

Reclamation, Rehabilitation and Restoration of Degraded Forest Ecosystems (RRR-DFE) in Mekong Basin Countries

Project Duration June 2013 to May 2015

Project Budget USD 500,000

► Overview

The project "Reclamation, Rehabilitation and Restoration of Degraded Forest Ecosystems" was a two-year regional project implemented by Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The Implementation Agreement was signed between the AFOCo Secretariat and The Royal Forest Department of Thailand, a leading country, on 14 May 2013. Thailand provided and set up regional project office for coordination among the five implementing countries.

Under this two-year regional project, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, collectively known as the Mekong Basin Countries (MBC), has undertaken activities related to biodiversity conversion, forest certification, watershed management, forest restoration and eco-tourism.

► Objectives

The RRR-DFE Project aimed to strengthen trans-boundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation, forest restoration, watershed management and ecotourism among five MBCs through pilot testing, organizing workshops on best practices and technology transfer, and capacity development activities. This Project further sought to achieve sustainable management of forest resources, biodiversity and environment through local people participation. Overall objectives are:

- to investigate present status of biodiversity utilization and forest management;

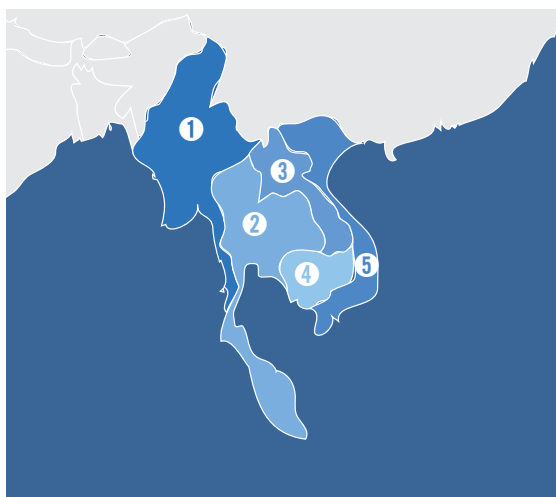
- to strengthen trans-boundary cooperation among the MBCs on conservation of landscape biodiversity and ecotourism; and
- to exchange knowledge and lessons learned on best practices of sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation.

► What have been done!

The MBCs started with selection of project sites and themes within the Mekong Basin.

- Cambodia : Ecotourism linked with biodiversity in Modulkiri Protected Forest Reserve
- Lao PDR : Participatory forest management linked with forest certification in Xebangnouane Community Forest
- Myanmar : Ecotourism linked with watershed management in Pindaya Protected Watershed
- Thailand : Ecotourism linked with forest restoration in Mae Kok Restored Forest Site, Chiang Rai
- Viet Nam : Ecotourism linked with biodiversity in Bidoup Nui Ba National Park, Dalat

Survey and documentation of biodiversity was undertaken in these sites and potential sustainable forest management models and methods of promoting eco-tourism within the pilot sites were formulated. The pilot sites were used for training, exchange of visits and technology transfer among the MBC, through national and regional workshops, inter-country visits and publication.



❶ Myanmar : pindaya(protected watershed) ❷ Thailand : Mae Kok(restored forest) ❸ Lao PDR : Xebangnouane(community forest) ❹ Cambodia : Mon-dolkiri(protected forest) ❺ Viet nam : Bidoup Nui Ba(national park)



Regional Workshop on Ecotourism Linked to Biodiversity Conservation in Dalat, Viet Nam



► The Result

In addition to survey and documentation of selected project sites, a number of local and national workshops as well as training courses were conducted to promote, share experience and discussion for the better practice of ecotourism model and participatory forest management.

The Regional Training on Enhancing Livelihoods through Community Forestry was organized in cooperation with Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) as well as Regional Workshop on Lesson Learned Ecotourism Linked with Forest Restoration was conducted on the regional level.

The project also enabled the relevant officials from each country to organize exchange visits to compare and learn about the state of biodiversity conservation and ecotourism in each country. The country activities were implemented in accordance with respective condition in each country on the project site, as summarized below :

❶ Cambodia : Biodiversity Conservation Linked with Ecotourism

Detailed map and boundary demarcation including potential sites of ecotourism and the information of wildlife and biodiversity in Monduliri Protection Forest area which is a trans-boundary forest area with Viet Nam was completed with consent from all stakeholders. Based on this map, the survey of biodiversity utilization was carried out. The Bunong, ethnic group, were heavily relied on non-timber forest products (NTFP) such as resin, wild fruit, honey, etc. Training programs for local rangers on GPS usage were conducted as well as capacity building of local stakeholders to better understand ecotourism and alternative livelihood activities were organized.

❷ Lao PDR : Participatory Forest Management Linked with Certification

Through the use of GPS, boundary demarcation was conducted for four villages, village rehabilitation area, village rattan planting area and individual household planting site for commercial tree species and rattan. A village nursery was also set up at Khamsavang Village and tree and rattan planting were implemented.

Technology transfer and capacity development were also undertaken. Important training courses on rattan seedling production, mushroom cultivation and sustainable forest management participation including low impact logging model are conducted to about 60 people or households in four (4) project target villages. The villagers maintained the planted trees and rattan in Ban Khamsavang through involvement of village youth.

❸ Myanmar : Ecotourism Linked with Watershed Management

The ecotourism development plan for Pwe Hla Watershed was initiated and local capacity building activities such as local training course in watershed management, biodiversity conservation and ec-

otourism development were conducted. As part of the project activity, a hostel was built for the watershed management training center. The project built check dams and through the involving the local people. In addition, knowledge sharing activities were undertaken through participation of forestry officials and community leaders in regional workshops.

❹ Thailand : Ecotourism Linked with Forest Restoration

A survey was done on the status of related organizations implementing works on environment (ecotourism, urban forest, forest carbon, among others) followed by data analysis and documentation. The project activities in Thailand focused on developing the best practice model for ecotourism. The ecotourism model of Mae Yao Watershed (MY Model) was formulated and disseminated to all MBCs and watershed communities concerned. Building of check dams and local trainings were organized to encourage local involvement in participatory management.

❺ Vietnam : Ecotourism and Payment for Forest Environmental Services Linked to Biodiversity

The baseline survey on ecotourism impacts, payment for Forest Environmental Services and biodiversity conservation was carried out to be used for developing a model of payment for ecosystem (PES) linked to ecotourism. Awareness raising activities were implemented for local people, visitors and students through Center for Ecotourism and Environmental Education (CEEE) which is an important tool for distributing its revenue to the local people.

► The Future

The participating countries have different level of implementation and state of biodiversity conservation and ecotourism linking to livelihood improvement. However, there were many existing opportunities for ecotourism and for sustainable forest management. The participation of the local communities was crucial. Equally important also is the intensive awareness raising activities as well as the capacity building of both the local stakeholders and the implementers. Constant updating and upgrading of knowledge and infrastructure, respectively, are essential for the sustainability of the various projects in the Mekong Basin.

For further project cooperation and development, it is recommended to continue people's participation in consulting for the best practices on ecotourism model, and design the tourist site in such a way that the integrity of goods and services of the forest ecosystems would still be maintained.

All parties recognized the need for continuity of these project activities. Donor-funded projects remain important particularly during the 1st stage (initialization) and the 2nd stage (development), but the MBCs will continue to make efforts to find ways to sustain the enthusiasm / momentum of the people in implementing the post-project activities.

The ASEAN-ROK Forest Cooperation (AFoCo) is a regional cooperation mechanism in the forest sector between ASEAN Member States and the Republic of Korea. It was formalized by the "Agreement between the Governments of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Republic of Korea on Forest Cooperation", which was entered into force in August 2012. The AFoCo aims to tackle the issue of deforestation and forest conservation in the context of sustainable development, and broaden the scope to other Asian countries.