An Organisational Assessment Of IUCN Lao PDR (Asia Region, 2001)

Title: An Organisational Assessment of IUCN Lao PDR: March 2001
Evaluation team: Asia Regional Office (ARO) - internal
Mandate of the organizational unit: Represent IUCN in Lao PDR and manage the IUCN Lao PDR Programme
IUCN area of specialisation: Country Programme
Geographical area: Lao PDR
Established: 1992
Overall budget: US$ 270,000
Donor(s): The Royal Netherlands Government, DANIDA
Objectives of the evaluation: To support IUCN-Lao PDR in developing its organisational efficiency, effectiveness and capacity to meet the emerging demands of the 2001-2004 planning period.
Type of evaluation: Organisational Assessment
Period covered by the evaluation: 2001-2004
Commissioned by: Regional Director IUCN Asia and CR *a.i.* IUCN Lao PDR
Audience: RD, CR *a.i.* and staff of IUCN Lao PDR, ARD
Methodology used:
1. Preparation
    a) Identification of key issues with:-
        - RD, CR *a.i.,* Director F/HR, ARO*,*
        - SP (former CR *a.i.*)
        - Regional Heads familiar with IUCN-Lao PDR
    b) Reading
        Background
        - Organisational Assessment & Development - The Way Ahead - March 2000 - *Universalia* Report
        - Draft IUCN Evaluation Policy: For review by Senior Management and the IUCN Council - January 2001
        - Delegation of Authority
    c) Preliminary data collection
        - IUCN-Lao PDR Progress Reports to ARD from 1999 to date
        - Programme Planning Strategy for IUCN-Lao PDR 24.02.01
        - Briefing notes from SP to DG -- February 2001
        - Summary of current status of IUCN-Lao PDR -- February 2001 – Scott Perkin
        - Matrix for Organisational Review of IUCN-Lao PDR -- February 2001 -- Scott Perkin
2. On-task in IUCN-Lao PDR (20-31 March 2001)
    a) Introductory staff meeting
        - Brief presentation of IUCN-Lao PDR Programme (IUCN Lao PDR staff)
        - The Asia Region (SJ)
        - Context and purpose of the Organisational Scoping and Assessment
    b) Semi-structured interviews of each member of staff
    c) Data collection from
        - Price Waterhouse Draft Audit Report 1999 Section 4: Salary
        - Various correspondence between IUCN-Lao PDR and Region re organisational issues
        - Opening a Bank Account for Local Office, Staff Health Costs 15.9.98: Memo from CR to FO
        - Staff contracts including TORs
    d) Follow-up interviews to gather further information, clarification of issues, some on request from staff members, to enhance individual understanding and capacity

e)   Meetings with CR *a.i.*(almost daily)

f)   Telephone consultation with Director Finance/HR, ARO

g)   Initial analysis of issues/findings

h)   Debriefing at staff meeting

3. Post-visit

    a)   Detailed analysis of information/issues - shaping of recommendations - report drafted

    b)   Draft report sent to RD, CR, Director F/HR, ARO

    c)   Comments assessed, accepted, negotiated, rejected

    d)   Report finalised

Questions of the evaluation: In the context of KRA 7, Asia Region Goal 3 and emerging opportunities for IUCN Lao PDR:-

    a)   organisational structure?

    b)   systems, proceedings, mechanisms?

    c)   management practices? and

    d)   personnel issues general/individual, what present and future capacities are needed to manage the new programme and new ways of working?

Findings:

1. Overall Assessment

Due to the uniqueness of its geo-political context and other factors, the IUCN Lao PDR Country Office remained somewhat isolated from the mainstream, developing management strategies which impacted negatively on its organisation development. The rationale for a more coherent approach to organisational development across the Asia Region and the need to integrate IUCN Lao's organisational systems into Regional and Global systems was poorly understood.

The opportunities opened up by the 'Programming Strategy for IUCN Lao PDR', the gradual introduction of a more participatory style of management and the mentorship provided, have opened up a new era and experiences for IUCN Lao PDR and its staff.

2. Programme Planning/Development, Coordination and Quality Control

Management

Staff were apprehensive of their ability to balance on-going work and the new demands, internal/external and doubts about the efficacy of the management tools introduced for this.

Quality Control

No formal systems exist within IUCN Lao PDR for quality control of programme/project development or for M&E of implementation.

Programme Coordination and Integration

Historically programme and corporate services staff have worked in isolation from each other and from the projects. Moreover there are no mechanisms for projects to learn from each other or contribute to organisational learning.

3. Information Sharing and Storage

The prevailing culture in Lao PDR is not conducive to information sharing whether internally in an organisation or between organisations. Therefore national staff of IUCN Lao need to be re-inforced in the validity and value of sharing and accessing information amongst themselves, the wider IUCN including members and commissions, as well as with partner organisations.

4. Financial Management

A higher level of financial management will be needed as the new programme is developed, resourced and implemented.

5. Human Resource Management

The human resource function has remained invested in the CR, assisted mainly by finance and partially by programme staff. Staff were not aware of the processes behind the drafting, issuing of HR policies or of adaption and implementation.

There are internal anomalies within IUCN Lao and dissonances with regional norms in a number of areas of personel management e.g. the contracting of staff, TORS, and appraisal administration.

6. **Administrative Services**
   Management
   Historically, the management of administration has been spread amongst the CR, finance/ programme staff and the receptionist rather. There has been no dedicated unit or staff dedicated to
   - bring greater all round efficiency to operations
   - free up the time of the CR to concentrate on crucial areas of his responsibilities for representation, leadership in programme development, resource mobilisation and organisational development programme staff to concentrate on programme development; finance staff to meet the growing demands
   - strengthen accountability within IUCN Lao PDR
   - facilitate the interface of IUCN Lao PDR with regional and global systems
   - enhance IUCN Lao PDR's ability to set up future projects smoothly and efficiently.
   IT Support
   Lao PDR was a late-comer in the use of IT. The commercial provision of services and technical support is in its infancy. IUCN Lao PDR has mainly had to rely on two non-national programme staff, (competent computer users who make no claims to technical expertise), who have struggled to keep the services going. Due to their own commitments and lack of resources for travel, IT experts from other Country Offices have not been able to give the level of support needed.

7. **Management Structures**
   Until recently, IUCN Lao PDR had the characteristics of a 'family' - the CR, to whom everyone reported, being the only source of decision making. Formal systems and procedures were missing. This way of managing was completely, unquestionably acceptable to the majority of staff, particularly as they have had little exposure to other management structures and styles.
   Due to their exposure to new ways of working and to the increase in workload, staff are beginning to realise that the old ways of working are no longer possible. The roles, responsibilities and authority levels of staff members are gradually being defined in an iterative fashion. In varying degrees staff are becoming increasingly receptive to the need for change.
   As the process of programme development is still under way and due to the staff's previous experience, it was difficult to engage in a meaningful discussion on structuring for the future.

8. **IUCN Lao PDR and the wider world**
   Historically, the CR has been the contact point for communicating with the outside world. Staff have been unsure as to whether they are authorised to make contact and do not know what is available.
   The strengthening of relationships with the Government of Lao PDR (with varying degrees of caution and excitement) is seen as opening up new opportunities.
   The sharing of the Programme Development Plan with the government came as a surprise to some staff members but was seen as a valuable step for building government's confidence in IUCN.
   Interaction with the few NGO IUCN members and other NGOs has been limited.
   The word 'conservation' is seen by many in Lao PDR as equivalent to 'protection' and antithetical to development. IUCN should give out strong, clear messages on conservation and sustainable development.

9. **Recruitment of a National CR**
   The staff were very clear that their top criteria for a new CR would be management skills. Technical skills, the ability to manage external relationships, particularly with government, but also at regional and international levels; integrity and a buy-in to IUCN's Mission were also seen as important. They thought that the new CR would need support for integration into IUCN, not only from the CR *a.i.* but that visits to ARO and some Country Offices would be essential.

Recommendations:

2. **Programme Planning/Development, Coordination and Quality Control**
   1. In addition to the training already planned, staff will need on-going support to develop their understanding of project design and proposal writing.
   2. The understanding of budget development will need to be enhanced.

3. The potential productivity of programme staff working together and supporting each other with their varied knowledge and skills should continued to be supported and enhanced.
4. Staff should continue to be encouraged to seek information and support from elsewhere in the Region.
5. TORs of Programme staff to be re-designed on the basis of responsibilities and duties needed in the current period and to exclude purely administrative tasks.
6. All revised staff TORs should be circulated so that each person is aware of everyone else's responsibilities.
7. An internal IUCN Lao PDR programme/project review mechanism such as a PRG should be developed.
8. Strong M&E component to be included in all programme and project proposals.
9. Regional M&E to work with IUCN Lao PDR to define the roles and responsibilities of a Country Office for M&E.
10. The recently initiated work on M&E should be taken forward so that systems and capacity for M&E are further developed.
11. The recently initiated joint planning amongst programme staff should be nurtured.
12. The recently initiated interaction of programme staff with projects should be enhanced.
13. Mechanisms for project to project links should be established in order to learn from experiences and build on each others strengths. Seek for common solutions to shared constraints/issues.
14. Depending on programme imperatives and resource availability, a dedicated programme development, and coordination and M&E function should be created. One of its roles would be to nurture 'organisational' learning.
15. Once the programme is defined and proposals funded, there will be a need to review capacity and adjust/build according to programme/project and organisational needs; redefine roles and responsibilities and restructure IUCN Lao PDR.

3. Information Sharing and Storage

16. The who, what, how and legitimate boundaries to protect confidentially, need to be mapped out with staff, preferably by the CR a.i. during the handover period.
17. The filing system needs to be overhauled and adapted to utilise the potential of IT.
18. Resources for the management and management of the library to be budgeted into proposals for a Framework Agreement, as well as programme and project proposals.

4. Financial Management

19. A fully qualified financial manager should be recruited as soon as resources permit.
20. Systems for generating sound information for financial management should be developed.
21. TORs of finance staff to be redefined. HR and administrative work should not be included.
22. Checks and balances to strengthen accountability need to be developed, e.g. purchasing and petty cash procedures.
23. Collaborative budgeting Finance/Programme staff together with CR needs to be undertaken.
24. The capacity of both finance and programme staff for 'smart' budgeting should be enhanced. (A short exposition on the difference between Framework Agreement and programme and project financing and how these can be designed to cater to organisational development needs was given).
25. Finance staff should be encouraged to visit project management offices under well-developed TORs defining the purpose, specific objectives including learning outcomes expected.
26. Understanding of and mechanisms for joint programme/financial management of the OABC for estimating projected income/ stimulating the design of fundable proposals should be developed. (A brief exposition on the OABC 'pipeline' and its importance for securing the future of IUCN in Lao PDR was made).
27. The possibility of a carrying-of-cash insurance policy should be explored.
28. The feasibility of opening of bank accounts near project office sites and the payment of salaries into bank accounts should be investigated.

29. The Director Finance and the Internal Audit Asia Region should support IUCN Lao PDR in developing a higher level of capacity for long term financial management.

5. **Human Resource Management**

30. TORs for the newly created post of Office Manager should include a well-defined degree of responsibility for supporting the CR in HR management and being the IUCN Lao PDR focal point for working with Regional HR.
31. The Director HR Asia Region should support IUCN Lao PDR in building a sound HR function.
32. The particular staff member working without contract should be issued a short, fixed-term contract immediately.
33. On-going, clear guidance and monitoring of staff contracting should be given by ARO to support the to-be-appointed CR.
34. In future the design of staff TORs to be based on models provided by ARO.
35. A system to be set in place for annual circulation of revised TORs of current staff and TORs of new staff as they are appointed.
36. The standard appraisal process should be extended to all IUCN staff in all new and on-going projects (unless due for closure in the near future).
37. Staff, responsible for managing others, will need guidance on how to appraise. On- going appraisal by managers and feed back to staff throughout the year should be encouraged.
38. IUCN Lao PDR to conform to the prevailing norms when deciding on increments.
39. The Director HR ARO, in consultation with the CR, should consider all possible options and, before the advent of a new CR, recommend to the RD a strategy for bringing salaries into line with regional norms. (The provision of additional benefits may help to mitigate any stringent measures needed to do this.)
40. An equitable decision should be made on the currency of payment.
41. Wherever feasible, salaries should be paid into staff bank accounts or by cheques.
42. A survey and analysis of medical/ accident/ life insurance policies should be made. Based on this, an informed decision should be made in consultation with Director HR, ARO on how to protect IUCN employees in a way which is consonant with other countries in the region and equitable for staff within IUCN Lao PDR.
43. An overall annual Leave Plan should be developed at the beginning of each year, reviewed and adjusted at regular periods, so that everyone avails their full quota of annual leave as per the 'Annual Leave Policy' issued on 10 April 2000. (Arrangements should be made with colleagues to ensure that no key tasks are neglected during leave.)
44. A formal orientation system will need to be designed and made operational as and when the organisation grows.

6. **Administrative Services**

45. The recruitment of a very competent Office Manager is essential at this time.
46. The Office Manager, when appointed, should report directly to the CR. All administrative staff, i.e. the Computer/ Information Systems Administrator, the Receptionist/Secretary, the Driver and Office Cleaner should report directly to the Office Manager rather than to Finance or the CR.
47. The recruitment of a Computer and Information Systems Administrator should be expedited.
48. The Office Manager, when recruited, should be tasked with advising on and then implementing, necessary changes in Reception/Secretarial Services within the limits of resources available.
49. The remaining policy issues pertaining to vehicles should be brought into compliance as soon as possible.
50. Consideration should be given to the appointment of a full-time cleaner as and when increased use of the office facilities warrants it.
51. The Office Manager should be made responsible for security. Security measures should be checked to ensure that they are in compliance with property and fire insurance regulations.

7. Management Structures

52. A major restructuring should be done when the programme development phase is over, and donor responses enable an estimate of the amount and complexity of the work and of resources likely to be available.

53. Recommendations for this restructuring should be a component of a full scale Programme and Organisational Review which should be carried out within the next few years.

8. IUCN Lao PDR and the wider world

54. Purposeful contacts, both informal and formal, within the Region, HQ and the Global Union should be further encouraged.

55. Country focal points for each important area of work, e.g. gender, should be appointed.

56. The responsibilities of being a country focal point should be clearly laid out, written into TORs and shared with other staff.

57. A joint study tour to IUCN Vietnam and its government counterparts by staff and key government counterparts should be arranged.

58. Raising resources for a communications/ corporate profiling strategy should be a top priority in the new programme era.

59. IUCN members should be involved in programme development. Their potential for collaboration and that of other organisations should be explored.

9. Recruitment of a National CR

60. An orientation programme for the new CR should be carefully designed to, inter-alia, enable him/her to understand the global Union, the Asia Region and how IUNC-Lao PDR fits in as a component of the organisational whole.

Language of the evaluation: English

Available from: IUCN HQ, IUCN Asia Regional Office (ARO)