

## **Evaluation Abstract**

### **Title, author and date of the evaluation report:**

Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) Sub-Sector Support Project – Phase II, Internal Review, prepared by Dr. Don Gilmour, Prof. Le Thac Can, Dr. Pham Hoai Duc, and Mr. Guido Broekhoven, March 2004

### **Name of project, programme or organizational unit:**

NTFPs Sub-Sector Support Project – Phase II

### **Objectives of the project, programme or mandate of the organizational unit:**

#### General objective:

To strengthen the capacity of research and management institutions in Vietnam for supporting the ecologically sustainable and equitable use of NTFPs that contribute to biodiversity conservation, improved livelihoods of poor people resident in and around forest areas, and national economic development.

#### Specific objectives:

1. National strategic and policy frameworks relevant to the ecologically sustainable and equitable development of NTFPs are improved.
2. Capacity of the NTFPRC/MARD and other relevant institutions is strengthened to assist with the development and implementation of national strategies and policies.
3. Other institutions and stakeholders involved in forest research and development, poverty reduction, and biodiversity conservation programmes are financially supported to undertake NTFP-related research & development and are engaged in information sharing through networks.
4. The use of existing approaches and methods for promoting ecologically sustainable and equitable development of NTFPs is expanded through relevant training and extension institutions.
5. Knowledge is gathered and local systems of sustainable NTFP management are piloted and demonstrated to inform and assist the implementation of reforestation, poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation programmes.
6. Project approaches and practices are established that foster the institutionalisation of effective resource use, partnership building, action-learning, and gender responsiveness in project implementation and within the host and partner organisations.

**IUCN area of specialisation:** Forest Conservation; Socio-Economics

**Geographical area:** Vietnam

### **Project or programme duration, length of existence of organisational unit:**

July 2002 – June 2007 (Phase II); July 1998 – June 2002 (Phase I)

**Overall budget of the project, programme or organizational unit:** Not clear

**Donor(s):** Royal Netherlands Embassy – Hanoi

### **Objectives of the evaluation:**

- To assist the project team and project implementing partners in assessing the achievements, lessons learned and strengths/weaknesses of the project to date;
- To assist the project team in formulating possible adjustments.

**Type of evaluation:** Project

**Period covered by the evaluation:** July 2002 – February 2004

**Commissioned by:** Not specified

**Audience:** IUCN-Vietnam, IUCN-ARO, project staff, implementing partners

**Evaluation team:** Mixed (Internal/External)

**Methodology used:**

The Evaluation Team spent fourteen days on its mission (five days in the field and nine days in Hanoi), using a range of interactive approaches and techniques, such as meetings with key informants and project partners; a participatory workshop with project staff aimed at identifying the key strengths, challenges and recommendations for the project; focus group discussions in the field; inspections of project sites; discussions with villagers; and review of selected documents.

**Questions of the evaluation:**

A comprehensive list of the evaluation questions is available in Appendix 1: Terms of Reference. The following are some of the main areas and questions reviewed:

- *Conformity with project design:* How well does project implementation follow the Project Document and the Project Implementation Plan?
- *Approach and Strategy:* Are the approaches and strategies appropriate, well-articulated and understood by all relevant parties?
- *Activities:* Do activities reflect the project goal, objectives, approaches and strategies? What is the project's progress compared with planned achievements?
- *Organization and Structure:* Is the project structure effective? Are the existing coordination mechanisms effective? Are the roles and responsibilities of project partners clearly understood?
- *Management and Administration:* Are the project procedures (planning, financial, administrative) appropriate and effective?
- *Linkages:* Are the project's interactions with other organizations meaningful and sufficient?
- *Budget:* Does the budget reflect present priorities? Are any changes required? Is disbursement effective?
- *Monitoring and Evaluation:* Are the M&E systems in place and effective?

**Findings:**

The following recurrent themes became evident in the course of the Internal Review:

1. Lack of clear vision and strategies (both short- and long-term) for guiding project activities;
2. Slow progress in initiating activities (particularly field activities);
3. Problems associated with the organisational structure (particularly, unclear roles and overlapping authority and responsibility among key project/partner groups and individuals);
4. Problems related to project management.

Specific issues identified included:

- There is a sense of “reinventing the wheel” in Phase II. At the same time, knowledge from Phase I has not been extracted and sufficiently applied.
- The Project Document (PD) is an adequate guide for project implementation. Conversely, the Project Implementation Plan (PIP) is seen as failing to give sufficient strategic guidance, unduly emphasizing the strengthening of the NTFP Research Centre.
- The absence of a clear and shared vision was a common theme throughout the discussion. An issue that had specifically been singled out was the lack of clear strategies for guiding project field implementation, support to the NTFP network, strengthening the capacity of the NTFP Research Center, and partnership development.

- Enlargement of the Project Management Unit, along with unclear limits of authority and responsibility of individual members, has complicated and slowed down management decision making, and has led to a situation of a lack of clarity and confusion over management issues.
- The current management style is not effective in encouraging staff enthusiasm and moving forward efficiently and effectively with project implementation. In addition, good working relationships have not always been established between the project and partner organizations.
- The decentralized approach intended in the PD has not been put into place.
- Diverging views among the Vietnamese partners, the IUCN Country Office, and the IUCN Asia Regional Office have become deeply divisive and threaten to inhibit certain aspects of project progress.

**Recommendations:**

The Internal Review offers a series of recommendations, including:

- Delay any major revision of the Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) until substantial implementation experience is gained (possibly until early 2005).
- Set aside the PIP as a vehicle for project review, while reverting to the conceptual structure outlined in the PD.
- Develop long-term vision and strategies in guiding field implementation (particularly with regard to testing the use of NTFPs and mechanisms for scaling up) and developing generic principles and guidelines for using NTFPs as vehicles for conservation and poverty alleviation throughout Vietnam.
- Concentrate the capacity building of the NTFP Research Centre on a limited number of areas considered of high priority.
- Change management style and adopt methods aimed at improving, clarifying and speeding up the decision-making process; decentralising project management towards the Regional Offices (ROs) and field site partners; prioritising and allocating time to the fundamental functions of the PMU, i.e. focusing on strategic issues and promoting common understanding of project strategies; etc.
- Clarify among PMU members, and between the PMU and IUCN, the authority and responsibility for key decision-making areas.
- Develop an inventory of potential partners and identify what they can contribute in terms of analysis of field activities, identification of lessons learned, formulation of policy implications, market analysis for NTFPs, etc.
- Further develop the M&E system in addressing impact monitoring and evaluation of unintended results.

**Lessons Learned:** Not specified

**Language of the evaluation:** English

**Available from:** IUCN Asia Regional Office (IUCN-ARO); IUCN Global Monitoring and Evaluation Initiative, IUCN-Headquarters