



*Paper Parks and Paper Partnerships:  
Lessons for protected areas and biodiversity  
corridors in the Greater Mekong Subregion*

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The three case-study PAs all fall within the planned economic and biodiversity corridors. The sites are:  
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.

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*The general trend revealed is that (PAs) are experiencing a net loss both of biodiversity and of resources for local livelihoods, often at an alarming rate.*

*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*

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These 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.

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## Key lessons learned



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

*The general trend 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.

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## Key lessons learned



### 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 have an explicit and robust strategy to develop a verifiable commitment from the relevant levels and agencies of Government to PA protection and FLEG.

## Key lessons learned



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

*An integrated strategy is needed which combines both 'community-led' and 'state-enforced' conservation approaches.*

The transfer of management responsibilities to communities must be matched by a corresponding transfer of State-protected rights and benefits, tangible to local people.

*The trend is a transfer of responsibilities to local communities without a corresponding transfer of rights or benefits*

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.

## Key lessons learned



### 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).

## Key lessons learned



### 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.

## Key lessons learned



### 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 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 example:* 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?

## Key lessons learned



### 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.

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.

Characteristic of projects to share only success stories while overlooking severe constraints and resulting failures - this impedes learning and slows the evolution of best practice.

## Key lessons learned



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

Strong shared vision must be built from the start if potential disagreement or conflicts of interest are to be avoided.

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 power of the economic-growth lobby, there is a concern that its interests are dominating.

No clear mechanism to promote open debate, build a real shared vision among stake-holders and generate win-win solutions

## Conclusions



- 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.

## Conclusions



- 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.*

## Conclusions



- 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.

Thank you!

