



## COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IMPROVES MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS OF HIN NAM NO NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA IN CENTRAL LAO PDR

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the multi-level collaborative governance system in Hin Nam No National Protected Area in central Lao PDR. The paper assesses the governance and management system's potential as an exemplar to protected areas practitioners, and discusses how such a system might be initiated and replicated elsewhere in the country and the region. Five building blocks of an experimental collaborative governance model are described. These comprise: (i) a participatory governance assessment; (ii) establishing a multi-level collaborative management and governance structure; (iii) participatory zonation based on traditional knowledge and customary rights; (iv) drafting collaborative governance agreements and (v) involving local people as additional protected area management manpower. The inter-linkages between these building blocks are also described. The first results of the collaborative governance approach are encouraging as the total management effectiveness score increased by 13 per cent in two years. It shows that the collaborative governance model can deliver positive results for the entire protected area system in Lao PDR, which is often referred to as a 'paper park system'. Further work on adaptive management of the collaborative governance system and sustainable financing of the technical field programmes will be required to sustain this model.

**Key words:** Multi-level collaborative governance, protected area, governance assessment, participatory zonation, customary rights, village rangers, Lao PDR

### INTRODUCTION

Historically, government established and managed protected areas have been the primary mechanism for conserving the world's biodiversity. However, the establishment of new protected areas, and effective management of current protected areas for biodiversity outcomes must take into account local demands for ecosystem goods and services. Consequently, in many regions a transition towards shared governance systems, also called collaborative governance / collaborative management, can be observed in which local communities have more powers and responsibilities for the governance and management of the natural resources on which they are dependent.

Collaborative governance in Lao PDR and in Southeast Asia is still a relatively new approach. Experiences have shown that conflicts between local people and government representatives often arise when centralised efforts are made to impose management regimes on local people living in and adjacent to protected areas (Baird, 2000). Despite increasing consensus that collaborative governance of protected areas may be a better way to achieve biodiversity conservation and natural resource management objectives in an equitable manner, there remain considerable differences between managers, conservationists, governments and local people with regards to the concept, the implementation of this approach and the definition of 'participation' (Baird,

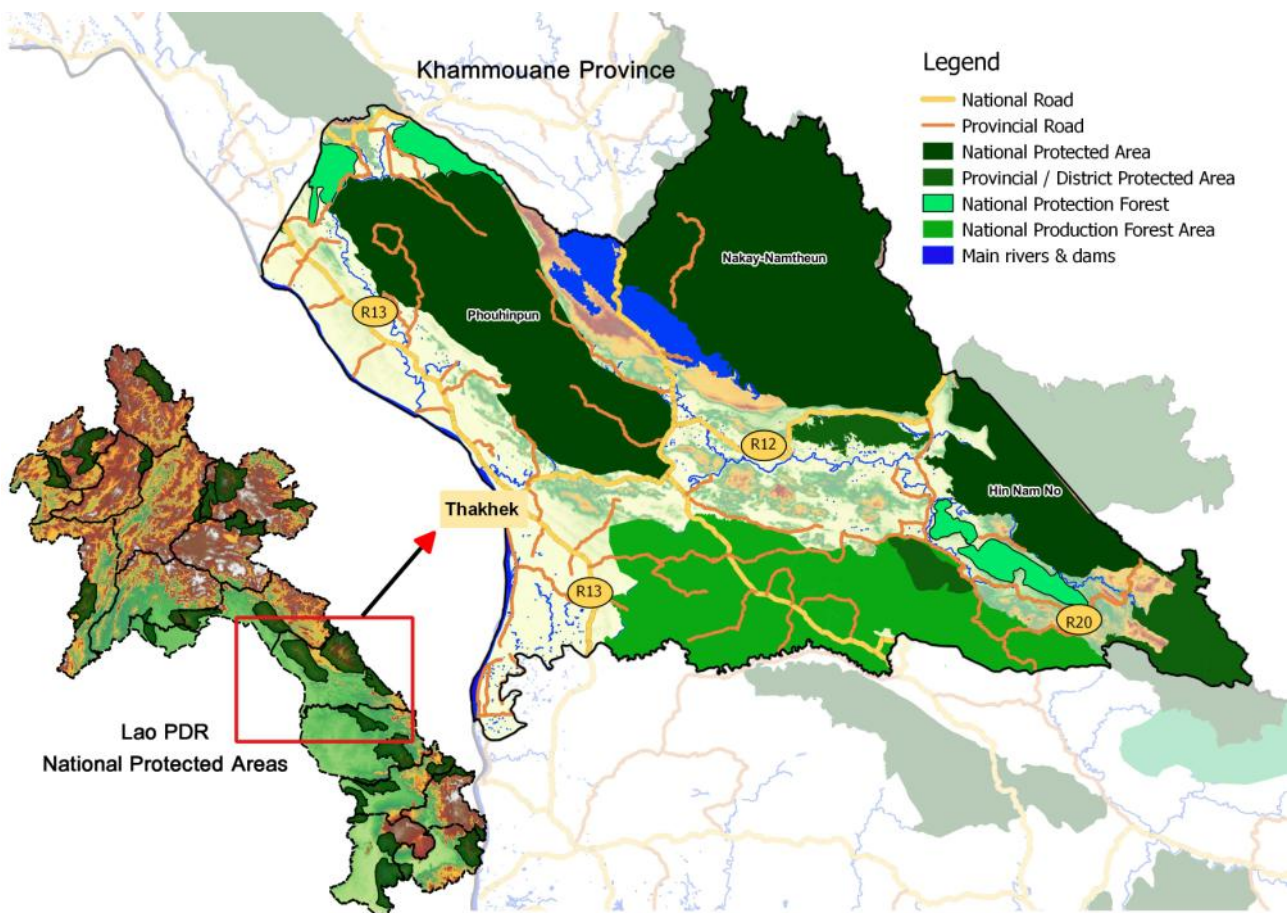


Figure 1: Location of Hin Nam No in Khammouane Province in Lao PDR (map prepared by Ronny Dobbelsteijn)

2000). Parr et al. (2013) recommend that government-designated protected areas establish working groups in the different fields of management, and enable these to create networks and institutional linkages between the grassroots communities and other local stakeholders, which in turn are guided by a protected area collaborative management committee.

Since the early 1990s, Lao Government policy for protected areas has focused on developing a partnership approach, which advocates people's involvement in conservation, especially that of the locals who depend on the natural resources for their daily livelihoods (Southammakoth & Craig, 2000). The development of successful collaborative governance requires that both guardian communities and government take on appropriate and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for conservation and protection. To date, not many of these promising partnerships have been realised – protected area management in Lao PDR largely remains a paper park approach due to insufficient budgets and human resources allocation by the government.

A number of countries in Southeast Asia are facing similar financial and human resource constraints. As a consequence, many protected areas in Lao PDR,

Cambodia and Vietnam are experiencing a net loss, both of biodiversity and of resources for local livelihoods, often at alarming rates. The primary agents of rapid ecological degradation are external traders such as sawmill owners, often assisted by local communities, who illegally extract natural resources for distant markets to maximise short-term profits. An analysis by Corbett (2008) confirms the need to combine state-enforced and community-led conservation approaches with some core elements for success: finding the appropriate division of roles between co-managers; ensuring that the transfer of responsibilities goes to the locals with customary rights; ensuring capacity development; and promoting good governance at all levels (especially if the poor are to benefit).

This paper examines the recently established multi-level collaborative governance system in Hin Nam No National Protected Area in central Lao PDR, which is the only site in Lao PDR to be officially under collaborative governance (DFRM/MoNRE, 2015). The paper assesses the governance and management system's potential as an exemplar to protected areas practitioners elsewhere in the country and the region, and discusses how such a system might be initiated and replicated. The description of this case study follows the 'Panorama solutioning



**Xe Bang Fai River Cave in Hin Nam No National Protected Area © Dave Bunnell**

approach' initiated by IUCN in 2014. Five so-called 'building blocks' of the experimental collaborative governance model in Hin Nam No were identified (de Koning, 2015).

### **HIN NAM NO NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA (NPA)**

Hin Nam No National Protected Area, in brief Hin Nam No, is located in Boualapha District, Khammouane Province. It constitutes a sizable proportion (88,500 ha) of one of the largest karst landscapes in Southeast Asia, being contiguous with Phong Nha–Ke Bang National Park in Central Vietnam (see Figure 1). It is one of the original 18 National Biodiversity Conservation Areas (now called NPAs) of Lao PDR established on 29 October 1993 by Prime Minister's Decree 164. A total of 18 villages lie in immediate proximity to Hin Nam No, with a total population of about 8,000 people, many of whom are ethnic minorities. Like other national protected areas in Lao PDR, Hin Nam No has a fragmented management authority with a part-time director and no full-time staff on site. As a result of these limited human resources, as well as limited financial resources allocated by the government, there is a lack of capacity, skills, information and law enforcement to effectively manage and monitor the protected area.

Since 2010, the German Government provided technical support to Hin Nam No through the Lao-German Project 'Integrated Nature Conservation and Sustainable Resource Management in the Hin Nam No Region', implemented by the Lao Department of Forest Resource Management (DFRM) with support from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

This has facilitated high levels of external technical support, both at the management level and in the different specialised fields, including biodiversity monitoring, community outreach, livelihoods and tourism. Experts have provided on-going support to the establishment and maintenance of the collaborative governance system.

### **IDENTIFIED BUILDING BLOCKS USING THE 'SOLUTIONING APPROACH'**

The 'solutioning approach' enables the sharing of new approaches and best practices related to all aspects and levels of protected area management and governance. Solutions should be replicable, topic relevant and impacting. The initial portfolio of solutions was launched at the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014, together with the first prototype of the online Panorama platform ([www.panorama.solutions](http://www.panorama.solutions)). Distilling and sharing these solutions and their components supports knowledge transfer and enables mutual learning. The aim is to inspire others through the identified tools, methods, processes and approaches in replicating what has been used before in and for protected areas.

As part of the solution for the identified challenge for Hin Nam No, five so-called building blocks were distilled. Achievements and lessons learned per building block are described in more detail in the following sections including the inter-linkages between the building blocks. It should be noted that the participatory processes described in building blocks two to four were parallel processes running at the same time and involving the same stakeholders. The identified building blocks are:

Table 1: Governance assessment results and subsequent interventions

Outcome governance assessment (February 2014)	Proposed intervention, progress so far (February 2016)
No clear delegation of decision making or implementation authority to guardian villages (see building blocks 2 and 3)	Hin Nam No Management Authority identified tasks to be delegated to villagers
Governance system is ad hoc and top-down, with lack of systematic benefit sharing (see building blocks 2 and 4)	Participatory reporting/planning system was developed at village (18), village cluster (5) and NPA level. Participatory co-management agreement, including benefit sharing mechanism, was developed and approved.
Lack of skills and capacity; lack of involvement by women (see building block 2)	Capacity development plan has been elaborated; recruitment of five female Lao Government volunteers (trainees)
Unclear zonation of Hin Nam No into manageable units per guardian village. A guardian village is actively involved in the protection of the protected area based on their customary rights (see building block 3)	Participatory zonation and trail mapping carried out in 18 priority guardian villages
Local rules exist but are unknown or not implemented by outsiders (see building block 4)	Establish general rules for the different zones in each guardian village and disseminate the information broadly
Willingness of guardian villages/village rangers to be involved in Hin Nam No management (see building blocks 4 and 5)	Monthly participatory biodiversity monitoring and patrolling system established using motivated village rangers who are compensated based on performance
Law enforcement system is unclear, slow and ineffective (see building blocks 4 and 5)	Some delegation of law enforcement to villagers ensures a more rapid and effective response

1. Governance assessment through participatory consultation
2. Setting up a multi-level collaborative management and governance structure
3. Participatory zonation based on traditional knowledge and customary rights
4. Collaborative governance agreements
5. Local people as additional protected area management manpower

### 1. Governance assessment through participatory consultation

A governance baseline assessment was implemented in February 2014 at various levels: village, village cluster, district and province. The intention was to document the current status on the governance and management, and collect data on Hin Nam No. The results of the assessment and the subsequent agreed interventions are presented in Table 1.

This participatory assessment generated ideas on the direction and strategic vision of Hin Nam No by bringing stake- and rights-holders from various levels together. The governance baseline assessment also included a Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) developed by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

(Mardiastuti et al., 2013), which is similar to the conventionally used METT (Stolton et al., 2007) but with an additional focus on governance. A more detailed questionnaire was used to assess good governance which was adapted from annex 3 of the IUCN publication on protected areas governance (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013). In February 2016 the results showed that the management effectiveness score had increased by 13 per cent since 2014 and good governance by 15 per cent.

### 2. Setting up a multi-level collaborative management and governance structure

#### • Protected area authority

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) is responsible for establishing a legal and institutional framework for protected areas. Based on this, the provincial protected area authorities plan and coordinate activities and provide technical support to the District Office of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE). The district authorities implement and monitor the daily activities together with the villagers who have a mandate to manage and protect certain portions of Hin Nam No.

Aspirations to have a more effective management model and better understanding of the tasks, led the protected

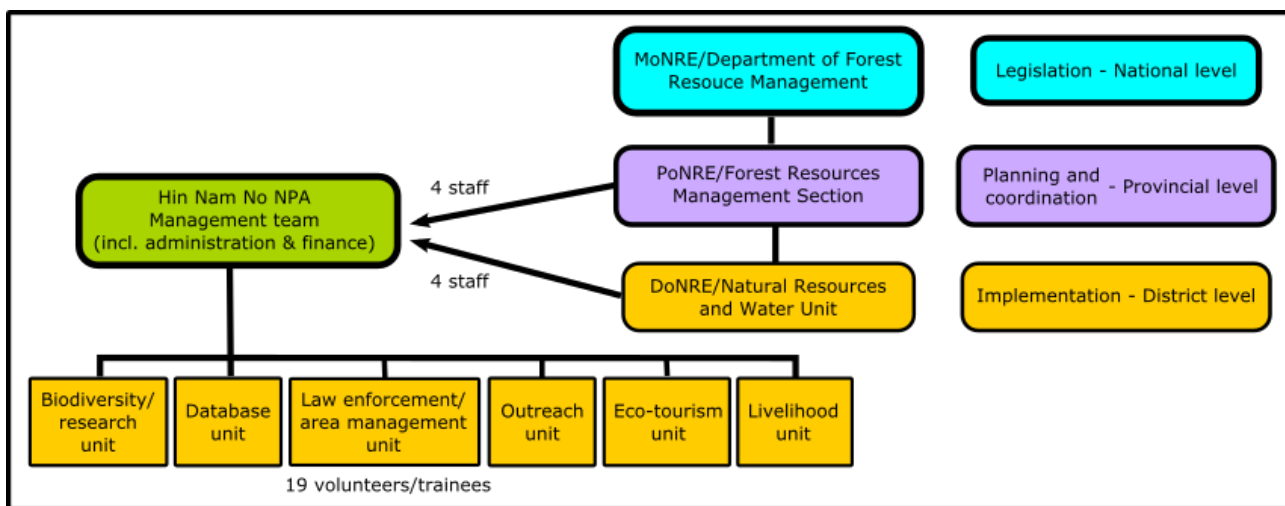


Figure 2: Institutional arrangements of the Hin Nam No Management Authority and its six technical units

area authorities to establish a new management structure for Hin Nam No, with six technical units in 2013 and early 2014. This process, which was supported by GIZ and the National University of Laos, started before the governance assessment, since a need for establishing more specialised units was already clear. Draft terms of reference were developed for each technical unit, and tasks were identified to be delegated to the villagers.

In August 2016, the newly established Hin Nam No management structure and its six technical units had a total of 27 staff to manage the protected area. The Hin Nam No Director is based in Thakhek, 200 km to the west. There are only eight part-time government staff and 19 volunteers. None of the part-time staff currently have sufficient capacity / professional preparation to show leadership in any of the specialized fields of management; this predicament may undermine the collaborative governance system in the future. Figure 2 shows the institutional arrangements of the management authority of Hin Nam No. The implementation of the protected area management tasks was decentralised to the district level.

#### • Collaborative system and stakeholders

A variety of stakeholders need to be involved to ensure effective collaborative governance. Primary stake- and rights-holders are the villagers and protected area management authorities that both ideally fulfil interlinked tasks. Successful collaborative governance also depends on the participation of secondary stakeholders. These comprise representatives from other government agencies such as the District Governor's Office, the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Tourism Office, Planning, Rural District Office, agriculture staff, forest inspection staff, as well as police and military. It is anticipated that these secondary stakeholders will

participate in strategic and operational steering (coordination; enforcement of laws). This will help to deal with threats such as illegal logging and poaching from opposing stakeholders who are only interested in quick profits and cause unsustainable use. Furthermore, strategic alliances with assisting partners are necessary for capacity development, institutional support and funding. To make sure that all stakeholders can work together towards the common goal, an effective institutional set-up is essential.

#### • Hin Nam No National Protected Area Collaborative Management Committee

Hin Nam No and its entire buffer zone are all situated within Boualapha district. Consequently, a multi-stakeholder committee was established at the district level – as the Hin Nam No NPA Collaborative Management Committee or District Co-Management Committee (DCMC). This landscape-scale body comprises the District Vice-Governor (chairperson), a secretariat and representatives from each of the five Village Cluster Committees (VCCMC) and secondary stakeholders from concerned district agencies. The DCMC currently meets quarterly and is a key structure for steering the management of Hin Nam No.

#### • Protected area working groups

Under the DCMC, five working groups were established in different fields of protected area management, with varying degrees of capacity and expertise.

These specialized fields comprise:

- i. Biodiversity monitoring, research and database
- ii. Law enforcement and area management
- iii. Outreach
- iv. Eco-tourism
- v. Livelihoods



Governance assessment on village cluster level © Mirjam de Koning

These working groups involve concerned district level government agencies, villagers and other stakeholders such as the private sector. They are organised by the heads of the relevant technical units and are the main engines of implementing management. Consequently, these five working groups played a major role in developing the relevant sections of the co-management plan, covering their respective specialized fields of management.

- **Village-level institutional bodies**

At the local level (in the 18 guardian villages), inhabitants form democratically elected village co-management committees (VCMC). Together with the five village cluster co-management committees they are mandated officially to protect and manage natural resources via official agreements. These village bodies provide management oversight to the village rangers and the eco-tourism service groups established within their respective villages. They also coordinate with the five village cluster committees and the five protected area working groups supporting the management of Hin Nam No.

- **Multi-level collaborative governance system**

As indicated above, at the district level the DCMC was established bringing together 13 appointed government officials from district level as well as village representatives from village cluster level (DFRM/MoNRE, 2015). The collaboration of the established co-

management committees at the village, village cluster and district level and the five established technical working groups can be described as a blending of technical agendas with administrative agendas (socializing protected areas), and represents a two-way process in line with the Law on Local Administration, 2003 and the 'Sam Sang' (Three Builds) system as stated in Prime Minister's Order No.16 dated 15 June 2012. This mixing of technical and administrative agendas increases the political support for collaborative governance and is different from previous tested approaches in Lao PDR. Villages report to village cluster level, which thereon report to the higher levels. The functioning of this bottom-up process is monitored via the annual good governance self-assessment in which villagers are involved, as well as joint participation of government staff on monitoring, and patrolling trips by village rangers. Top-down, strategic decisions made at higher levels take the inputs and needs of village levels into account, and specific measures and activities to be implemented are communicated back to the operational levels of village cluster and village.

This process ensures that all stake- and rights-holders are able to articulate their needs and participate in decision-making processes. A transparent sharing of information, experience and knowledge enhances the capacity for natural resource management among all parties to achieve the common goal of biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation in and around Hin

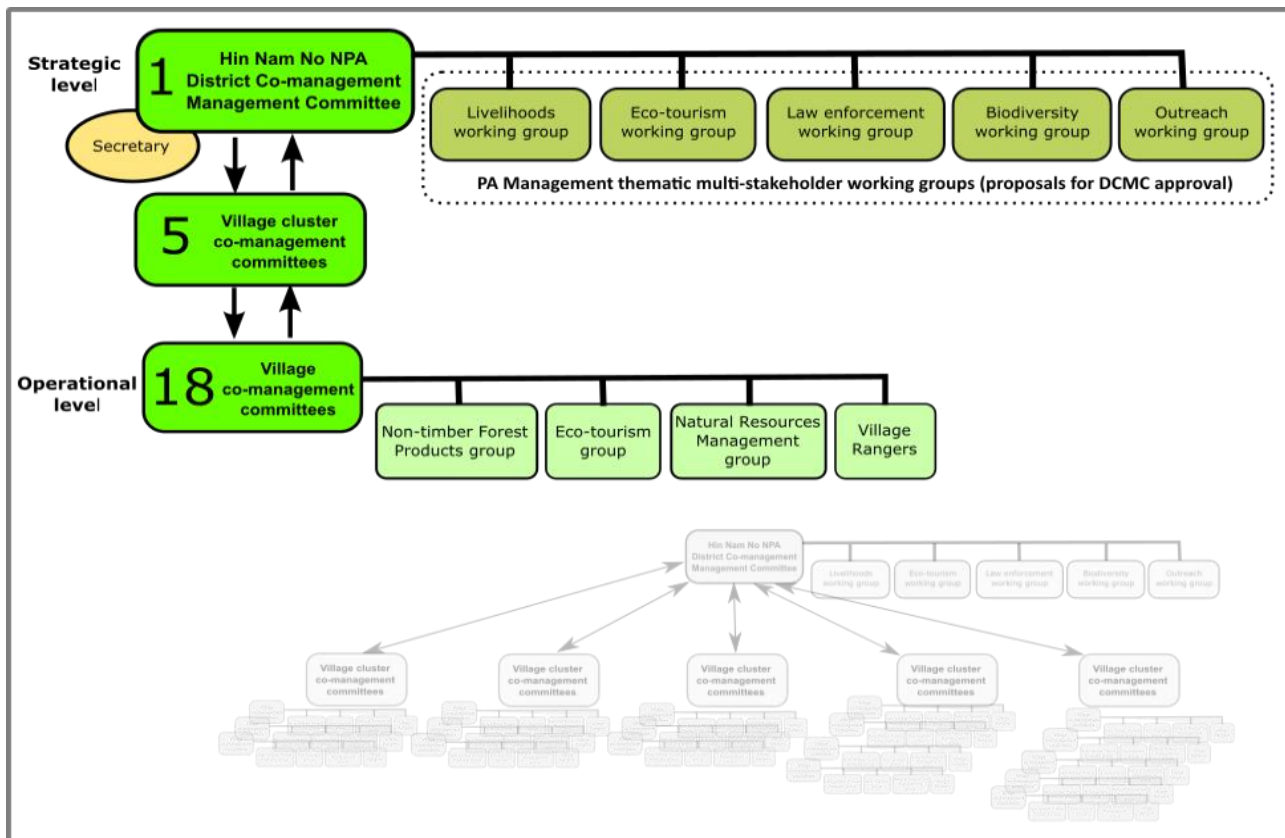


Figure 3: Multi-level collaborative governance arrangements in Hin Nam No National Protected Area

Nam No. A balance needs to be found between the need to involve people who are doing the work in the forest (village rangers) and the need to involve people who can validate decisions (village authorities and high level officials). The multi-level collaborative governance system for Hin Nam No National Protected Area is illustrated in Figure 3.

### 3. Participatory zonation based on traditional knowledge, customary rights and biodiversity values

The Lao law requires zonation inside National Protected Areas, to identify:

1. Total Protected Zones (TPZ) for the preservation of biodiversity, and
2. Controlled Use Zones (CUZ) for the regulation of resource use and definition of limited access.

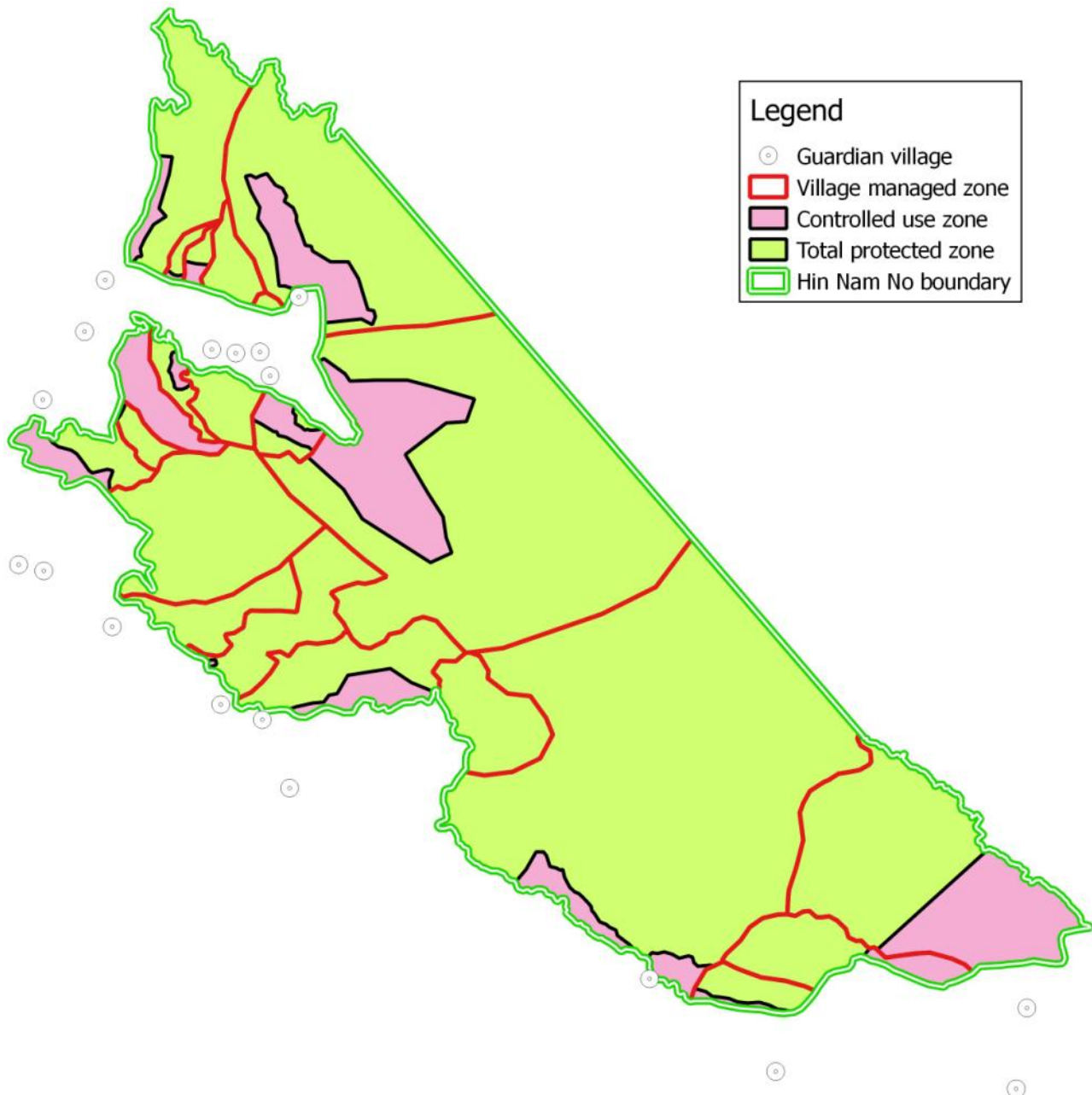
Participatory zonation is an essential tool for local communities to engage in collaborative governance – especially when the process takes into account local knowledge and respects existing customary rights. The Hin Nam No protected area authorities started the participatory zonation process in 2014, based on the agreed interventions of the governance assessment. In order to divide the work between the 18 villages surrounding Hin Nam No, it was necessary to clarify areas and responsibilities:

- Which areas will be monitored?
- By whom? (Related to the question: Who has the right to use which resources?)

As a first step, the 18 guardian villages determined the boundaries, based on used trails and customary rights of villages. Then the village rangers mapped trails and collected data on important features, biodiversity and threats. Based on the trail maps produced, villagers were asked to define areas they need for collecting Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), aquatic products, and other natural resources. The villagers were also asked to define areas that are inaccessible due to the rugged terrain, and areas that should be left alone to protect wildlife for breeding purposes.

Based on the proposals by the guardian villages, the Hin Nam No management authorities geographically divided the Hin Nam No region into areas to be managed by the 18 guardian villages, which are grouped into five village clusters. All eighteen guardian villages are located outside of the Hin Nam No, but some of their village lands fall partially within Hin Nam No.

All land inside Hin Nam No consists of conservation forests and there is no agricultural land or production forest inside Hin Nam No. Consequently, the zonation process focused on jointly identifying the Controlled Use



**Figure 4: Preliminary zonation of Hin Nam No into Total Protected Zones and Controlled Use Zones based on proposals and existing usage by guardian villages (map prepared by Ronny Dobbelsteijn)**

Zones (CUZ), which prescribes the traditional village lands of these 18 guardian villages. In a second step, management rules for the CUZs were formulated, based on the customary rights of the villagers. The Total Protected Zones (TPZ) comprise all parts of Hin Nam No beyond the CUZ. They can be divided into inaccessible parts, and areas considered of high biodiversity value (DFRM/MoNRE, 2015). More information is needed on the areas considered of high biodiversity value, to subdivide them further. The process of participatory mapping of trails and the subsequent selection of key trails for regular monitoring led to a clear agreement on which area should be monitored by which village. This led to a de-facto delineation of village areas of responsibility within Hin Nam No. In total, 75,911 ha (86

per cent) were proposed by the villagers as TPZ and 12,625 ha (14 per cent) as CUZ (de Koning & Dobbelsteijn, 2015) (see Figure 4).

The basic rules and regulations governing the access and use of the proposed TPZ and CUZ are stipulated in the Forestry Law (2007) and in the collaborative governance agreements that have been approved by the District Governor of Boualapha. The DCMC agreed that further meetings with the villagers are required via the VCCMC and the VCMC to discuss and agree upon more detailed resource use rules for the CUZ to prevent unsustainable use by villagers and outsiders. The final zonation system has to be approved by the District Co-management Committee.



#### 4. Collaborative governance agreements

The collaborative governance agreements were drafted in village meetings with the help of a neutral facilitator by the first nine villages which were setting up village co-management committees. Based on the first participatory draft agreements the local authorities decided to generate one uniform collaborative governance agreement in the form of a district by-law, including benefit-sharing arrangements with regard to an agreed set of fines to be paid by offenders and the use of resources based on customary rights. As differences between the nine proposed agreements were small, a compromise for one generic agreement was found during a workshop held in July 2014 chaired by the vice-district governor. The proposed consensus document coming out of this meeting was also presented to the nine villages that created their village co-management committees later in 2014. Upon request by the local authorities the document went through several meetings and due diligence processes involving legal government offices before it was officially approved by the Boualapha District Governor. The final version was disseminated to all 18 villages and also over the border in Vietnam to the protected area authorities and rangers of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

#### 5. Local people as additional protected area management manpower

The approach aims at involving local villagers actively in the management of the protected area. This is driven on the one hand by the connectivity and dependence on the area by local people and their time availability to participate, and on the other hand by the limitation of resources provided by the government. In total there are 87 democratically elected co-management committee members spread over 18 villages and five village clusters involved in participatory planning and reporting. In the guardian villages, village rangers are compensated for making regular trips into the protected area to record wildlife sightings and threats and to become involved in patrolling for law enforcement. Payment fees for biodiversity monitoring and patrolling were agreed through negotiations and based upon fair compensation for the hard and dangerous work of climbing in the mountains. Up until August 2016 the money for the village rangers was provided by GIZ to the Hin Nam No management team that pays the rangers.

A total of 110 villager rangers were trained in the use of GPS equipment and in recording sightings in coded booklets. All data and information from the field are inserted into the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) system. The data collected by the village rangers is verified and entered into the SMART database

every three months by the database unit. The database unit analyses the data and presents the main wildlife sightings and threats to the DCMC and the Hin Nam No NPA Director in the quarterly reporting and planning meetings via maps. In these meetings, decisions are made for the plan for the next three months and on where the village rangers will go. From the SMART system it becomes clear that the threats to Hin Nam No are similar to other NPAs in Lao PDR, namely uncontrolled logging and poaching. Over recent years these threats remained constant or even increased in certain places, in spite of the collaborative governance system. On a more positive note the wildlife sightings of selected key indicator species also remained constant (results of bi-annual scientific biodiversity monitoring and the village rangers). Vegetation surveys combined with satellite image interpretation showed a negligible deforestation rate.

There are a further 35 households in four villages involved in the provision of eco-tourism services such as guiding and boating services, as well as guesthouse and home-stays. Village service providers were trained to provide a certain quality of services. The eco-tourism activities have been developed in a way that they conserve the environment and at the same time benefit the local people. In one village this link between conservation and tourism has been elaborated via a so-called conservation agreement under the umbrella of the existing collaborative governance structure and agreements.

#### DISCUSSION

**Governance assessment:** According to IUCN's instructions, the described 'building blocks' were formulated to try to follow a logical sequence and make parts of the 'solution' replicable. The governance assessment constituted a vital first step 'building block'. It laid out a collective vision as to how the governance and management system may be modified, and identified the sequence of steps that should be followed to attain a more effective and equitable system. The fact that the governance assessment involved representatives from all the different levels of management facilitated a collaborative visioning of governance and management.

**Multi-level collaborative governance system:** The governance assessment provided the orientation and stimuli for the development of the governance system. The establishment of the multi-level collaborative governance system is heavily dependent upon the recognition of the different specialized fields of protected area management (Parr et al., 2013; Parr, 2015). The



Village rangers in action © GIZ Hin Nam No

organization of the NPA Management Authority, as illustrated in Figure 2, and the drafting of terms of references for the six technical units helped in the description of the tasks to be undertaken to effectively manage the Hin Nam No. However, the management authority could only allocate 2-3 district government volunteers per unit. This was acknowledged by the management authority and therefore some management tasks were delegated to the villagers. Capacity development of the Hin Nam No Management Authority and villagers enabled them to better execute their tasks. The official endorsement of the collaborative governance structures by the district governor legitimized the approach.

The increase in management effectiveness and good governance self-assessment results convinced the stakeholders to continue with this partnership. However, this multi-level collaborative governance system is continuously evolving. Recent thinking suggests that the membership of the DCMC should be modified to include provincial representatives to link the provincial policy-makers to the district administration and the five operating district-level working groups, which are gaining momentum as the main engines for implementing technical sub-programme activities within the villages.

**Zoning and collaborative governance agreements:** The 18 VCMCs were key institutional bodies in leading the zonation process and the development of collaborative governance agreements within the guardian villages. These two building block steps built on the existing traditional systems of natural resource management, and seem to be a particularly strong component to the multi-level collaborative governance system – building upon the existing traditional resource management system rather than creating a new management system which undermines traditional customary approaches, inadvertently generating conflict. This homogeneity with customary management systems encourages village participation, which is vital in sites with low government capacity and budgets. This conflict aversion in itself is particularly appealing and brings added interest at the administrative district, provincial and national levels.

As Hin Nam No is located in only one district, the process to approve the agreements went relatively fast as it is easier to approve a district by-law compared to higher level agreements. Another enabling factor is that Boualapha is a pilot district in the province to develop a ‘three-built’ district (sam-sang), implying that the ownership and implementation of the activities has to be decentralised to the local level. The due diligence process

initiated by the district governor to approve the collaborative governance structure and agreements led to clear leadership and ownership from the local authority. This provides noticeable encouragement for local villagers to implement the agreements, as fines for poachers and benefit sharing mechanisms are in place. Initially, the implementation of law enforcement without endorsed agreements generated problems as the village rangers felt insecure in doing their job. From each village the very clear and strong request was made that each village respects the boundaries between the villages in the Hin Nam No and that the village rangers survey their own village lands; otherwise there would be confusion as to who has the right to be inside Hin Nam No.

**Additional manpower:** In Hin Nam No, 110 village rangers were trained in the basics of biodiversity monitoring and the use of the necessary equipment, as a basis to support the identification of areas of high biodiversity value. Basic activities are being implemented reasonably satisfactorily. Most of these village rangers are police or village militia who patrol Hin Nam No on a part-time basis. They can also tackle minor legal infringements. As Hin Nam No is mainly a limestone/karst region, large areas are very difficult to access and the number of trails is minimal. Local part-time village rangers seem to be more effective compared to full-time government rangers. This was demonstrated by an increase in the area covered for patrolling and biodiversity monitoring and some successful law enforcement interventions in which village militia arrested poachers and fines were settled locally with benefit sharing for the village rangers involved. Furthermore, they are more effective and cost efficient as the village rangers rely on their own food supply and are located close to the area and can act quickly, so there is no need to establish separate ranger stations. Furthermore, they know if there are trespassers as they live next to the area they manage.

In 2015 a total of 110 trained village rangers walked 1,523 km on patrol covering 60 per cent of the reserve. For this a cost-effective total of US\$ 12,000 was paid to the village rangers. The system of making use of local tourism service guides also works well as it is an additional income for the people living next to the area which they know very well. Given the limited number of tourists, it is important that the village tourism service providers don't rely solely on tourism income for their livelihoods. The service providers involved in eco-tourism had an 8.8 per cent (37 per cent for women) additional monthly household income from eco-tourism services. There was an increase from 465 visitors in 2014 to 2,520 in April 2016.

### **Challenges and opportunities for Hin Nam No:**

Up until August 2016 the collaborative governance set-up has resulted in an increase in participation in protected area planning and reporting at village, village cluster and district level. Through this increased sharing of information between various stakeholders more practical solutions are being proposed and tested. The model also resulted in an increased authority and voice by the district governor in the protected area management, which has had an impact on the implementation of proposals and their effectiveness as the district governor is the highest authority in the district.

On a more critical note it is clear that the coordination of law enforcement around Hin Nam No cannot be handled by the management authorities and guardian villages alone. This activity requires the collaboration of many agencies, which would best be handled by the district working group on law enforcement headed by the district vice-governor. Discussions on the need for sharing management tasks are more easily understood by government officials than tackling the issues of shared power and decision making. With still valuable timber and NTFPs remaining in and around Hin Nam No it is questionable whether there is real political will to engage in governance and power issues in Hin Nam No. To date no sustained law enforcement programme has been implemented. As a consequence, illegal activities continue both within the protected area and in the forested portions around the Hin Nam No. The latter remains the biggest challenge to tackle. The law enforcement working group is currently elaborating a strategy, to be approved by the DCMC, to make law enforcement more transparent and effective. This is in line with new policies that came into place with the newly elected government.

The village rangers system is a relatively cost-efficient system but payments need to be sustained once the GIZ project is terminated. It has to be seen if the entire system of 110 village rangers can be sustained or whether it should be down-scaled to a leaner system operating from a village cluster level while networking with village rangers at the village level. One option for future financing of the village ranger system could be via a Trust Fund involving the Environmental Protection Fund or corporate responsibility financing. The mobilisation of private sector partners for tourism development and public funds are also important to sustain the collaborative governance arrangements.

To sustain the collaborative governance system it is important to create a direct linkage between roles, responsibilities and rights, benefits as agreed upon in the



Local people depending on the resources of Hin Nam No National Protected area © Lucas Wahl

collaborative governance agreement for Hin Nam No as a whole and the envisaged conservation agreement which will focus on specific zones, activities or resources. This should also include the link to improved livelihood activities as a potential benefit. The Hin Nam No management is not a development organization and cannot hope to provide for all the needs of the villagers. However, an important aspect of developing agreements involves partnering with other development partners in the immediate vicinity of Hin Nam No.

#### **Challenges and opportunities for replication:**

Representatives of MoNRE requested for this innovative model to be piloted with the possibility of extending it to other areas in Lao PDR. To date, the building block with regard to the establishment of the governance structure is already partially copied in Phou Dendin NPA in Phongsaly Province with the support of the local Lao Biodiversity Association. In Xe Pian NPA in southern Lao PDR, the idea exists to do a governance assessment as a starting point and to elaborate a co-management plan similar to the one in Hin Nam No. Based on the interest shown by other management authorities in Lao PDR, the GIZ project has organised study tours to Hin Nam No and provided a 'training of trainers' in the capital Vientiane. The 'training of trainers' manual follows the different building blocks.

Hin Nam No has some unique management characteristics. Not only is the site completely located within a single district, but the protected area is a limestone massif, and is a geological formation. It has no communities living inside, has extremely limited access,

limited alternative land uses and limited high value resources. Furthermore, the site has been tentatively identified as the nation's first natural world heritage site, increasingly gaining political support. Thus, the establishment of this multi-level collaborative governance within this reserve has been one of the easiest sites in Lao PDR to set up. It remains unclear how easy it will prove to set up multi-level collaborative system arrangements in sites covering several provinces and 5-10 districts. It also remains unclear as to how the working groups will remain effective in engagement in more complex management scenarios, with influential investors deliberately undermining the collaborative governance system for personal gain.

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

At the present time (August 2016), Hin Nam No staffing levels and allocated budgets by the Lao government are extremely low and therefore effective management still needs to be improved. On a positive note, the Hin Nam No authorities and GIZ have developed an innovative collaborative governance system in which technical and administrative agendas are mixed (socializing protected areas), in line with relevant legislation on decentralisation and based on customary rights. This has increased the political and local support for collaborative governance and is different from previous tested approaches in Lao PDR.

The description of the building blocks and their interlinkages enabled a relatively simple and structured write-up of the three year process that was followed to set up the multi-level collaborative governance system.

The increase in management effectiveness shows that the collaborative governance model brings positive results with opportunities to the entire system of NPAs in Lao PDR, up to now often referred to as a 'paper park' system. As future building blocks, more work on 'sustainable financing' and 'adaptive management' through actual implementation is required to sustain this model. Implementation of the collaborative governance approach in Hin Nam No can begin in earnest in the coming five-year period.

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## RESUMEN

Este artículo examina el sistema de gobernanza basada en la colaboración en el Área Protegida Hin Nam No en el centro de la RDP Lao. El artículo evalúa el potencial del sistema de gobernanza y gestión como modelo para los profesionales encargados de las áreas protegidas, y examina cómo se podría iniciar y replicar un sistema de este tipo en otras partes del país y de la región. Se describen cinco elementos esenciales de un modelo experimental de gobernanza basada en la colaboración. Estos comprenden: (i) una evaluación sobre la gobernanza participativa; (ii) el establecimiento de una estructura de gestión y gobernanza basada en la colaboración en distintos niveles; (iii) la zonificación participativa basada en el conocimiento tradicional y los derechos consuetudinarios; (iv) la elaboración de convenios sobre la gobernanza basada en la colaboración; y (v) la participación de la población local como mano de obra adicional para la gestión del área protegida. También se describen las interrelaciones entre estos elementos esenciales. Los primeros resultados del enfoque basado en la gobernanza participativa son alentadores habida cuenta de que la puntuación total de la efectividad de gestión aumentó en un 13 por ciento en dos años. Ello demuestra que el modelo de gobernanza basada en la colaboración puede ofrecer resultados positivos para todo el sistema de áreas protegidas en la República Democrática Popular Lao, al que a menudo se denomina "sistema de parques de papel". Será necesario seguir trabajando en la gestión adaptable del sistema de gobernanza basada en la colaboración y la financiación sostenible de los programas técnicos para sustentar este modelo.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine un système de gestion participative multi-niveaux dans l'aire protégée nationale de Hin Nam No au Laos central. L'article évalue le potentiel de ce système de gouvernance pour servir d'exemple au management d'autres zones protégées, et examine comment un tel système pourrait être lancé et reproduit ailleurs dans le pays et la région. Nous décrivons les cinq étapes pour la construction d'un modèle de gestion participative expérimentale. Celles-ci consistent en : (i) une évaluation de la gestion participative ; (ii) l'établissement d'une structure de gestion et de gouvernance multi-niveaux coordonnée et collaborative ; (iii) un plan de zonage participatif basé sur la connaissance des traditions et droits coutumiers ; (iv) l'élaboration d'accords de gestion participative, et (v) la participation des populations locales à la gestion du parc. Nous mettons également en lumière les liens qui existent entre ces étapes. Les premiers résultats de cette approche de gestion participative sont encourageants puisque la note d'efficacité de gestion globale a augmenté de 13 % en deux ans. Cela indique que ce modèle de gestion participative pourrait fournir des résultats positifs pour l'ensemble des aires protégées au Laos, souvent appelé un 'système de parcs de papier'. Les travaux d'adaptation du système de gestion participative et du financement durable des programmes d'assistance technique sur le terrain vont continuer afin d'entretenir et de valider ce modèle.