

Case Study: The Emerald Triangle Forest Complex

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This case analyzes the challenges and opportunities of working towards cooperative goals in a trans-boundary conservation area. Based on detailed interviews and fieldwork in the region and with the International Tropical Timber Organization, the case is particularly well-suited for students and practitioners interested in working on eco-regional management in sensitive border regions.



Photos: Kimberly Marion Suiseeya

Disclaimer: This case has been prepared as the basis for discussion and collective learning rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

The Author

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The Story Unfolds

The participation of Laos at the 2nd PSC Meeting and 2nd Joint Task Force Meeting was a major breakthrough. Now three countries are participating in the project.¹

For the first time since early in the first phase of the transboundary Emerald Triangle project, all three countries – Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand – were participating. Laos agreed to host the third Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting in November 2009 and was going to consider full participation in the third phase of the Emerald Triangle project. It looked as if the project might finally be able to advance towards its first objective of improving cooperation between the three countries for biodiversity conservation.

It was indeed a major step when Laos participated in the 2nd PSC Meeting and Field Trip in Siem Reap. We were all hoping to build on that and maintain the momentum.²

Less than one month, however, before it was scheduled to occur, the third PSC meeting was moved from Laos to Bangkok. As documented in a series of email exchanges, Laos' involvement shifted from deep levels of commitment from the district up to the national level of government to silence from the Government of Laos (GoL). The frustration of the Project Manager, Mr. Chheang Dany, was evident in the following email he sent to Mr. Kamol Wisupakan, his counterpart in Thailand:

Everything began to unravel when Dr. Ma began to interject himself in the email discussions. Dr. Ma thought the field trip was too expensive; then he thought two days were too long because of his schedule, then he would not allow the dates of the meeting to be slightly changed to accommodate critical Lao staff. Finally he belatedly realized that the meeting was being organized in Pakse, and requested the meeting and field trip be moved to Vientiane, with very little time left to make the arrangements.

At this point Laos became very frustrated, and both Vientiane and Pakse based staff became angry. Not surprisingly, you were ultimately informed by phone that Laos was not going to host the meeting. No follow up email of explanation was sent to you or Dr. Ma. Laos did not respond in any way to the official invitation to participate in the 3rd PSC in Bangkok. There is a very clear diplomatic signal from Laos in this lack of response.

The momentum the project had been gaining towards transboundary cooperation was lost. The third PSC meeting proceeded in Bangkok with no representation from Laos. The project was finishing its second phase and preparing to propose a third phase to continue transboundary cooperation for biodiversity conservation, with no indications that Laos would once again get involved in the project.

The Emerald Triangle

The Emerald Triangle, a term coined by the Thais, is a large expanse of forested area along the Cambodian, Lao, and Thai borders. In Thailand, the area includes three national parks and two wildlife sanctuaries with 173,000 hectares collectively coined the Pha Taem Protected Forests Complex (PPFC). In Cambodia, the area includes the 190,000-hectare Preah Vihear Protected Forest.³ On the Lao side, there is a vast area of rich forest, part of which is protected as the Dong Kanthung Provincial Protected Area,⁴ but the area that the GoL has tentatively nominated for inclusion in the project is the Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area, which lies more than 200 km to the north of the Cambodian border.

The Emerald Triangle is an area rich in resources, including three types of forest (dry evergreen, dry dipterocarp, and mixed deciduous) and large, rare mammals of global significance. An initial wildlife survey carried out in 2002 by Kasetsart University found 51 mammals including “the rare and endangered...Pileated Gibbon, Silvered Langur, Banteng, Elephant, Serow, Tiger, and Leopard...along tri-border areas between Thai, Cambodia, and Lao PDR.”⁵ Multiple wildlife surveys carried out in the Lao part of the Emerald Triangle have found large but declining populations of elephants, gibbons, and Sambar deer, among other important species.⁶

Two main threats to biodiversity and forests in the Emerald Triangle region include trade in wildlife and wild plants and habitat fragmentation. Addressing these threats requires substantial transboundary cooperation, yet achieving the cooperation necessary is complicated by the history of the region. The political boundaries delineating the territory of each country have been the source of contestation for more than a century. With its origins in the battles among kingdoms to acquire land, the current conflict stems from a 1962 decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) stating that the land surrounding and including the 11th Century Preah Vihear Temple was within Cambodia’s borders. Although Thailand did concede the temple to Cambodia, it maintained that the ownership of the surrounding land was unclear and has considered the borders unresolved. In 2008, following Cambodia’s nomination of the site as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the conflict flared and both Cambodia and Thailand sent in troops to protect their interests. As recently as spring 2011, there have been multiple deaths on both sides related to these border tensions between Cambodia and Thailand.⁷

Project Overview

The Emerald Triangle project is one of a handful of International Tropical Timber Organization’s (ITTO) transboundary conservation projects across the globe. The ITTO is an “intergovernmental organization promoting the conservation and sustainable management, use and trade of tropical forest resources.”⁸ Their projects focus primarily on timber trade, but they do have a small portfolio of conserva-

tion projects found throughout their membership countries. Dr. Hwan Ok Ma, the Project Manager from ITTO, first became involved in the Emerald Triangle project in 2008. He believes that ITTO has a unique role in contributing to transboundary conservation.⁹ Dr. Ma oversees a number of projects in Southeast Asia. As a project manager, his primary role is to help member countries develop project proposals, oversee project implementation, and manage monitoring and evaluation for ITTO-funded projects. He also works with host-country governments to hire project staff. Because he is based at ITTO's headquarters in Japan, Dr. Ma's interactions with project staff are limited and he only meets them in person during larger project meetings, such as Project Steering Committee meetings and monitoring missions. The day-to-day operations of the project are the responsibility of the country project managers.

Kamol Wisupakan spent 25 years as a civil servant with the Thai Royal Forestry Department (RFD). At the age of 50, he retired from the RFD and began working as a consultant for different international organizations on forestry-related issues in the region. After five years consulting for a UNDP/FAO forest rehabilitation project, Kamol became the Project Manager for the Emerald Triangle project in Thailand in 2001. Although he was not involved in developing the project, he quickly became critical to its success. He managed the day-to-day activities of the project, was responsible for liaising between ITTO and the RFD, and worked to build relationships with his counterparts in Cambodia and Laos. On this last task, Kamol felt it was more the responsibility of Dr. Ma and ITTO to formally engage Cambodia and Laos, but he was comfortable working closely at the technical level with the other two countries. He reached out to Chheang Dany, the Director of the Wildlife Protection Office in Cambodia, who agreed to work with the RFD to develop a second phase of the project that would include Cambodia.

Chheang Dany, like many of his counterparts in Cambodia and Laos, received his degree in forestry engineering in Russia. He has moved his way up through the ranks of Cambodia's Forestry Administration (FA), first working in protected areas and wildlife management units, before becoming the head of the Wildlife Protection Office (WPO). He has been working in the WPO since 1997. Dany became involved in the Emerald Triangle project as it neared the end of the first phase, when the ITTO and Thailand began thinking about putting together a proposal for a second phase. He is vocal about the limited capacity of the FA, both in terms of technical, financial, and human capacity and places a strong emphasis on the importance of designing and implementing projects to fit within existing political constraints.¹⁰ Dany believes that foreign experts working in Cambodia often fail to recognize the political realities that can inhibit the ability of his office to implement complex and ambitious projects such as the Emerald Triangle project.

There were two key foreign experts affiliated with the second phase of the Emerald Triangle project: Hunter Weiler, the Technical Assistant to the project in Cambodia, and Hugo Rainey, the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) Chief Technical Advisor for their Northern Plains project (also in Cambodia). Weiler is a wildlife bi-

ologist from the United States who has spent the better part of the last two decades in Cambodia. He is a recognized expert on large mammals in Cambodia and has consulted on projects for the FA, the World Bank, and a variety of non-governmental organizations during his career in Cambodia. Weiler has strong opinions on the ways in which projects should be designed and believes in promoting ambitious goals. He also has little patience for the ITTO, believing that the organization and Dr. Ma micromanage projects and are unable to adapt to changing circumstances on the ground.¹¹ As the Technical Advisor to the Emerald Triangle project, Weiler was responsible for helping develop the project and supporting the FA's implementation of the project.

As the representative of WCS, Hugo Rainey needs to maintain a constructive working relationship with the FA. WCS never implements projects on its own, but instead works in close partnership with host country governments. This serves to both build capacity and increase the likelihood that projects will be implemented as planned, since they are jointly developed with government counterparts. Rainey was responsible for coordinating WCS' Conservation Areas Through Landscape Management (CALM) project activities with the Emerald Triangle project activities to ensure that they complemented each other. When he joined WCS during the second phase of the Emerald Triangle project, however, implementation on the ITTO project was delayed, but this did not inhibit WCS' ability to make progress on their own CALM project.

Transcending Borders

The primary goals of the Emerald Triangle project are twofold: first, to improve biodiversity conservation in the region; and, second, to improve cooperation between Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Although it is formally titled the "Management of the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex to Promote Cooperation for Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation between Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos,"¹² Phase I of the Emerald Triangle project was implemented solely by Thailand:

*The first phase of the project, in fact, was not transboundary. It was more or less the Thai component.*¹³

The initial project budget of US \$911,054 was wholly designated for activities in Thailand's PPFC area and the impacted communities, including the development of baseline data. Phase I was implemented from 2001 to 2004; it focused on preparing a model for tri-national cooperation and establishing a management plan for PPFC, with significant emphasis on the latter.

Halfway through the implementation of the first phase, in 2003, IUCN and ITTO held an international workshop on "Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests" in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. In the case study of the PPFC project presented at the workshop, Trisurat identified "two

main obstacles for cooperation, including suspended bilateral relationship between Thailand and Cambodia, and reluctance from Laos to participate in trans-boundary biodiversity conservation.”¹⁴ Kamol recalls early cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand:

*The technical staff in Cambodia were very happy, and we were happy and we enjoyed working together. Even though it is hard to communicate [because of language barriers]. If we could communicate without going through the ministry, it was very easy to talk...*¹⁵

From Kamol’s perspective, the challenges the project faced regarding increased transboundary cooperation emerged from bureaucratic and political origins:

*... if we had to go through the ministry, it was difficult. The Royal Forestry Department has to do things according to what the politicians want, which could make things difficult.*¹⁶

Dany felt similarly that the technical level was somewhat more conducive to trans-boundary cooperation and that the challenges rested at higher political levels.¹⁷

*At the technical level we can start to work together. This is a good start. Even there is a level of political commitment. When they allow us to work together, this is a way to show that there is political cooperation. We, both of us from the Thailand side and Cambodian side, we work for the governments of our respective countries. It depends on the politics of the country: if they don’t allow us to work, we can’t work.*¹⁸

Despite the optimistic recollection of cooperation in the first phase of the project, there were difficulties in initiating and establishing a working relationship between the two countries:

*In the first phase, Thailand had to bring Cambodia and Laos in [to the project]. We tried hard. We really tried hard. Most of the communication was initiated by me. I even had to lead most of the discussions.*¹⁹

Cambodia did join the project, but there was some frustration with the way it was developed, suggesting that the achievements in transboundary cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand was limited. Weiler said that the real obstacles for cooperation in Phase I of the project were the result of poor project design:

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Dany was also frustrated with the sole focus on Thailand in the first phase of the project. He suggested that, because all of the funds from the first phase of the

project were dedicated to Thailand, “in order to participate in all of these [project] meetings there were times when he had to use his own funding.”²¹ The intentional design of the project to focus on Thailand, while successfully honing a sense of national ownership over the project, seemed to create obstacles to broader cooperation in the Emerald Triangle.

Three years after it began, at the final PSC meeting, ITTO and the project stakeholders concluded that, “the first phase of the Project has been successfully implemented.”²² According to ITTO’s project documentation, Phase I of the project did achieve its established objectives despite the challenges the project faced, including Laos’ absence from the project and the limited participation from Cambodia. By the end of Phase I, a management plan for the PPFC was written, alternative livelihood activities were completed, and Thailand enlisted the help of Cambodia to write a proposal for Phase II of the project. The project was ready to move on to the next phase.

Scaling Up

Phase II was considered the scaling up phase, whereby the project would shift from being primarily focused on scoping and on-the-ground management activities in Thailand to broader-based transboundary cooperation. Whereas Thailand had submitted the Phase I project proposal to ITTO unilaterally, the Phase II proposal was jointly developed and submitted by Thailand and Cambodia. It is the second phase of the project where the transboundary cooperation objectives became primary. Dany noted that the collaboration to develop a joint proposal was particularly significant for this project:

*This project is truly a transboundary project. It is the only one in the world where two countries have jointly developed and submitted a proposal. In other projects, you have two or more countries each developing their own proposals to work in adjacent conservation areas, but they do not jointly develop the proposal.*²³

Cambodia took the lead for implementing Phase II. The Emerald Triangle project shifted its focus towards on-the-ground management activities in Cambodia and a stronger emphasis on strengthening cooperation between the three countries. The objectives of the second phase of the project were threefold:

- Strengthen cooperation between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos on transboundary biodiversity conservation
- Enhance protection and monitoring of biological resources along the tri-national borders
- Strengthen the involvement of local communities and stakeholders in sustainable uses²⁴

Although a significant emphasis was placed on promoting transboundary cooperation, there were significant constraints to involving Laos.

The Lao Challenge

Momentum for engaging Laos in the Emerald Triangle project was slowing building during the second phase. By the middle of the second phase, the ITTO, Cambodia, and Thailand believed they had identified the reasons why Laos was reluctant to participate in the project. First, Laos is not a member of ITTO. This meant that the project was unable to mark any project funds for Laos' participation in the project. If Laos wanted to participate, it would likely have to generate its own funding for activities – something that would be very difficult for a country whose national budget for the entire protected area system averaged about \$200,000 per year, or less than \$10,000 per National Protected Area. Membership in ITTO is expensive, and unless a donor is willing to pay the fee directly, it will not be a priority.²⁵

Secondly, Kamol and Dany believed Laos did not want to be involved because it did not have a suitable area to nominate for inclusion in the project. The area directly adjacent to the Thai and Cambodian borders was not designated as a National Protected Area, but as a Provincial Protected Area, which was under the authority of the provincial government. As the Emerald Triangle project is a trans-boundary project, any areas considered for inclusion should be managed by the national level.

According to a government official in Laos, site selection and ITTO membership were only minor considerations in Laos' decision to engage in the project:

It is very difficult with Thai and Lao. The border is not clear. We have a long border with Thailand and the land border cannot be agreed upon...so it is difficult to implement. The politics are not clear. This is a political issue. I don't know how far the Joint Committee on the Lao-Thai border has come. We cannot take action until they agree.²⁶

Kamol suggested an additional reason why Laos did not want to become involved in the project; he said that the Thai's have a superiority complex and the Lao's have an inferiority complex, making it difficult for Laos to join a project that was started and implemented by Thailand without equal involvement from the other affected countries.²⁷ Weiler posited that the project had not followed the appropriate channels for properly engaging Laos, implying that by not following protocol, Thailand and Cambodia were not respectful of Laos' administrative procedures:

ITTO should officially inform the Lao Government via the CPC [Cooperation Planning Committee] only. The CPC will forward the project proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to consider passing the project to the Department of Forestry. The Department of Forestry will examine the project proposal and provide recommendations. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will then coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to submit the project proposal and the recommendations to the higher authorities for consideration and approval. Finally, the matter will be returned to the CPC. After the project has been approved, the government officers concerned

*will be able to participate in the project. If the project is not channeled through the above route, it would not be possible to receive approval.*²⁸

The Lao government official did indicate that many of the decisions that were required in order for the Department of Forestry to get involved in the project rested in the hands of other ministries, such as the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (e.g. ITTO membership) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (e.g. transboundary and international cooperation).²⁹

Despite the continued challenges for effectively engaging Laos in the project, the ITTO was determined to enlist their cooperation:

*Dr. Ma will not give up and wants me to call them.*³⁰

Kamol did continue to try to engage Laos, although he felt that it was really a diplomatic issue that Dr. Ma, as the representative of the ITTO and the developer of the project, should be responsible for handling.

*We only tried to go through government channels. We cannot confirm anything because we are working level. It should be from ITTO, but Dr. Ma from ITTO always said that we should contact them and try to bring them in. But this is not correct. The international organization should contact the other countries. But Dr. Ma is too busy. Most of the communication is cc'd to him so he understands that Dany and I do our parts.*³¹

From Dr. Ma's perspective communication with Laos was the responsibility of the Project Steering Committee, the project's governing body responsible for ensuring the project achieved its objectives.³²

Technical vs. Political Cooperation

Successfully engaging Laos was only one of many concerns the project faced. In fact, the project was struggling to implement many of its core activities due to bureaucratic, political, and administrative challenges.

Phase II was scheduled to begin in 2005, directly following the completion of Phase I, but it was delayed by three years and was implemented beginning in 2008 and finished in June 2010. According to Weiler, the delay was the result of poor communication and understanding between the Thai and Cambodian governments and the ITTO:

*The ITTO project start-up was delayed for three years **after** it was fully approved and funded. You ask 'how can that be'? It was fully funded by three governments and approved by ITTO. ... It took three years for ITTO, Thailand, and Cambodia to sign a project agreement. That was seven pages and it took three years because each time one party would sign it, they would make changes and they would send it to the next party then they would have to send out another original. Once the project agreement was*

*signed, the project couldn't start until there was a cooperative agreement between Thailand and Cambodia; they wanted an official government document recognizing the cooperation between the two governments on the transboundary project.*³³

Once the project agreement was signed in March 2007 and the cooperative agreement between Thailand and Cambodia was signed, it took one more year before project implementation began in March 2008, three years after its scheduled implementation.

Phase II Implementation

The Cambodian Forestry Administration (FA), with Dany serving as the project manager, led the second phase of the project. While he was enthusiastic for the project, Mr. Dany suggested that the conservation objectives of the project were too ambitious:

*Some others claim we should do this and do that. They want us to achieve full cooperation and ecological planning without boundaries and include all of it in one small project. Ideally this is what we could do. But the transboundary issues are not easy to address. They say the government should do this and the minister should attend the meeting. Sometimes the politics are different because of patriotism. All of this can lead to the mistranslation or misinterpretation of the activities. They want to achieve the ideal outcomes, but the reality is different.*³⁴

To Dany, the project was deeply embedded in the political realities of the region and its objectives needed to be tempered by that reality. Others with knowledge of the project saw this differently, however. They both felt that more could be achieved if the Cambodian leadership in the project were stronger and more committed. Instead, they saw Dany as an obstructionist:

*Dany did not want to give up anything to the CALM project.*³⁵

*The basic problem with the project was Chheang Dany, the project manager for Phase II. He dislikes foreigners and NGOs in general. Initial agreements were made in 2007 to work with WCS' project. Dany ignored these agreements and was hostile.*³⁶

Weiler thought that the Project Design Document (PDD) should be updated to reflect the progress of other activities in the region, particularly with the CALM project, but he said that ITTO would not allow this.³⁷ Kamol said that they really tried to follow the PDD and that Dany tried to do this as well.

Changing the project document would not matter.

Although technical communication between Thailand and Cambodia appeared to be productive, it seemed that collaboration between Dany, Weiler, and Rainey was proving difficult. Kamol noticed these tensions:

Hunter is very aggressive...he doesn't leave any [chance] for us to participate in the conversation. He knows a lot, more than us. But there are disagreements in Cambodia with him and Dany...from what I heard, by the end of the project he and Dany had different ideas.³⁸

The lack of coordination and collaboration within Cambodia was inhibiting the ability of the project to achieve its on-the-ground activities in Cambodia, which were critical for achieving the primary objectives of Phase II of the project.

Partners for Biodiversity Conservation in the Emerald Triangle Area

Unlike Thailand, Cambodia and Laos both face severe capacity challenges when it comes to biodiversity conservation; they rely heavily on the involvement of international non-governmental organizations to lead and implement priority conservation activities. Phase I was criticized for its limited engagement of NGOs. Phase II was developed in consultation with WCS in Cambodia.

Prior to and during the ITTO project, parallel conservation efforts were ongoing in the region. In Thailand, the RFD along with local community partners had been implementing sustainable livelihood projects in order to provide development opportunities for the impacted communities. For example, the Eco-Forest Project had already been working with local communities in the PPFC area to provide training on orchid cultivation. This activity was incorporated into the ITTO project and continued following the completion of Phase I.³⁹ Nature Care, a local NGO, had also been working in the northern part of the PPFC for more than ten years. They had been working with local communities to build a community forestry network, yet these efforts were not integrated into the Emerald Triangle project.⁴⁰ Brown's 2007 study on community involvement in the transboundary project, which largely focused on the Thai implementation of the project, found that there was insufficient meaningful engagement of local communities and civil society organizations in project development, a weakness that Brown suggests contributed to poor project performance.⁴¹ Kamol does not agree that there was weak collaboration with civil society, at least in the Thailand component of the project:

Most of the NGOs that we worked with on the project we got along well. We have the same information and same direction and we almost got the same results. We both support each other. There are some areas with some very strong support from NGOs. They want us to help or to support – this could create a very good relation, even with the protected area staff.⁴²

Thailand has a comparative advantage in conservation over Cambodia and Laos. They have a highly developed national parks system, including high staff capacity as well as public demand for conservation, suggesting that collaboration with civil society organizations may not be critical to project success. Laos and Cambodia, on the other hand, rely heavily on NGOs to implement conservation initiatives.

In Laos, WCS carried out extensive wildlife surveys in the Dong Kanthung area in 1996 and 1998. At the time, the Dong Kanthung area was being proposed as a National Protected Area, but with an already financially strained National Protected Area system, the GoL decided not to add it to the national system and instead listed it as a Provincial Protected Area. Since that time, “no funding to support the area has been allocated and the area has been highly disturbed.”⁴³ The 2003 National Report on Protected Areas and Development identified a number of wildlife trade flows between Laos and Cambodia and Laos and Thailand, including both inflows and outflows between Laos and Cambodia in the Emerald Triangle Area.⁴⁴ In June 2010 IUCN in partnership with the Division of Forest Resource Conservation in the Lao Department of Forestry completed a gibbon survey and found that, although there has been significant decline in some species (e.g. the Asian Elephant population has declined from about 50 individuals to no more than 8), “many key wildlife species are present and it is probably hard to find such important habitats and abundance in wildlife communities in other locations in Lao PDR.”⁴⁵ The area has also been recognized by Birdlife International as an Important Bird Area and is believed to be one of two areas in Laos that provides habitat for water birds.⁴⁶ Despite the conservation significance of the Dong Kanthung area, there have been no projects carried out by the GoL or NGOs. A government official in Laos said that as of August 2011, the Dong Kanthung PPA has been nominated as a National Protection Forest, which will be managed by the Division of Protection Forests.⁴⁷ Protection Forests are distinct from Protected Areas in that the mandate for protection is based on watershed protection and/or national security interests, rather than biodiversity or other conservation values.

Although there are no existing projects in the Dong Kanthung area, there are complementary efforts in nearby areas, including the World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) ecotourism project in Xe Pian National Protected Area and the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) Biodiversity Corridors Initiative (BCI). The Global Alliance for People and the Environment (GAPE) also has ongoing community development projects in protected areas in Champasak Province along the border with Cambodia. IUCN also works in the area, primarily with the BCI project and through its advocacy with the 2010 Gibbon Survey. Because Laos is not an active partner in the ITTO project, however, none of these organizations have been engaged in transboundary conservation efforts, despite their significant presence as key players in the conservation movement in Laos. Dr. Ma, Kamol, and Dany all agreed that they could not engage NGOs in Laos prior to securing participation of the Lao government.⁴⁸

WCS Cambodia had been working with the FA in the Northern Plains of Cambodia since 1998.⁴⁹ Their most recent effort, the CALM project, is a seven-year, USD \$4 million effort aimed at securing conservation and livelihood gains in a post-

conflict situation.⁵⁰ The project began in 2006 and was developed in parallel to the ITTO project. In a letter dated May 31, 2005, WCS Cambodia's Country Program Director, Joe Walston, wrote to the General Director of the FA, "WCS has been consulted in the development of the Government's ITTO project for the Northern Plains in Cambodia. The work plans of each project (CALM and ITTO) have been developed in co-ordination with each other and they share mutually agreeable goals."⁵¹ The ITTO and WCS projects were intended to work in collaboration with one another:

Initial agreements were made...that the second phase of the Emerald Triangle project would work in collaboration with WCS's project. WCS does not work alone; [they] work with both the Forestry Administration and the Ministry of Environment in the same area. So, the agreement was made... with Mr. Dany. ... Initial agreements were about first of all him supporting the work that [WCS does] with the Forestry Administration...not giving money to [WCS] directly, but paying through the Forestry Administration to another FA team. This agreement was broken, which was unfortunate. Secondly, there was no other collaboration in other areas where there didn't need to be any financial exchange. He didn't want to communicate – he didn't acknowledge [WCS'] work...^{52}*

While the ITTO project was delayed, the CALM project moved forward. When the ITTO project finally began, Weiler sought to capitalize on the synergies between the ITTO and WCS projects:

As ITTO Project Startup approached, WCS and I agreed that all the on-the-ground activities for both projects should be implemented by WCS/CALM... and that we should transfer ITTO funds to CALM for those activities. ...we agreed that the ITTO project should shift focus to 100% on transboundary activities...⁵³

Although official documents from both the ITTO and CALM projects suggest that cooperation and synergies existed between the two projects, experiences on the ground suggest that the two projects were at odds with one another. Weiler's discussion of his experiences in Cambodia includes a characterization of two sides in competition, working against one another:

The brutal reality is that ITTO is funding one FA team that is trying to take over management of the PVPF [Preah Vihear Protected Forest] from the existing FA team that is funded by...WCS.⁵⁴

Dany's decision not to work closely with WCS could be due to some misunderstandings and miscommunication between WCS and Dany's office and between the central FA office and field offices.

* Please see the appendix for a response to this opinion.

I don't know what they mean when they say they want "full cooperation." WCS did not consult with us when they developed the CALM project. They did not ask us how they want us to cooperate with them when they developed the project.⁵⁵

The final evaluation of the second phase of the project was very clear: cooperation between the government agencies and NGOs was necessary and needed to be drastically improved in order for the project to achieve its objectives.

Defining the Emerald Triangle's Ecological Landscape

The Emerald Triangle, as described earlier, is the area of rich forests that straddles the Thai, Lao, and Cambodian borders. Aerial views of the area show islands of green in Thailand, expansive forests in Laos, and large areas of intact forests in Cambodia. Where the three countries meet is one of the largest, intact transboundary forests in the region. Despite its size, however, and its apparent disregard for political boundaries, the distribution of species may actually conform to the established political boundaries.

There are no seasonal large mammal migrations between Cambodia and Thailand. Everyone keeps talking like there is. The wildlife all goes between Cambodia and Laos, which is why we need to get Laos involved.⁵⁶

Even if Laos were involved, however, the protected area it was considering for inclusion in the project was much further north. The Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area (NPA) shared a border only with Thailand and lies more than 200 km north of the Cambodian border. Despite the incursion of Cambodian wildlife traders into the Dong Kanthung PPA and the Xe Pian NPA, neither of these areas was considered for inclusion in the project. The Dong Kanthung PPA could not be included because provincial authorities manage it and the Emerald Triangle project needed to be a national level project because of its transboundary nature.

The Dong Kanthung PPA is the responsibility of Champasak Province. We [the Division of Forest Resource Conservation] cannot nominate it to be part of the ITTO project. Now it will become a National Protection Forest, which will be managed by another division, so we still cannot include it in our work.⁵⁷

The Xe Pian NPA was not considered because of the extent of existing projects in the area. Adding one more project to Xe Pian would mean that millions of dollars were being spent there, where no money was being spent in Phou Xieng Thong. At the end of the first phase of the Emerald Triangle project, "Lao PDR could not identify any protected forest area to join the project due to its own constraints."⁵⁸ Thus, while it seemed that the GoL was enthusiastic about the initial Emerald Triangle project, the first phase ended with only two sides of the triangle identified.

The curious site selection is not limited to Laos. Thailand similarly selected areas that shared only a border with Laos, even though the most opportunity and the most threats were in the tri-border area. Of the five national parks Thailand included in the project, only two of them share a border with Cambodia (the Yot Dom Wildlife Sanctuary and part of the Pha Jong-Na Yoi National Park). Additionally, a significant portion of the project has been dedicated towards activities in the northernmost protected areas, rather than on the tri-country boundary area.

Diplomatic Relations

When asked to discuss the Emerald Triangle project, a government official in Laos said “oh, it won’t succeed. There is no cooperation between the governments. They just fight.”⁵⁹ When asked if referring to why Laos was not involved in the project, the official said that it wouldn’t succeed because Thailand and Cambodia could not agree – they were the ones who were always fighting – not because of any diplomatic conflicts involving Laos.⁶⁰ The official’s response seemed to imply that there was no point in Laos getting involved in a transboundary project when it already seemed hopeless because of the Thai and Cambodian conflicts.

The near century long conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over the Preah Vihear Temple Complex escalated in 2008, following the nomination of the site as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Since the nomination, both countries have stationed armed soldiers in the area, with deaths occurring as recently as April 2011 due to open hostilities between troops on the ground. Despite the heightened tensions among the highest levels in Cambodia and Thailand, the cooperation and communication in the Emerald Triangle project continued:

Some of the project area became a militarized zone, so we had some restrictions in doing our work. There were suspicions...but our staff tried to demonstrate that nature has no boundaries. ...the government gave us an opportunity to clarify the objective of our project and we were able to keep working. Our project activities are technical, not political, so we could keep working. But other sectors were suspicious of our work.⁶¹

Most of the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia was focused on areas outside of the project area. Despite this, the conflict did impact the ecological integrity of the project area:

There are a huge number of soldiers and their families being sent to the area – more than 3000 alone in Preah Vihear and they are being given huge areas of land. In fact, there was a huge concession in one of the protected areas we manage – more than 20,000 hectares. ...they are hunting and cutting down forest.⁶²

This issue was also identified in the midterm evaluation of the CALM project:

There is no indication that additional hostilities with Thailand are likely, and hence the most valuable forest areas along the Cambodia-Thai border are not directly threatened at the moment, but the presence of large numbers of military in the area both poses an incipient threat and constrains the scope and scale of conservation activities.⁶³

The military makes the requests for land concessions to the Prime Minister's office – not the FA or the Ministry of the Environment – and the Prime Minister is unlikely to turn down the requests.⁶⁴ When the requests are made directly to the FA, the FA has been able to manage them and reject them where they are inappropriate, but when requests are made to the Ministry of Environment, they are also often approved.⁶⁵ Balancing multiple, competing priorities such as national security and conservation, is often a challenge in complex landscapes such as the Emerald Triangle, particularly with multiple institutions charged with managing a common geographic area.

Ideally, the Emerald Triangle project would contribute to helping manage these kinds of conflicts and the collaboration at the technical levels demonstrates the potential for enhanced cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia.

Conclusion and Future of the Project

The Emerald Triangle project is moving into its third phase. Dr. Ma has hopes that this will be the phase that brings Laos into the project. Trisurat feels that Laos is giving positive indications that it will become part of the project since it recently nominated Dong Krathung as a national protection forest. Dany and Kamol are looking forward to serving as project managers for the next phase. Weiler remains the most skeptical.

A review of the phase III project documents raises questions of whether or not the ITTO and the project proponents have fully considered and addressed the challenges that have affected this project since its inception. There is some hope, however. In Cambodia, project management will be based near the project site. There will be funding for Laos' involvement through support from JICA, Japan's international aid agency. While the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia has not been resolved, the project staff continue to communicate and coordinate, focusing on technical cooperation. Additionally, JICA's office in Cambodia will be taking the lead as funder for the project. Questions remain as to how successful the Emerald Triangle project can be in promoting transboundary cooperation. Ultimately, the answers will be found in how well the third phase of the project can address the multiple challenges the project has historically faced.

Supporting Documentation

Annex A: Abbreviations

ADB – Asian Development Bank

BCI – Biodiversity Corridors Initiative

CALM – Conservation Areas Through Landscape Management

DFRC – Division of Forest Resource Conservation (Laos)

DoF – Department of Forestry (Laos)

FA – Forestry Administration (Cambodia)

GAPE – Global Alliance for People and the Environment

GoL – Government of Laos

ICJ – International Court of Justice

ITTO – International Tropical Timber Organization

IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature

JICA – Japanese International Cooperation Agency

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

NPA – National Protected Area

PDD – Project Design Document

PPA – Provincial Protected Area

PPFC – Pha Taem Protected Forests Complex

PSC – Project Steering Committee

PVPF – Preah Vihear Protected Forest

RFD – Royal Forestry Department (Thailand)

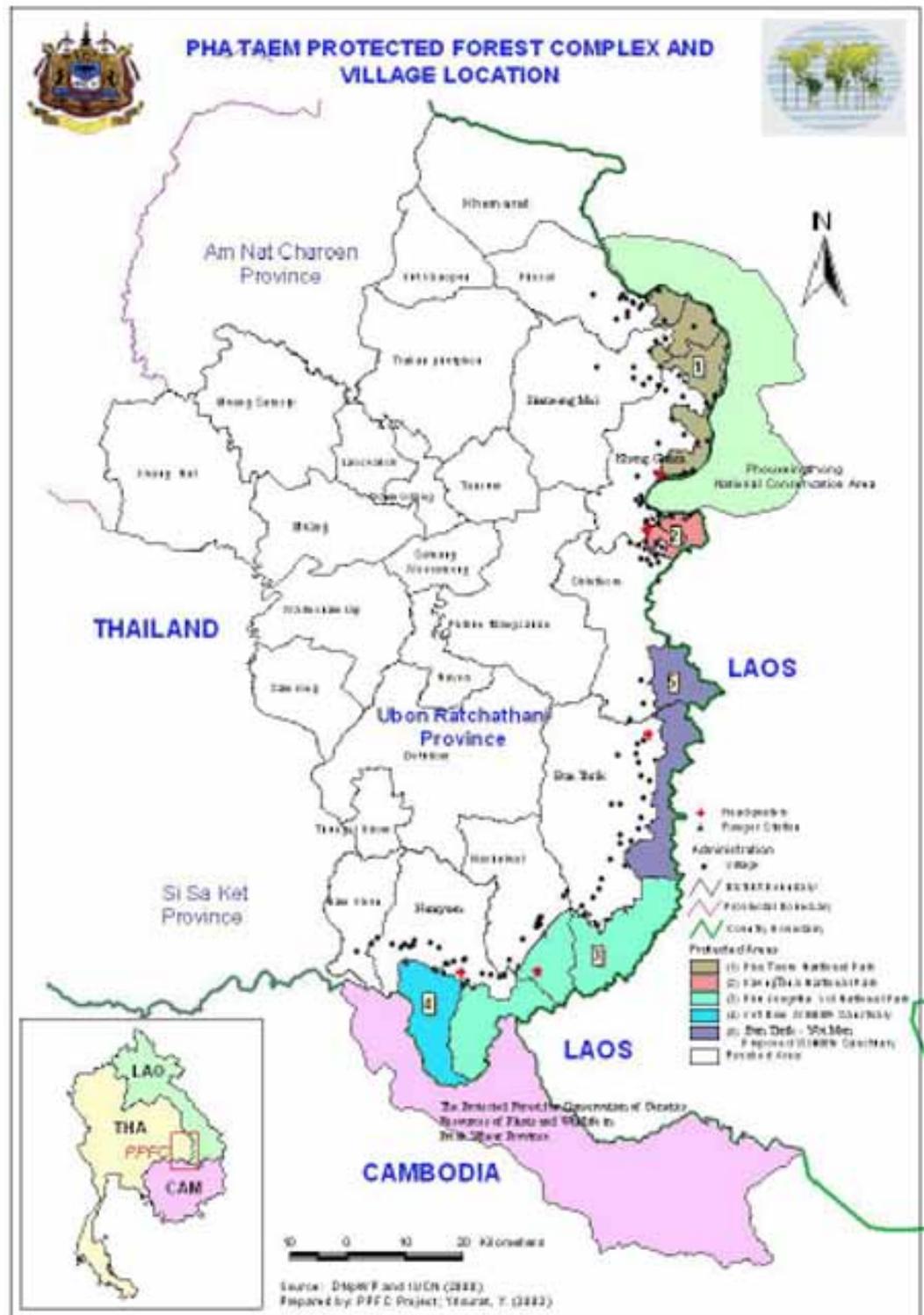
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WCS – Wildlife Conservation Society

WPO – Wildlife Protection Office

WWF – World Wildlife Fund

Annex B: Map of the Area



Annex C: Major Influences of Project Outcomes

Examples of major influences that affected the achievement of stated project objectives (strengthening biodiversity conservation and promoting cooperation between Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand).

Influence/Issue	Objective Impacted	Alternatives	Key Individuals
Designing Phase I as a project solely focused on Thailand	Strengthening biodiversity conservation; promoting transboundary cooperation	Work closely with all three affected countries to develop a project proposal	ITTO/Dr. James Gasana
Unclear roles and responsibilities	Strengthening biodiversity conservation; promoting transboundary cooperation	Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the ITTO and Project Managers could have strengthened opportunities to engage Laos	Dr. Hwan Ok Ma, Kamol Wisupakan, Chheang Dany
Interpersonal conflicts/strong personalities	Strengthening biodiversity conservation; promoting transboundary cooperation		Hunter Weiler, Chheang Dany
Static use of PDD	Strengthening biodiversity conservation	Adapting the PDD to more current circumstances could have promoted a closer partnership with WCS Cambodia	Chheang Dany
Changing meeting date for the 3 rd PSC meeting, which led Laos to withdraw from both hosting and participating in the meeting	Promoting transboundary cooperation	Keeping the meeting date would have kept Laos involved. Dr. Ma could have adjusted his schedule, more carefully followed the development of the meeting, or sent someone in his place.	Dr. Hwan Ok Ma (ITTO)

Annex D: Project Organizational Charts (Thailand and Cambodia Components)

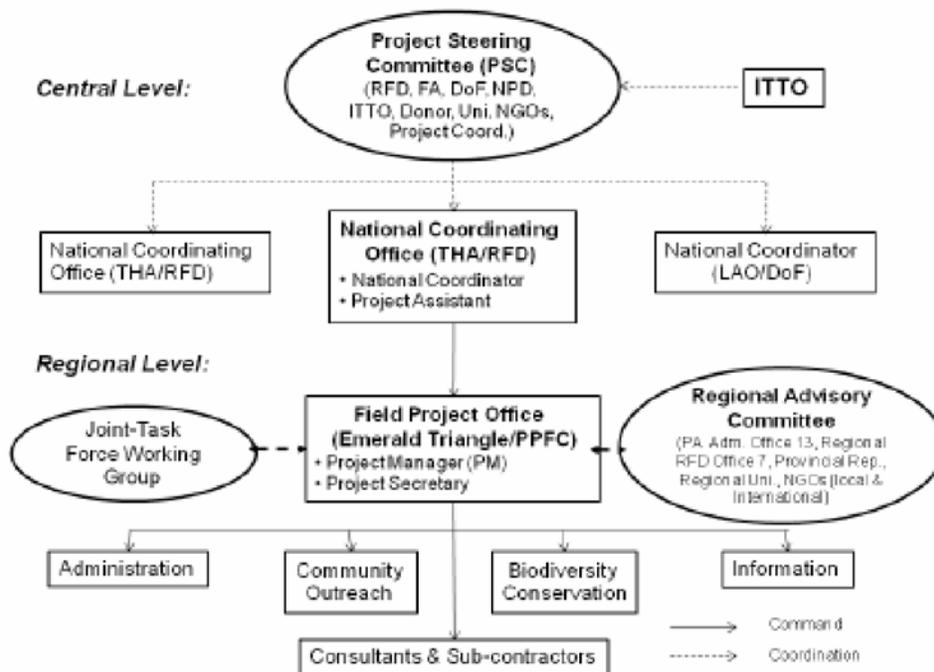


Figure 1: Organizational Structure for Thailand Component⁶⁶

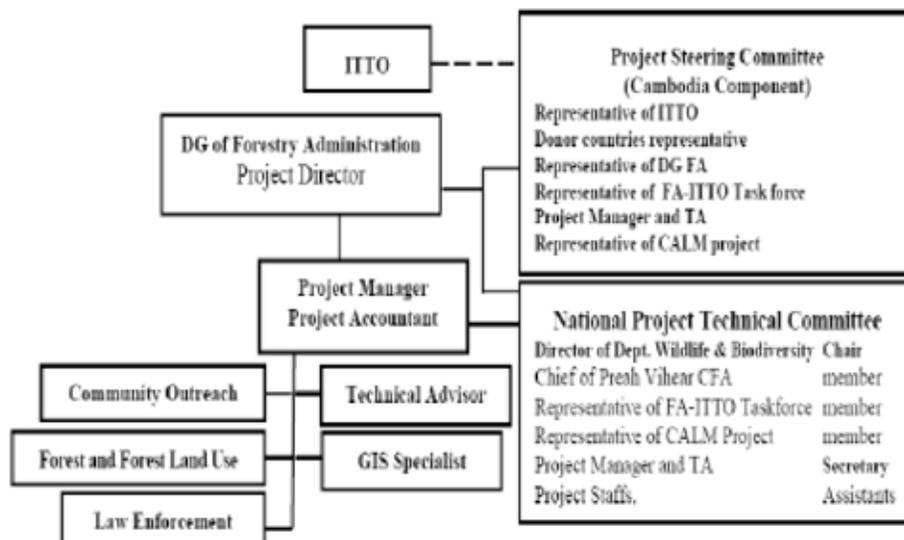


Figure 2: Organizational Structure for Cambodia Component⁶⁷

Annex E: Response to Case Study from Cambodian Forestry Administration

February 6, 2012

Dear Kimberly,

Thank you for your email message of January 23rd in which you responded to some of the concerns of the Forestry Administration of which you were indirectly aware through our correspondence with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) regarding your 'Case Study of the Emerald Triangle Forest Complex' I was pleased to learn in that message that it was not your intention to produce an unbalanced report. Nevertheless, the Forestry Administration still believes that there are several important concerns that I would like to refer you to in the following passages in the 'Case Study.'

On page 6 of the 'Case Study,' it is stated that (Hugo) "Rainey immediately noticed a lack of coordination between the project and WCS' activities in the region. This left Rainey and WCS frustrated with the Emerald Triangle project ... "What is the source of this statement and to whom should it be attributed? Hugo Rainey? There is no reference which is cited. Moreover, as Mark Gately, the Director of the Cambodia program of WCS, indicated in his email message to you of January 26, "I am the representative of WCS in Cambodia, and I assure you that WCS is not frustrated with the Emerald Triangle project. In this instance, you have taken a single fact (Hugo Rainey notices a lack of coordination between the ITTO and WCS activities), and drawn a wholly unjustifiable conclusion (that WCS is frustrated with the Emerald Triangle project)."

In this instance, the divergent opinions of Mark Gately and either Hugo Rainey or yourself regarding reported 'frustration' with the project should at least have been recognized in the 'Case Study' so that your assertion that "In the case of opinions, I also made every effort to talk with the other parties involved to get the other side(s) of the story" would have been more consistent with that which was actually reported. This would have also allowed the 'students' of the 'Case Study' to appreciate some of the more subtle complexities of project interrelationships to a considerable extent rather than to approach the analysis of the resolution of 'differences' in the implementation of the project in a more simplistic, less realistic manner.

On page 11 of the 'Case Study,' the comments by Hunter Weiler, as well as those of an anonymous person, indicated that "Dany did not want to give up anything to the CALM project" and "The basic problem with the project was Chheang Dany, the project manager for Phase II. He dislikes foreigners and NGOs in general. Initial agreements were made in 2007 to work with WCS' project. Dany ignored these agreements and was hostile. These are rather serious allegations and in this instance, the perspective of the one who is charged (me) with those allegations is not contrasted with those of either Hunter Weiler or the anonymous person. This suggests that these comments were regarded as 'facts' since if they were to be regarded as 'opinion,' you " ... would have made every effort to talk with other parties involved to get the other side(s) of the story" such that " ... ideas, opinions,

and statements (were) included from a diverse group of stakeholders.”

The inclusion of my perspective representing the Forestry Administration on this matter would have allowed ‘students’ the opportunity to appreciate to a much greater extent some of the implications associated with the interactions of different personalities of different cultures in implementing Phase II of the project in those ‘students’ efforts to assess alternatives that might have improved project performance. The selective inclusion of comments entailing personal provocation are certainly not appropriate tools to use to enhance the learning experience.

There is also a related concern regarding the use of unattributed quotes. While the actual names of ‘participants’ are often not used in case studies, you have chosen to use them in this ‘Case Study’ and, as such, each of the passages quoted in the ‘Case Study’ should be attributed to the actual person making the quote in order not to ‘shield’ that person arbitrarily from recognition. This would have served to maintain consistency in the treatment of both those involved in the implementation of the project, as well as those providing comments or critiques of the project.

On page 12 of the ‘Case Study,’ you state that “Weiler thought that the Project Design Document (PDD) should be updated to reflect the progress of other activities in the region, particularly with the CALM project, but he said that ITTO would not allow this. Was this statement considered to be a ‘fact’ or an ‘opinion?’ If it was considered to be a ‘fact,’ the reason for ITTO’s decision on this matter should have been provided in the ‘Case Study,’ especially since there might have been a legitimate restriction that constrained the ITTO from making the alternative decision. If, in contrast, the statement was considered to be an ‘opinion,’ the contrasting view of Dr. Ma of the ITTO should have been incorporated into the ‘Case Study.’ In either instance, omitting the perspective of ITTO deprives those reading the ‘Case Study’ of another opportunity to develop a more complete understanding of the dynamic interactions of project implementation.

On page 12 of the ‘Case Study,’ you also present Hunter Weiler’s contention that “In the end, many of the achievements claimed by the Emerald Triangle project were actually outputs from the CALM project. This is a particularly inappropriate choice of the source of opinion regarding the outputs of the CALM project. Indeed, as Mark Gately, the Project Director, not the Technical Advisor of the other project, responded to you in his email message of January 26, “Regarding the issue of project outcomes on page 12, I would not agree with Hunter Weiler’s assertion that the ITTO project was claiming CALM outcomes as their own. Ideally that statement should be clearly marked in the text as Hunter’s personal opinion (‘Weiler claims . . .’. ‘Weiler alleges etc.), rather than offered as a statement of fact.”

On pages 12 and 13 of the ‘Case Study,’ you provide a commendable balance of opinions that should have characterized the entire ‘Case Study’ by juxtaposing the views of Brown with those of Kamol regarding the project’s engagement, or lack of engagement, with NGOs.

On page 13 of the Case Study, you state that “Laos and Cambodia, on the other hand, rely heavily on NGOs to fund and implement conservation initiatives. This is misleading, as well as non-factual, in the very important sense that NGOs generally receive considerable amounts of their funding from international donors and are not the ultimate sources of the funds that are provided through them to implement development projects in Laos and Cambodia.

On page 14 of the Case Study, you again reference an anonymous source who states that “Initial agreements were made...that the second phase of the Emerald Triangle project would work in collaboration with WCS’s project. WCS does not work alone; [they] work with both the Forestry Administration and the Ministry of Environment in the same area. So, the agreement was made... with Mr. Dany. ... Initial agreements were about first of all him supporting the work that [WCS does] with the Forestry Administration...not giving money to [WCS] directly, but paying through the Forestry Administration to another FA team. This agreement was broken, which was unfortunate. Secondly, there was no other collaboration in other areas where there didn’t need to be any financial exchange. He didn’t want to communicate – he didn’t acknowledge [WCS] work... Hunter Weiler statement is also quoted on that page. It indicates that “As ITTO Project Startup approached, WCS and I agreed that all the on-the-ground activities for both projects should be implemented by WCS/CALM ... and that we should transfer ITTO funds to CALM for those activities. ...we agreed that the ITTO project should shift focus to 100% on transboundary activities.” Since you chose to quote an anonymous source with some very serious allegations, then you should also have balanced this view with that of the Forestry Administration. If you would have done so, you would have learned that it is not possible to have a written or verbal agreement with WCS without the approval of both the Forestry Administration and the ITTO and that there has never been an agreement approved between the Forestry Administration and WCS, most especially with regard to sub-contracting the WCS CALM project using ITTO funds.

There is nothing inherently inappropriate with including Hunter Weiler’s comments on this matter, but since Hunter Weiler was a Technical Advisor, not the Project Manager, of the ITTO project, he had no authority whatsoever to make agreements with WCS with regard to project activities or the use of the project’s funds. That is the sole responsibility of the ITTO and the Project Manager. Hunter Weiler’s comments, therefore, should have been either omitted or, if included, balanced with those of the Forestry Administration.

On page 15 of the Case Study, you provide a more commendable balance of Hunter Weiler’s comments that infer the rather ‘unfriendly’ management objectives of the project in the Preah Vihear Protected Forest with the contrasting statement of the Forestry Administration.

On page 15 of the Case Study, you also stated that “The final evaluation of the second phase of the project was very clear: cooperation between the government agencies and NGOs was necessary and needed to be drastically improved in

order for the project to achieve its objectives. Your statement is correct, but only in the most general sense. Since the comments from the final evaluation appear immediately after the statements of Hunter Weiler and the Forestry Administration regarding cooperation with the WCS CALM project, the evaluation comment might easily be taken out of context. Dr. Gasana's comments represented a very general recommendation to collaborate more with civil society organizations, including rural credit NGOs, and were not specifically targeting interactions with WCS.

On page 17 of the Case Study, you quote Hunter Weiler's assertion that "The project could have had some genuine accomplishments, but due to ITTO micro-management and rigidity, it did not. ... Phase II was trashed in the evaluation, but they still recommended a Phase III. ... ITTO has not given up. These are rather serious allegations that should have been accompanied by comments from Dr. Ma regarding ITTO's perspective on this matter. This would have allowed development practitioners and others the opportunity to compare and contrast in a much more objective manner internal constraints restricting ITTO management options with Hunter Weiler's assertions that those constraints affected project performance and should have been circumvented irrespective of the conditions under which funding was provided to support implementation of Phase II of the project.

On page 17 of the Case Study, you also provide the opinion that "There is a lack of institutional clarity and coordination to manage national security needs alongside conservation needs." This statement appears to represent for all intents and purposes a severe criticism, indirect as it might be interpreted, of the Royal Government of Cambodia that was prepared on the basis of uncorroborated statements offered by Hugo Rainey of the WCS. The statement should therefore have either been accompanied by supportive information obtained from several reliable sources if, indeed, such information might be available; identified unambiguously as your opinion based on the statements of Rainey; or deleted for lack of supportive corroborative information.

On page 18 of the Case Study, Hugo Rainey's comments that "Rainey has noticed an improved sense of co-operation from Dany and thinks that having JICA take the lead as a funder, with an in-country presence, could lead to improved collaboration between WCS and the project, which would mean an increased chance of more successful outcomes in the project area" are incorporated into the report. This comment might be interpreted as patronizing, especially within the broader context of the material presented in the "Case Study," without the counter-balanced comment of the Forestry Administration. In considering the selective inclusion of related material referenced above in other parts of the "Case Study," an objective observer might contemplate if there might be another interpretation of 'students' completely unfamiliar with the project than the rather simplistic one that 'Dany was a real problem in the implementation of Phase II of the project.'

In the table in Annex C, in the row linked to the Influence/Issue regarding the Static Use of the PDD, the name of Dr. Ma was omitted and should have been included as a Key Individual. His response to that issue should also have been solicited for

inclusion in the 'Case Study,' as previously discussed above under comments on page 12 of the 'Case Study.'

The Forestry Administration understands that "This case has been prepared as the basis for discussion and collective learning rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation." Nevertheless, we believe that the 'collective learners' of this 'Case Study' deserve to read a more balanced depiction of the different perspectives of the project in assessing the merits and shortcomings of those perspectives in an effort to develop meaningful insights into project performance. It is ultimately the responsibility of the author of this 'Case Study' to ensure that 'students' and development practitioners are provided not with a selective, but with a disinterested, impartial description of the complex interplay of forces, factors, and personalities which characterized the implementation of Phase II of the project and, as such, to have "... made every effort to talk with the other parties involved to get the other side(s) of the story." In order to provide such a description, moreover, the author should have also recognized that it is standard procedure in preparing a 'Case Study' to allow those interviewed the opportunity to review drafts of the 'Case Study,' as well as 'Study Notes' for use in the classroom, to confirm or refute statements and opinions and to allow them to respond to those passages with which those interviewed might take issue. This should have been accomplished prior to distributing the 'Case Study' through the ITTO and making the apparently unilateral decision to post it on the website of the Institute for Environmental Diplomacy and Security of the University of Vermont. Some of the results of not following those procedures are reflected in Mark Gately's comments in his email message to you of January 26 that "As far as WCS comment on the study is concerned, I don't recall receiving any emails during the time period that you mention – are you sure that you contacted me? Had I seen a copy of this study in advance of publication, or been consulted in any way, I would have suggested significant modifications to the text."

We are convinced that there will now be some mutually satisfactory resolution of these very important concerns of the Forestry Administration regarding the 'Case Study' which have been elaborated in this email message.

Sincerely yours,

Chheang Dany

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