



LESSONS LEARNED

FROM SIX YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE LAND AND FOREST
CONSERVATION IN DRY DIPTEROCARP LANDSCAPE IN
SOUTHERN LAO PDR



SAFE Ecosystems Project



May 2022

Acronyms

CBD	Convention on Biodiversity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DDF	Dry Dipterocarp
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HCVF	High Conservation Value Forest
ISP	Integrated Spatial Plans
NSEDP	National Social Economic Development Plan
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
PMU	Project Management Unit
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessments
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SRI	System of Rice Intensification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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1.0 Background

The GEF and UNDP supported Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR Project (the SAFE Ecosystems Project) has been implemented by the Department of Forestry (DOF) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). The project PIF was approved on 30 September 2014 as part of GEF-6 STAR allocations and was initiated on 20 May 2016. The original project implementation partner was the Department of Forest Resources Management under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and was later transferred to DOF as a result of a National Assembly decision and has focussed upon biodiversity conservation, as well as sustainable land and forest management.

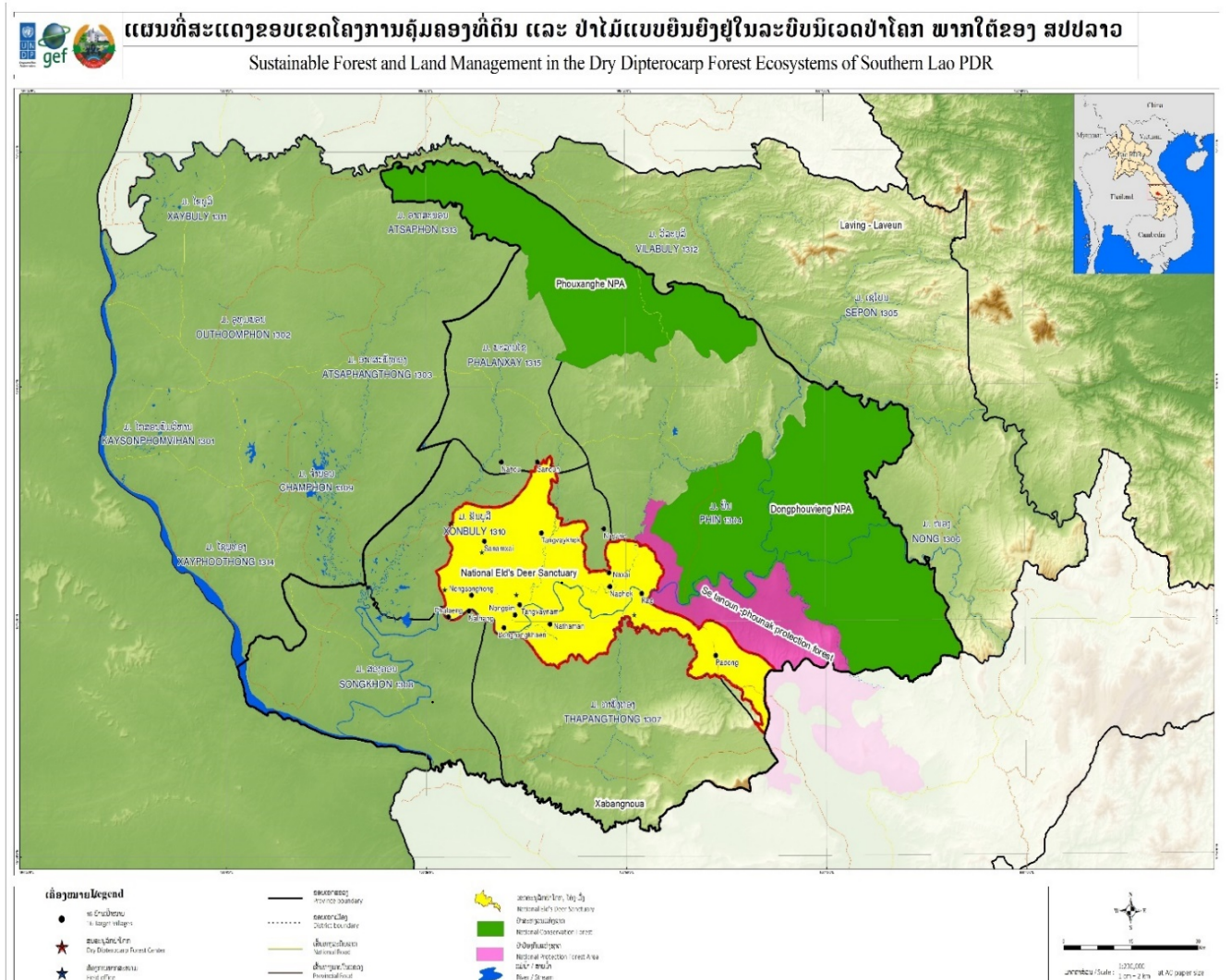


Figure 1: Map of project areas within the target districts in Savannakhet Province

The project has been implemented within five target districts (Phalanxay, Phine, Songkhone, Thapanthong and Xonabouly) of Savannakhet Province. The project document described that the threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Savannakhet province can be defined under two general categories: (i) conversion and degradation of natural habitats and ecosystems; and (ii) overharvesting of biological resources.

It also noted that the long-term solution sought by the project was to facilitate a transformative shift from unsustainable to integrated sustainable land and forest management within the DDF landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure critical wildlife habitat and conserve biodiversity, to maintain a continuous flow of multiple ecosystem services, and to support rural development and livelihoods opportunities. The main barriers to implementing solutions were underlined as the following:

1. Inadequate legal, regulatory and institutional framework for Integrated Natural Resource Management.
2. Minimal experience among key government and civil society stakeholders in developing and implementing SFM practices on the ground.
3. No mechanisms to compensate for land uses for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Recognizing the global and national importance, the Government of Lao PDR prioritized the conservation and sustainable management of the DDF landscape of Savannakhet province. As a measure of the commitment to conservation of the landscape, it selected this area to be the site of the new National Protected Area in the country, and as a demonstration site for testing the implementation of new national policies and processes related to strategic environmental assessment, integrated spatial planning, and high conservation value forests.

However, the government and other national stakeholders faced significant barriers to achieving the goal, included inadequate legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks to support integrated and effective management of natural resources; limited experience among key government and civil society stakeholders in developing and implementing sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation practices on the ground; and insufficient mechanisms to compensate for land uses for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. For this reason, the proposed project sought to strengthen land and resource use planning capacities and procedures and the policies and regulations that governed them, while simultaneously expanding and strengthening the management of resources on the ground by government agencies, local communities and private sector actors, and also intended to develop innovative financing mechanisms and programs (including ecotourism and livelihoods programs) that could ensure the sustainability of improved land use and resource management approaches.

The project's objective was to demonstrate sustainable land and forest management in the dry dipterocarp forest landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention. The development objective was to achieve sustainable natural resources management enhanced through improved governance and community participation. The project worked on three major outcomes classified as components in the five target districts with range of activities structures in each of the components:

1. Enabling policy environment, increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management in the landscape including protected area,
2. Sustainable forest management and protected area expansion in 5- target districts in Savannakhet province and
3. Developing, promoting incentives and sustainable financing for biodiversity conservation and forest protection.

The Project Management Unit (PMU) has been based within the Department of Forestry compound in Vientiane under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. A Provincial office was also hosted at Savannakhet PAFO Forestry Division, as well as small offices at the DAFOs of each of the five target districts. The Project Management Unit has been responsible for the implementation of the activities in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

The GEF CEO approved the Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR project, hereafter referred to as "SAFE Ecosystems project" on 30 September 2014 for incorporation into the GEF council work programme for the GEF-6 replenishment cycle. Following the project preparation phase, the project obtained approval for implementation by the GEF CEO in 2016. The project officially started on 20 May 2016 when the project document was signed by UNDP and the Government of LAO PDR and the inception workshop held on 20 October 2016. The planned closing date of 60 months following project signing is 20 May 2022.

Project implementation and progress was consistently tracked through quarterly progress reports, regular field visits, annual progress implementation reports, a mid-term review and a terminal evaluation. Performance assessment reports consistently indicated that indeed the projects had progressed with overall satisfactory objective rating. Lessons learned enables identification and documentation of best practices intended to facilitate lesson learning, experience sharing as well as up scaling and replication of such practices.



Figure 2: Dry dipterocarp forest ecosystem, Savannakhet Province, Southern Lao PDR

2.0 Methodology

In preparation for the projects' phase out in May 2022, a process was implemented project wide to extrapolate, analyze, share and discuss lessons learned during the project implementation spanned the period from September 2016 until April 2022. This report contains the lessons produced for the governments, UNDP and national project teams' planning and operational purposes.

Multiple methods were used as a best practice to collect and triangulate information. A desk review of available project documents and reports was completed to help better understand the context and structure of the project and identify the main achievements of the project interventions. This provided stakeholders' perspective on the project results in comparison with the project's theory of change. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at national and provincial level who had played significant role in project implementation. This included project staff, representatives of organizations, consultants and relevant government officials. Appropriate interview guides were developed to interview various stakeholders.

2.1 Specific focus is given to the following:

1. Showcase factors that could have had a positive or negative bearing on project performance.
2. Assessing the implications of these factors for project design (preparation), management and actual implementation.
3. Identifying best practices as well as weaknesses associated with project planning and implementation.
4. Examining the dynamics of sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation within the overall feedback mechanism of implementing agency for the purpose of self-learning; and
5. Exploring ways and means of internalizing lessons from project implementation in operations and administrative aspects.

3.0 Key Project Indicators & Results

Protected Areas Management Capacities

- ✚ Strengthened protected areas management capacities resulting in improved management effectiveness tracking toll (METT) mean scores from 39.5% at project inception to 54.25% at the end of 2021 enabling improved biodiversity conservation.

Decision Maker Capacity

- ✚ Improved capacity of decision makers to make informed determination on natural resources utilization as a result of the development of decision support system which eased access to relevant information.

End Beneficiaries

- ✚ A total of 9,134 beneficiaries were empowered and their capacities strengthened (6675 Male; 2459 Female) as a result of project support to participate in reforestation, ecotourism, alternative livelihoods activities and community patrolling activities.

Natural Resource Management Capacities

- ✚ Improved natural resources management capacities of 5- target districts with completion of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs).

Multi-Sectoral Committees

- ✚ Strengthened coordination capacity of stakeholders with establishment of multi-sectoral committees' mechanisms in 5 Districts established to support sustainable resource planning and management in Savannakhet Province.

Capacity Building

- ✚ Improved stakeholder capacities to participate in forest & conservation with trainings on forest management and biodiversity conservation techniques.

Enhanced Conservation

- ✚ Enhanced conservation of priority habitats with upgrading 130,745 hectares of protection forest into a national protected area "The National Eld's Deer Sanctuary".

Protected Areas Planning and Management

- ✚ Improved protected areas planning capacities with development of management plans and business plans enabling the target areas effectively participate in conservation of forest and wildlife.

HCVF Sites

- ✚ Increased conservation of critical habitats with designation of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) and development of regulations governing the sites.

Tree Planting

- ✚ Enhanced forest conservation with reforestation of degraded forest areas included 768 hectares-replanted, 3020 hectares by natural regeneration and agro forestry in production areas.

Village Forest Management

- ✚ Strengthened village forest management capacities with development of forest management plans and establishment of community tree nurseries.

Awareness Raising

- ✚ Increased public awareness on the conservation and sustainable development of Dry Dipterocarp Forests in Savannakhet Province with erection of three eld` s deer statues in Kaysone city and Xonabouly district and dissemination of forest management regulations.

Ecotourism

- ✚ Increased community benefits with development of two wildlife-based ecotourism sites facilitated communities to benefit for their support in wildlife conservation.

Water Security

- ✚ Strengthened capacity of smallholder to undertake climate resilience agriculture as result of project supported construction of 27 boreholes for water security.

Livelihood Activities

- ✚ Increased household income level through establishment of alternative livelihoods activities linked to sustainable forest management as a result of implementation of 16-conservation agreements.

Village Market

- ✚ Improved market linkage for over 6000 smallholder farmers as a result of project support in construction of market.



Figure 3:Capacity building training on use of GIS

3.1 Key factors to the project successes

As part of project implement and achieving outputs, there were several factors noted contributing towards the success of activities. These included:

- ✚ Sustainable rice farming which farmers adopted activities taught by the extension specialist because it enabled community members reduce cost of production by utilizing locally available resource and increased economic benefits from increased yield with a significant margin.
- ✚ The success in biodiversity conservation was mainly attributed to capacity building of village authorities and community support driven by conservation incentives in their involvement in biodiversity outcomes.
- ✚ The experience from SAFE Ecosystems project shows the need to allow enough time, spanning beyond the project cycle in some cases to heal degraded landscapes and restore ecological functions, while mitigating potential trade-offs and building local institutional capacity and mechanisms to facilitate local governance and management of sustainable land and forest management infrastructure as well as practices.

4.0 Lessons learned

Lessons learned are the learnings gained from the process of implementing a project. Lessons from the SAFE Ecosystems Project were compiled and refined within structured thematic areas. The thematic framework for compilation of lessons learned of the information collected following engagement with relevant stakeholders with reflect all stages of a project cycle. The Thematic areas for compilation of lessons learned included the following aspects:

1. Project Design and Planning
2. Project Management Arrangements
3. Project Implementation

4.1 Project design and planning

Project Initiation Stage

The project initiation stage is critical phase but often not given the required attention in terms of allocation of resources and time. Projects need to be reinforced by a thorough feasibility analysis based on an assessment of the target sites followed by the development of an appropriate implementation plan based on the assessment. The overall lesson learned is "It's important to make sure all the essential foundations are in place and fully understood by key stakeholders". In case of this project, community engagement on the project development and target project objective must be clarified with well-defined theory of change and the proposed projects should be in line with their needs and objectives otherwise misunderstandings and delays could occur during project implementation. Furthermore, realistic assessment project implementation timeframe aligned needs to be aligned with the complexity of the project activities with focus on sustainability. Any shortcuts in the planning and project preparation result in uncertainties and delays in the project implementation such as the need to undertake social environmental safeguards analysis.

Project Site Selection

Selection of areas for project activities should have clearly identified criteria, agreed upon and understood amongst stakeholders in a transparent and accountable process that takes all the key factors into account and meet the project requirements in line with the project objectives, capitalize on viable initiatives and minimize possibilities of resource allocation on areas not closely linked with the project results. The involvement of the stakeholders enhances ownership and their participation in project implementation.

Stakeholder Selection

Stakeholders involved in project implementation should be able to contribute positively support in achieving the desired results. Selection should with applicable skills and abilities and to restrict collaborations to partners who can directly contribute to the achievement of the collaboration's objectives besides contributing towards efficiency and effectiveness of the intended results.

Project Design

The project should be design in a way that creates not only attractive and interesting opportunities besides considering the technical knowhow on the planned initiatives for the target communities but also enables periodic review among stakeholders on strategic direction, progress, efficient resource allocation and the sustainability of projects activities.

Focused Outcomes

Projects should have approximately three outcomes / components with realistically achievable outputs in order for the implementers to remain focused and concentrated on the core activities besides ensuring impactful and sustainability of implemented activities well thought from the initial stages. It is important to thoroughly profile communities (socioeconomic analysis) to gain a better understanding of the needs, capabilities and capacity.

Government Commitment

It is essential that projects receive the support of government administration (good will) at various levels and that the contributions of the projects are aligned to the country's priorities and the target communities. The project design needs to be aligned with the country's political structure, strong results framework besides technical implementation capacity.

Stakeholder Orientation

Stakeholders needs to be oriented on the target results, change pathways and relationship between components as soon as the project have been approved to enable clear articulation and understand the project goals during implementation. Orientation on project management is undertaken including project reporting and evaluation processes with focus on higher level results beyond the output levels.

Project Timeframe

Realistic project implementation timeframe is necessary during the orientation phase of the first year as part of planning to enable the project to be implemented efficiently. This requires completion of initial activities and preparations, including timely staff recruitment, procurement of equipment, office space, identification of consultants, service providers and review of planning documents and establishing of strong stakeholders' engagement forum.

National Context

It is important at the project planning stage to take into account the national realities and get relevant contacts for implementation of project activities, make a detailed assessment of capacities nationally with details of areas which will require greater effort to achieve project visibility and to establish functional steering committees.

Knowledge of Government Systems

The inception phase should pay particular attention to the identification and application of administrative, financial and procedural systems and alignments between the implementing agency and the executing agency, involved government departments and project implementation teams needs to be oriented on the arrangements and minimize administrative challenges during implementation.

Capacity Building through Mentoring

Capacity building initiatives to be more effective needs to be embedded between project implementation to more effective as it enables appropriate mentoring and building competencies, particularly in areas with limited national capacities. The project supported capacity building of stakeholders with a specific focus on district and village level on Protected Areas (PA) management, livestock raising, tree nursery, rice farming, dressmaking, reforestation and ecotourism.

4.2 Project management arrangements

Project Management Design and Arrangements

The project management design / arrangements should support smooth implementation of the project activities limiting unnecessary bureaucracies but ensure great accountability of decision makers. The design should allow stakeholders periodically review and assess

viability of planned activities with an objective of enhancing efficiency. Furthermore, the existing government structures and capacities should be taken into consideration to enable efficient implementation and achievement of the results.

Active National Steering Committee

It is important for the success of the project and effective implementation that there is an active and functional national project steering committee with a well-thought balance of skills and representation that can lead, guide, monitor and evaluate the project implementation.

Incentives for Assigned Government Staff

Provision of adequate incentives and increased commitment by involved government staff is important in ensuring that activities are delivered on time with required quality standards. In some cases, seconded staff have limited skills required for project implementation as well as other roles in addition to project activities. High level engagement is required to explore competitive identification of government staff, development of incentive scheme and full-time deployment of staff during the entire implementation period as part of in country capacity development.

4.3 Project implementation

Private Sector Engagement

Private sector involvement in development and implementing nature-based investment solutions is essential in ensuring sustainability beyond the project cycle. Costs and benefit analysis of private sector needs to be evaluated and should be involved early in the development to assure buy-in and long-term engagement. Though, in a number of cases private enterprises are often involved in environmental degradation, engaging with private sector is essential to enhance their understanding on the importance of sustainable utilization of the natural resources. It provides an opportunity to build partnerships between private sector actors and the government agencies left to address issues affecting the sector and maintaining its role to govern. Projects right from the initial stages have to develop incentives to make the activities attractive to the potential investors. Furthermore, work with the project in designing sustainable solutions that are market driven while efficiency utilizing resources. Private sector involvement ensures that the investment opportunities are able to address the costs and risks while the benefits are visible as this proved to be the challenge in securing investors to take over the management of ecotourism sites.

Land Tenure Rights

The land tenure rights held by the communities play a major role in effective community managed forests as is the case with protected areas in Lao PDR. The project supported the assurance of land licences to communities in 16 target villages in addition to land use and forest planning. However, the enforcement and compliance of the zoning regulation was limited as the case of implementation of reviewed forest regulations. Community activities affected the survival and management of the planted indigenous trees at the degraded forest areas. Buffalos and cows were the major destructive agents of planted indigenous trees in the project area due to low regard or understanding of land use management.

Community Engagement with Reforestation

Local communities can significantly contribute to restoration of degraded forest areas by enhancing natural regeneration through protection against fire, uncontrolled grazing and illegal logging, but they need to be provided with incentives and increased awareness on the benefits of environmental conservation such as being provided their own high value seedlings, or ownership of planted seedlings. The local community authorities can play a vital role in involving community members and enforcing agreed regulations. Reforestation initiatives should be tailored as community business models with considerations of the market to ensure that they are sustainable beyond the project cycle.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Project needs constant monitoring and evaluation of activities and progress, as well as review of work plans and impact to facilitate adaptive management and informed decision making. Project steering committees need to have scheduled review of project outcomes by enhanced participation but not limited to field missions to enable timely decisions and propose change of work plans.

Communication and Coordination

In order for the project implementation to be smooth and to ensure that all key stakeholders are informed of the status at different stages of project, communication must be well developed and resourced. Strong institutional coordination and cooperation between stakeholders involved in forest and biodiversity conservation are important both for the success of the intended objective and sustainability of the impacts. The project supported the coordination of stakeholders involved in natural sources management resulting in improvement in enforcement of policies in their respective districts.

Support for Implementation of Plans and Strategies

Sustainable land and forest initiatives require not only guidelines developed, but also support for practical implementation as well as mechanisms for enforcement. The project supported the development of the village management plans and protected areas business plans, however it was beyond scope to ensure they were implemented and used effectively.

Promote Coaching as Part of Capacity Development

Shortage of national staff and expertise in key areas can require the use of international expertise and their roles should include training or working national staff to ensure sustainability of the implemented activities as well as empowering local capacities. The approach was utilized in the development of protected area management plans for the 4- target protected areas.

Ensure Local Ownership

Local ownership of project supported initiatives takes time to become institutionalized within national and local departments as was the case of Decision Support System supported by the project localized at the Savannakhet Department of Planning and Investment with the objective of strengthening informed decision making on utilization of natural resource. Furthermore, institutionalized initiatives should include operationalizing concrete policies and regulations supporting the use of supported initiatives.

Community Livelihood Support

Effective livelihoods support to local communities in forests and surrounding areas with the aim towards improving livelihoods and reduce dependence on forest resources should be based on socio-economic assessment. Comprehensive socio-economic analysis of viable income generating activities was not undertaken resulted in challenges in implementation of some of the livelihood activities. The technical capacity and applicability of initiative should be considered to enable achieving target results and sustainability.

Engagement with Indigenous People

Achievement of biodiversity conservation objectives with indigenous people's participation can be more effective in supporting conservation of the protected areas. It however depends on tangible benefits from alternative income generating activities. The local communities played a vital role in biodiversity conservation from previously hunting the wildlife to taking part in protecting following engagements and public awareness which subsequently resulted in population increase in the target wildlife species.

Provision of Feasible Alternatives for Forest Communities

Deforestation and loss of biodiversity take place in situations where there is lack of awareness of the importance of forest for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods among local communities. Limited alternative livelihoods sources drive unsustainable utilization of forest resources and other factors including weak enforcement capacities to limit wildlife and forest crimes. Communities are willing to change when provided with viable options as was evident from the adoption of SRI rice production resulting to reduced pressure to encroach on forest land for agricultural production. Furthermore, for initiatives to be effective, viable and sustainable economic

alternatives to using forest resources need to be provided, to compensate for losses incurred due to restrictions imposed on the use of the forest resources.

Communications

Communication plays an important role in linking project planning and implementation in terms of planning, dissemination and effectively sharing information among key stakeholders. The project had well defined communication strategy with sufficient infrastructure to link the project management unit with both provincial and district coordination offices. Communication materials produced included digital and non-digital means and tools for diverse events. Project visibility can attract other organizations at all levels to work in the same areas aware of the potential benefit and leverage from that for the wider benefit of communities and natural resource conservation. The communication infrastructure enabled project implementation continuity and virtual engagement with stakeholders in the face of COVID-19 crisis.

Timely Implementation of Livelihood Activities

Project activities tailored for livelihood development creates opportunities for communities to build trust and confidence between the project and communities should start at an early stage of the project, adequate time taken to identify, develop and implement the viable activities and market. Furthermore, regular site visits to monitor the progress and where required technical support provided. Implementation of the livelihood's activities were delayed and development of market for communities completed in the final year of project implementation.

Inclusion and Gender Programming

Inclusion related programming need to address how the target group are affected by project intervention, taking into consideration the context in the society informed by detailed analysis during project development to ensure adequate resources are allocated. In gender equality context, it also means that opportunities to empower women and support the change are planned and supported with consideration of the activities. Some implemented such as village patrolling involved mainly men because of the nature of the activities. It's important that gender mainstreaming is advanced in advanced through active participation in all project interventions applicable.

Piloting Sustainable Agriculture Techniques

Sustainable farming and forest management practices were adopted by communities through pilot demonstrations and testing which promoted the adoption of new technologies and techniques, resulting in increased productivity (yield per area) and income from the activities besides empowering communities to utilize their land more efficiently.

Development and Implementation of Community Conservation Agreements

Conservation agreements should be simplified to avoid confusion, ease its viability and create institutional frameworks for the exchange of conservation outcomes for incentive payments. Designed project activities need to minimize the costs of participation while allowing for productive activities for local communities. Furthermore, incentive payments need to be conditionally based on delivery of set of ecosystem services delivered. The project piloted implementation of conservation agreements in 16 villages with challenges in the initial's phases mainly due to the complexity of the agreements and the limited capacity of the village authorities.

Building Capacity for Financial and Administrative Management

Capacity building of village authorities takes long time and support should be enhance over time to support their ability to manage community projects. The project supported village development committees on project and financial management.

Financing for Nature

Nature based financing are still new concepts but fast evolving, in country capacity required strengthening to explore arising opportunities to support the financial needs of protected areas and implementation of management plans in the protected areas supported by the

project. Supportive policy framework also plays an important role in strengthening the development of financing mechanisms. Projects involved in environmental conservation should dedicate adequate resources to investigate the potential financing modalities for biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming biodiversity conservation with the national context. Projects face challenges in the objectives in areas where the target activities do not have supportive national policies to complete. It requires more time to complete financing mechanism results and other new approaches hence should be among the activities to be completed in the initial phases of the project to increase the chances of success besides stronger partnership with stakeholders involved in sustainable financing of the protected areas.

5.0 Challenges

Some project activities were not achieved in line with the plan as during the project planning; the results for certain activities had been overestimated resulting to challenges in achieving them during the implementation period. These overestimated targets included (i) potential ecotourism, (ii) total area with improved forest management and (iii) protected areas financing targets.

During the project development, private sector engagement received limited consideration resulting in challenges in institutional capacity and sustainability of ecotourism initiatives with regards to market-oriented product design of the developed products and services.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic contributed towards a slowdown of completion of project activities. For a two-year period, preventing and controlling of the COVID-19 pandemic was a government priority over other activities. Furthermore, travel restrictions slowed down all project activities and stopped both internal and international travels which impacted ecotourism and tourism sector as a whole negatively.

Low technical capacity of staff at the provincial level and target districts affected effective implementation of project activities particularly in reforestation and alternative livelihoods generating activities in selected villages.

6.0 Conclusion

This process and documentation of lessons learned here has been participatory, empowering and created the right conditions for critical analysis on implementation on accomplishments, challenges, what could have been done instead, how things could have been done better, required resources and things to change if similar project could be initiated.

Forest management and biodiversity conservation are not new concepts, and their importance for achieving sound sustainable natural resource management together with livelihood improvement has been recognized over the years. However, it has not been extensively applied globally despite considerable efforts by various stakeholders.

The lessons learned process offered the opportunity for analysis and reflection and for rejoicing on achievements and pity on mistakes by the project team and partners during implementation; it also leaves a product which could be used as a guide in designing and implementing similar projects in country.

Closer collaboration and partnership among organizations involved in biodiversity conservation is not only crucial to improving efficiency and joint learning on natural resource management issues, but could also lead to more synergies in actions on the ground.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Project Result Framework

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
Project Objective: To demonstrate sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention¹	Improved forest management measured by an increase in total area under Sustainable Land Management (as reported in LD PMAT, Part I) <i>(Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; aligns to Core Indicator 4.3)</i>	0 ha.	698,746 ha.	271,279 ha.
	Improved management effectiveness of protected areas covering at least 583,672 ha. (as measured in the GEF BD1 Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool – METT): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dong Phou Vieng Conservation Forest • Phou Xang He Conservation Forest • Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak Protection Forest • Ong Mang Conservation Forest (proposed) <i>Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; aligns to Core Indicator 1.2, expansion area for Ong Mang counted under Core Indicator 1.1)</i>	METT Scores: 39 39 33 47	METT Scores by end of project: 65 65 60 74	53 51 47 66
	Capacity to ensure compliance and enforcement of sustainable forest and land management, and mainstreaming of forest connectivity into the main production sectors in Savannakhet Province (as measured by scores in the UNDP-GEF Capacity Development Scorecard ²)	Capacity Score: 16.5	Capacity Score <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By project mid-term: 25 • By end of project : 38 	33.5
<i>Number of direct beneficiaries disintegrated by gender (NEW INDICATOR approved at mid-term to transition to GEF Core Indicators; Core Indicator 11)</i>	0	N/A	8,835 (Male: 5,301; Female: 3,534)	9,134 (Male: 6675; Female: 2459)
Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guiding resource management and conservation decision-making in Savannakhet Province	0 SEAs have been carried out in Savannakhet Province	1 SEA covering the 5 targeted districts completed by end of year 1	5 Strategic Environmental Assessments

¹ Objective (Atlas output) monitored quarterly ERBM and annually in APR/PIR

² Project will work to ensure that gender equality is promoted in the selection of persons to participate in capacity development activities

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas³	Improved land use planning and management reduces degradation over 1,060,525 hectares ⁴ of forest landscapes in Savannakhet Province, leading to unabated provision of ecosystem services such as water supply (quality), flood prevention and biodiversity conservation	0 district land use plans based on detailed ecological information or integrated into development and investment decision processes	5 District-level Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs) strengthened with data from Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and integrated with District Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs) ⁵ by end of year 2	5 Integrated Spatial Plans
		No zoning or planning processes exist at the landscape level for Dry Dipterocarp Forests	Zoning Plan for the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Landscape approved and guiding management decisions by end of year 4	Zoning plans completed
	Information management systems to guide land and resource use planning in Savannakhet Province	Information on natural resources and conservation priorities is incomplete and highly dispersed	Decision Support System in place and operating by end of year 2	Decision Support System developed and used
	Inter-institutional and multi-sectoral coordinating bodies overseeing resource management activities in Savannakhet Province to ensure compliance with SEAs, ILUMPs and SEDPs	No formal coordinating mechanisms exist for stakeholders involved in resource management and conservation	Multi-sectoral stakeholder committees established and meeting regularly at each of the 5 districts by end of year 1	Multisectoral stakeholder committees established with regular meetings held
	Public-private partnerships for sustainable land and forest management in Savannakhet Province	Existing public-private partnerships are ad-hoc mechanisms between individual companies and institutions	Responsible Business Forum established and meeting regularly at the provincial	Responsible Business Forums held for 2 years.

³ All outcomes monitored annually in the APR/PIR. It is highly recommended not to have more than 4 outcomes.

⁴ Land use planning and management will benefit the entire landscapes of the 5 targeted districts (916,323 ha.) as well as areas of official protected areas that extend beyond the district boundaries (144,202 ha.)

⁵ The SEDP planning process would include enhanced consideration of underlying natural systems, better spatial analysis and evaluation, consideration of changes in Environmental Service Values under different options, and climate change mitigation and adaptation, thus enabling optimal allocation of land and critical BD and LD benefits in tandem.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
			level by end of year 1	
	<p>Policy and regulatory frameworks support integrated approaches to resource management and conservation through following measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decree on Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) & develop targeted regulations on ISPs • Jurisdictional issues and coordination for enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws • Regulations on PA finance and functioning of protected areas within wider landscapes • Nationally-defined HCVF categories and integration of HCVFs into forest policies and regulations and PA management plans 	<p>Existing policy and regulatory frameworks have significant gaps that constrain effective PA management and the mainstreaming of BD, SFM and SLM approaches into provincial and district level planning and financing processes and resource management decisions</p>	<p>By end of year 2 SEA Decree finalized and enacted by and ISP regulations approved</p>	<p>The SEA decree finalized and enacted before the project inception.</p>
			<p>By end of year 3 Resolve jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws</p>	<p>Jurisdictional and co-ordinational issues relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws were resolved</p>
			<p>2015 Decree on PAs revised to authorize PA financing mechanisms and landscape-level coordination</p>	<p>The updated PA Decree at the final stages of legislation</p>
	<p>Consolidated technical guidance on the design and management of plantation forestry and agriculture in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscape improve the sustainability of such operations and reduce their impacts on the surrounding landscape</p>	<p>General guidelines for plantation forestry and agriculture exist in Lao PDR, but are not specifically tailored to the ecological conditions of Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscapes</p>	<p>Guidelines on Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture developed by the end of year 3</p>	<p>Guidelines developed</p>
<p>Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of</p>	<p>Area of Savannakhet Province under various forms of protection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Protected Areas gazetted and fully operational 	<p>0 ha.</p>	<p>By the end of the project: New protected area of 168,614</p>	<p>130,745 ha upgraded to a national protected Area</p>

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
Savannakhet Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New or existing Protection Forests designated as High Conservation Value Forests (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool) <p><i>(Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; PA expansion aligns to Core Indicator 1.1 for expansion area, with existing PA area reported under Core Indicator 1.2; HCVF aligns to Core Indicator 4.4)</i></p>	0 ha.	Estimated 193,684 ha. Of designated HCVFs	HCVF sites identified. Regulations adopted covering (5,780 ha).
	Restoration of degraded Dry Dipterocarp Forests to counteract on-going and past land degradation (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool) <i>(Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; aligns to Core Indicator 3.2)</i>	Approx. 1,000 ha. In the 5 targeted districts have been reforested (mainly with non-native, commercial species)	Restoration of 1,111 ha. Of Dry Dipterocarp Forest with native species by the end of the project	The Project reforested 768 ha Supported approximately 3,020 ha of afforestation through natural regeneration.
	Capacities of communities located within or adjacent to protected forests to effectively participate in SFM activities	Forest-based communities have limited mechanisms or experience in SFM or community management of forest resources	Community land certificates issued for 16 villages by end of year 1	16 Village forest management planning developed
			Village forestry management plans for 16 villages finalized by end of year 2	16 Village Land Certificates issued
	Biodiversity management / ecosystem service provision mainstreamed in forest landscape management in five priority districts resulting in improvements in the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services, indicated by: Increase in Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests	73.04	No net decrease	no "end of project" study was conducted.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
	Populations of species with IUCN Endangered Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eld's Deer (<i>Panolia eldii</i>) Silvered Leaf Monkey (<i>Trachypithecus cristatus</i>) Asian Elephant (<i>Elephas maximus</i>) Francois' Langur (<i>Trachypithecus francoisi</i>) Siamese Crocodile (<i>Crocodylus siamensis</i>) Maintenance of water quantity in downstream area of Xe Bangxiang River <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseflows (dry season) # of flooding events 	Current populations within Project Area: 60-80 individuals 70-100 individuals 32 individuals 12 12	Populations by end of project within Project Area: 60% increase 18% increase 12% increase 18% No net decrease	116% increase (173 individuals) 11% increase (111 individuals) 25% increase (35-40 individuals) 50% increase (18 individuals) Survey detected at least 3 females and minimum of 1 male; 21 hatchlings reported by WCS.
		Baseflows: 0.40m One flooding event(142.256m) water level	Baseflows: 1.02m No flooding event	Baseflow: 0.63 m Flooding events recorded in 2019 and 2020.
<i>Technical skills and technology transfer for Protected Area management staff in planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management. (NEW INDICATOR APPROVED BY RTA)</i>	Limited skills and technologies for Protected Area Management (Capacity scorecard baseline: 1) (NEW BASELINE LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Protected Area management staff have strengthened technical skills and supporting technology for planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management by end of year 3 (Capacity scorecard target: 2.5) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	2
<i>Existence of environmental education programmes to increase the degree</i>	Environmental education programmes are partially developed and partially delivered (Capacity scorecard baseline: 1) (NEW BASELINE LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Comprehensive environmental education programmes exist	2

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
<i>of environmental awareness of stakeholders. (NEW INDICATOR APPROVED BY RTA)</i>			and are being delivered for environmental awareness by year 3 (Capacity scorecard target rating: 3) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	
Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection	Levels of investment in land use planning and forest management planning at the village and districts levels in the targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province	USD 741,000 per year ⁶	By end of project, levels of public and private investment increased to: USD 900,000 per year	\$1,075,886.85 USD in government programme expenditures reported by DPI for land use planning and forest management planning between 2016 and 2021. \$3,373,140 reported as part of DOF, PAFO and DAFO co-financing with the SAFE Ecosystems Project between 2016 and 2021 supporting land use planning and forest management planning. Total Amount as of Terminal Evaluation: \$4,449,026.85
	Wildlife-based ecotourism products designed and operating in the project target area	0 projects operating	At least 4 wildlife-based ecotourism projects operating in project target area by the end of the project	2
	Funds available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province (as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-governmental financing mechanisms 	USD 0 per year	By end of project, levels of public and private investment through diverse	0

⁶ \$325,000 per year from PONRE for environmental conservation; \$333,000 per year from PONRE for district and provincial master plans on land allocation and land use, and the issuing of land use and land development certificates; \$83,000/year from districts for development planning.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	(Terminal Evaluation)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government budget allocations 		and new revenue sources increased to: USD 100,000 per year	
		USD 168,480 per year	USD 250,000 per year	<p>\$90,000 per year reported on GEF BD1 Tracking Tool as indicated by Government budget allocations for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape (total: \$450,000).</p> <p>\$1,908,000 reported as part of DAFO and Ong Mang Center co-financing at the District Level in support of protected areas management with the SAFE Ecosystems Project between 2016 and 2021.</p> <p>\$959,211.14 USD reported by DPI for various Government and Development Partner expenditures on natural resource management between 2016 and 2021.</p> <p>Total Amount as of Terminal Evaluation: \$3,317,211</p>
	Incentives and other benefits to communities within targeted landscape are directly linked to wildlife recovery and forest protection (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	5< Conservation Agreements with communities in the Ong Mang Sanctuary	At least 16 community-based Conservation Agreements that incorporate improved ecological conditions and human development levels signed by end of year 2	16 community conservation agreements implemented

Annex 2: Project Implementation Photos



Decision support system capacity building training





National Eld's deer Sanctuary Area border sign installation



Awareness Raising for the villager



Reforestation with community engagement

Community forest rangers





Community Tree Nursery



Ecotourism within the sanctuary



The Eld's Deer