Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project Vietnam

Report of the Internal Review

by

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Acknowledgements

The review team would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the project team, the staff of the NTFPRC, CRES, ECO ECO and IUCN Vietnam during the mission. We are particularly grateful to Dr Le Thanh Chien for his support and patience during the review. Our special thanks to Mrs Tran Thi Kim Ngan for interpretation services.

Abbreviations

CRES	Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies
ECO ECO	Institute for Ecological Economy
FSIV	Forest Science Institute of Vietnam
IUCN	World Conservation Union
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MoSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
NTFPRC	Non Timber Forest Products Research Centre
NGOs	Non governmental Organisations
NTFPs	Non Timber Forest Products
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation

Executive Summary

The internal review of the Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project was undertaken by William J Jackson, Nguyen Van San and Harry van der Linde. It was guided by the following objectives:

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

The review mission sought to assess the effectiveness of implementation and the anticipated impact of the project. Specific areas of attention included an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the goal and objectives, the approach and the project's strategy. In addition, the review considered gender issues and unintended consequences of the project.

The project has made remarkably good progress given the short time that it has been operational. The project staff and partners are keen to develop the project in a manner that enables learning and uses lessons learned to guide project activities. The project goal and objectives are quite ambitious for the time frame. The following specific recommendations are made:

- **Recommendation 1** The project should identify and test its key assumptions, then adjust work plans as needed.
- **Recommendation 2** The project should develop a set of results (between the objectives and the activities of the work plan) that identify clearly what can be achieved during the present project.
- **Recommendation 3** The project should review objective three in relation to its ensure that is clearly linked to objectives one and two and that it includes a wider range of stakeholders.
- **Recommendation 4** The project should assist the NTFP RC to assess the potential for using the marketing analysis and development method (and possibly also the RRA/PRA methods as adapted by the project for NTFPs) to raise the profile of the Centre as an institution capable of developing, applying and supporting others in the use of innovative methods for NTFP use and management.
- **Recommendation 5** Developing the strategic plan for the NTFPRC's should continue to be given high priority. The government has identified the role of the Centre. The project and NGO members should support the Centre to build its capacity and link it with lessons from the field sites
- **Recommendation 6** The project's interventions should continue to focus on the links between biodiversity conservation and rural development by considering not only the farming system but also the links with the protected areas, the buffer zones and other non-agricultural lands.
- **Recommendation 7** The project should continue to design its field site interventions based on participatory approaches.
- **Recommendation 8** The project should assess current use patterns of the shrublands in Ke Go and consider developing a demonstration trial on improved management of shrublands.
- **Recommendation 9** The project should undertake further analyses of the use of fuel wood in the pilot sites and use the results to evaluate the relevance of field activities and design future interventions.
- **Recommendation 10** The project should continue to monitor and evaluate the relevance of the approach and activities at the field sites.

- **Recommendation 11** To continue the process of strengthening the capacity of the field teams, the project should consider:
  - Providing better access to transportation. At present both sites have one motorcycle each, this is inadequate for efficient use of the field team's time.
  - Improving computer facilities. While new facilities have recently been provided to the Ke Go team, the computing facilities at Ba Be are not working and require a substantial investment of ECO ECO.
  - Providing basic field equipment. The field staff may be more effective and efficient if they were provided with some basic field equipment such as small backpacks and adequate footwear.
  - Reconsider needs for field office space. While the current field office space is adequate in both sites, there is a need to look to the future and the potential for expanding the field teams and using the office space for meetings and workshops. The current offices will be inadequate for such purposes.
  - Improving staff skills. The skills of field staff vary considerably between sites and between individuals. The staff would greatly benefit from training in project management, computer operation, English language, community forestry and rural development issues and an increased awareness about NTFPs.
  - Providing short-term support on specific technical issues – The field teams have benefited greatly from their exposure to the RRA/PRA training and activities. They may also benefit from other technical inputs, for example, technical advice on the suitability of particular species for long term sustainability of ecosystem services (eg water regulation and supply, soil formation, erosion control, nutrient cycling, food production and raw materials) once these needs have been identified.
  - Enabling the Senior Technical Adviser and Centre-based team to continue to undertake regular field work to strengthen the capacity of the field teams and to help them to focus on the range of potential solutions to the problems that have been identified rather than continuing to just emphasises the agroforestry model. The review team could find no restrictions in the project budget that would prohibit allocation of funds to more intensive field work by the project team.
- **Recommendation 12** IUCN should assist the project to resolve the complications with recruiting field advisers and assist the project to find a workable solution.
- **Recommendation 13** The project is strongly encouraged to continue to identify and resolve tensions between partners through discussion, joint analysis and collaborative planning and M&E.
- **Recommendation 14** ECO ECO is encouraged to strengthen their ties with the project by sticking to agreed work plans, using better the improving consultation mechanisms with the project, providing more timely reports and by assigning long term project coordinators or supervisors to the project.
- **Recommendation 15** The project should continue to organise workshops or seminars to bring the partners together periodically to discuss key substantive issues and questions facing the project.
- **Recommendation 16** Gender work should be given high priority including the recruitment of short term technical support of a gender specialist, the development of a gender action plan and training of staff.

- **Recommendation 17** The project should continue to closely monitor the gender equity issues of the activities in the field. In addition the project should improve the gender balance in the NTFP RC project staff if the opportunity arises.
- **Recommendation 18** The project should support the NTFPRC to put in place mechanisms for linking lessons learned from project field activities with policy makers and other agencies interested in the issues that the project is working on.
- **Recommendation 19** The review team suggests that the NTFPRC in collaboration with the project more clearly establishes the role and responsibilities of the Centre's Monitoring team. The review team commends the project's focus on learning, it recommends the M&E staff at the NFPRC continue their monitoring role and at the same time be given a wider mandate to a focus on supporting the field teams to more effectively learn and apply the learning to their actions. Conversely the responsibility for monitoring and evaluation among the field teams should be clarified and strengthened.
- **Recommendation 20** The project should continue to develop and adapt M&E and reporting approaches that promote the learning of lessons.

Introduction and Background

This document summarises the findings of the internal review of the Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project (hereafter called the project) undertaken by IUCN – The World Conservation Union, in association with the other project partners. The project began operation in the second half of 1998 and is currently approaching the mid way point. Details of the project's design and implementation strategy can be found in the Project Document, the Inception Report, the first Six Monthly Report and the report of the Technical Review and Assistance Mission.

The project focuses on the role of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and biodiversity in relation to socio-economic development in Vietnam. The goal of the project is *to promote biodiversity conservation through the sustainable use of Non-timber Forest Products*. Its objectives include:

1. To strengthen the Non-Timber Forest Products Research Centre (NTFPRC) and make it the pre-eminent national centre for NTFP development and management;
2. To organise in each pilot site appropriate collaborative management systems, which will promote and maintain sustainable use of NTFPs;
3. To develop and implement an effective awareness raising campaign, specifically directed at NTFP users within the pilot sites;
4. To ensure that the management of the project is effective and efficient.

Note:- the project added the fourth goal after the project commenced.

Project approach

The project secretariat is housed in the offices of the NTFPRC in Hanoi. The Centre is part of the Vietnam Forest Science Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. IUCN collaborates with the NTFPRC in the implementation of the project. The two pilot sites activities are being carried out in collaboration with two Vietnamese NGOs, namely:

- The Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) of the University of Hanoi that works in the buffer zone of the Ke Go Nature Reserve (Ha Tinh Province); and
- The Institute of Ecological Economy (ECO ECO) that works in the buffer zone of Ba Be National Park (Bac Can Province).

Project activities at the NTFPRC focus on building the capacity of the Centre in NTFP management and market research. Work in the two field sites focuses on exploring practical solutions to NTFP conservation, development, management and marketing. More specifically, the activities in the field sites aim to:

- Generate an understanding of current NTFP uses by local communities, management strategies, and the social and economic values derived from them;
- Design improved methods for sustainable harvesting and cultivation of NTFPs;
- Develop, test and apply a management and organisational framework for sustainable use of selected NTFPs; and
- Develop marketing strategies, processing infrastructure and technical skills, which will generate cash income for local communities, while providing incentives for maintaining forest biodiversity.

The project intends to feed lessons learned from the pilot activities back through the NTFPRC to influence government policy and enable replication in other areas.

The project has three features that are relatively innovative for Vietnam. First, the project is focusing both on biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development of local communities through the ecologically and economically sustainable use of NTFPs. Second, the project is being implemented through a partnership between a government agency and NGOs. Third, the project is using a learning approach that aims to integrate research with field-based action through selected pilot sites. These three innovative features present a considerable challenge to implementing the project, particularly as there is limited experience in implementing such a project in Vietnam. Nevertheless, an approach that links socio-economics and biodiversity, works with a range of partners and emphasises learning by doing would seem to be well suited to the current social, political and economic context of Vietnam.

The project document stresses that the project is not simply about finding technical solutions, but also about linking NTFP users with improved management practices and supportive institutions. Furthermore, the document emphasises that the 'whole context of NTFP use is continually evolving and changing so the project will need to be reviewed regularly.' It is within this spirit of learning that the current internal review has been set.

Methodology of the review

The review was undertaken by IUCN as a collaborative effort between the review team, the project team and the implementing partners. The review team comprised William J Jackson, Nguyen Van San and Harry van der Linde. It was guided by the objectives set in the terms of reference (see Appendix 2) which are:

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

The review mission sought to assess the effectiveness of implementation and the anticipated impact of the project. Specific areas of attention included an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the goal and objectives, the approach and the project's strategy. In addition, the review considered gender issues and unintended consequences of the project.

As part of the mission, the review team helped the project to improve their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) skills by conducting a short workshop in Hanoi (see Appendix 4). The workshop emphasised developing an M&E system to equip the project with the capacity to learn lessons to guide the implementation of the project.

In addition to working with project partners in Hanoi, the team visited field sites in Ke Go and Ba Be. A list of people met and the places visited is attached as Appendix 1.

The review was not without limitations. The short time available to deal with the issues raised in the terms of reference meant that the review team could not cover all issues equally well. The team did not meet with the Project Steering Committee and was unable to meet with relevant national or international organisations or representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Nor did the team have the opportunity to review the budget or the administrative systems. However, within these general limitations, the review addresses most of the points listed in the terms of reference.

Results

The project has made remarkably good progress given the sort time that it has been operational and particularly given that the project is still within the 'start-up phase' identified in the project document. The detailed findings of this review are presented below.

Assumptions

The success of a project is often determined by the **assumptions** behind the project being clearly identified. Although several assumptions have been identified in the Project Document, the project would benefit from more clearly identifying and testing these underlying assumptions.

For example, CRES has identified a number of key questions that could be easily converted to assumptions, these include:

- Can the production of alternatives outside the forest contribute to forest conservation, or should the solution be sought in the sustainable harvesting of products inside the forest?
- To what extent does forest dependency of local people decrease with increasing socio-economic well being? (from the CRES briefing note for the Netherlands, 1999):

These questions can be rewritten to the following assumptions:

- The production of alternative resources and income generation activities outside the protected area will result in forest conservation;
- Dependency on forests declines with increasing socio-economic well being.

If these assumptions prove to be incorrect, then activities undertaken to raise livelihoods, awareness and capacity of local farmers may not result in forest conservation. Therefore, the goal of the project would not be achieved. It is not the place of the review team to suggest assumptions, this is the responsibility of the project team. However:

- **Recommendation 1** The project should identify and test its key assumptions, then adjust work plans as needed.

Validity of Project Goal and objectives

The present **goal** of the Project is relevant and appropriate, but ambitious. The project partners and donor need to acknowledge that, even under the best of circumstances, progress towards the goal will be slow. Given a longer time frame it is quite feasible that the promotion of biodiversity conservation through sustainable use of NTFPs will become a deciding factor in forest policy and practice in Vietnam.

The project's **objectives** are relevant to the goal. However, like the goal, the objectives are quite ambitious and are perhaps better considered as longer term strategic objectives rather than aims to be achieved within the time frame of the current project. The review team suggests the project needs to more clearly describe the **results** to be achieved by the current project. To do this, the project will need to insert a set of results between the objectives and activities of the project's logical framework. Identifying results will also help to identify useful progress indicators for project monitoring and evaluation. The project is contractually obliged to develop these indicators and we note that the project secretariat intends to work on them during the coming months.

- **Recommendation 2** The project should develop a set of results (between the objectives and the activities of the work plan) that identify clearly what can be achieved during the present project.

The review team notes that objective One (strengthening the NTFPRC) has received considerably more attention since the technical review and assistance mission in May 1999. The Centre has developed a strategic plan that identifies the niche of the Centre. Further efforts by the project to strengthen the Centre will focus on building capacity of the Centre to achieve the goals of the strategic plan.

The review team concluded that objective three (*to develop and implement an effective awareness raising campaign, specifically directed at NTFP users within the pilot sites*) does not fit well within the logic of the project design. While the issue of raising awareness is of great importance to the project, the objective may fit more logically as a result of objectives one and two. The danger of having an awareness raising objective by itself is that the awareness raising activities can become disconnected from the real needs identified through the other activities of the project. If the suggested change is not considered desirable by the project Steering Committee or donor then the objective should be broadened to include other key stakeholders including policy makers and local authorities.

- **Recommendation 3** The project should review objective three in relation to its ensure that is clearly linked to objectives one and two and that it includes a wider range of stakeholders.

Several people interviewed during the review mission mentioned that until recently they had a limited understanding of the objectives of the project. This issue was also raised by Mr Andrew Ingles in the technical review and assistance mission report. The review team is pleased to note that the project has expended considerable effort to raise awareness of the project's objectives and to assist the project's partners to develop a more integrated and effective approach to project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. However, there are still considerably different expectations amongst project participants, particularly at the field sites. The project needs to continue awareness raising efforts to ensure that different expectations of project partners are addressed and that expectations about project achievements/outputs are realistic.

Effectiveness and Efficiency of Activities

When assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the project's activities it is important to keep in mind that the project has only been operational for a little more than one year. Many of the problems encountered by the project in the first twelve months are to be expected and it is important to avoid being too critical of progress to date. The fact that the project is willing to learn from the lessons and experiences of its trials and tests and adjust its activities to take into account new knowledge is commendable.

Activities of the NTFPRC

The NTFPRC Monitoring Team has worked with the project field teams in Ke Go and BA Be to adapt and use RRA methods for base line studies. The review team finds that the RRA approach is suited to identifying key issues and local communities willing to work with the project. Field staff in Ba Be have a good understanding of the RRA approach, those in Ke Go are aware of the approach but will require ongoing support from CRES and the NTFPRC to become proficient in the techniques.

The Market Analysis and Development team has effectively adapted an internationally recognised method to the context of the project, and more broadly to the context of Vietnam. The so-called 'market analysis and development method' considers NTFPs as part of the whole livelihood strategies of a household. According to the project's report on the diagnostic survey, the market analysis approach 'ensures that not only harmful interventions are avoided but positive interventions capable of meeting both conservation and economic development objectives.' The adaptation of the approach to suit local conditions in Vietnam indicates the potential capacity of the project to learn and adapt. This sort of 'action-research' approach

should be fostered by the project. At the M&E workshop conducted as part of the present review, the value of action-research in a situation of great complexity and changing circumstances (as typified by the project field sites) was highlighted.

The review team noted that the preliminary market channel analysis for Ba Be has been completed and the report for Ke Go was being prepared while the mission was underway. The reports of the team identify and prioritise NTFPs that are most suited to marketing. The results of the market channel analysis and of the RRA/PRA will be used to guide the project's intervention strategies in the field sites.

- **Recommendation 4** The project should assist the NTFP RC to assess the potential for using the marketing analysis and development method (and possibly also the RRA/PRA methods as adapted by the project for NTFPs) to raise the profile of the Centre as an institution capable of developing, applying and supporting others in the use of innovative methods for NTFP use and management.
- **Recommendation 5** Developing the strategic plan for the NTFPRC's should continue to be given high priority. The government has identified the role of the Centre. The project and NGO members should support the Centre to build its capacity and link it with lessons from the field sites

Activities in the Field Sites

In the first year of the project, activities in the field sites focused on using an 'extension model' to promote agroforestry by transferring technology and funds to selected farmers. The technical review and assistance mission (Ingles, 1999) suggests that the approach adopted by the NGO partners is based on the following two assumptions:

1. The rural development approach which has been promoted previously by ECO ECO is completely compatible with the goal and objectives of the NTFP Project;
2. ECO ECO understands already the best NTFP based forest conservation activities to be done at each site.

The project has encouraged both NGO partners to broaden their approach to design activities based on an analysis of needs and opportunities using participatory techniques (RRA/PRA assessments and market analysis and development). Training of field teams and Centre staff in RRA has been undertaken and initial RRAs and market analyses have been completed. The project intends to continue to build on this approach, and it notes the success of the approach will be determined by the rate of adoption of the techniques by the NGO partners.

Whilst the RRA approach has been useful to refocus the project field work, the project still needs to more broadly consider the role of NTFPs in terms of major land use and land tenure issues within the pilot sites (including State Forest Enterprises lands, the protected areas and non-agricultural communal lands). In other words, a more systemic approach is needed to lift the project beyond the current emphasis on agroforestry within the buffer zone. The long term sustainability of rural livelihood strategies needs to be considered in a broader context than is currently the focus of the project. The links between various land use, land tenure types and livelihood strategies have not been investigated adequately and the strategies adopted by the project to date may not lead to sustainable use of natural resources. To begin with, the project could develop a clearer understanding of the land use zoning in and around the protected areas, and the constraints and opportunities that these zones provide. Such information would be used to guide the design of future field activities.

In the medium to long term, the project should seek to strengthen its relationships with the State Forest Enterprises and the Protected Area Authorities with a view to examining opportunities for jointly working

with local farmers to address core conservation problems and to develop more sustainable and equitable arrangements for the use and management of areas under the control of these two authorities.

The review team wishes to emphasise that it is not suggesting a major refocus of the project to SFE lands or protected areas, but rather the project should review the current level of knowledge of the socio-economic and environmental impact of other land uses.

- **Recommendation 6** The project's interventions should continue to focus on the links between biodiversity conservation and rural development by considering not only the farming system but also the links with the protected areas, the buffer zones and other non-agricultural lands.
- **Recommendation 7** The project should continue to design its field site interventions based on participatory approaches.

By way of explanation of recommendation 6, large areas of the Ke Go area comprise degraded shrublands on moderate to steep hillsides. The shrublands are currently used by local people to provide fuel wood, grazing and a range of non timber forest products including medicinal plants. Sections of the degraded lands in the so-called buffer zone are also being settled by small scale farmers and converted to mixed agriculture. The contribution of these shrublands to the local economy is unclear, but likely to be substantial. The project could assess current use patterns of the shrublands and consider developing a series of demonstration trials on improved management of shrublands. Such trials could be developed in close collaboration with local people and local authorities. They could assess the effect of ceasing grazing on the sites and the effect of various silvicultural regimes aimed at improving the productivity of key NTFP species. IUCN's regional forest conservation co-ordinator Mr Andrew Ingles can provide technical advice on this issue.

- **Recommendation 8** The project should assess current use patterns of the shrublands in Ke Go and consider developing a demonstration trial on improved management of shrublands.

The review team noted that fuel wood is one of the major uses of the protected areas on both sites. This was also identified through the RRA exercise carried out by the project. Therefore, the field activities carried out under the umbrella of the project should consider this issue. It would seem unlikely that the use of the protected area by local people will decline in the foreseeable future unless the fuel wood issue is addressed.

- **Recommendation 9** The project should undertake further analyses of the use of fuel wood in the pilot sites and use the results to evaluate the relevance of field activities and design future interventions.

The review team acknowledges that the project primarily focuses on plants, but there may be instances where use and management of wild fauna could provide income generation activities that also contribute to biodiversity conservation, for example, gecko farming (already suggested in the marketing team's report).

The review team noted that, although there is improved understanding about the project goal, there were considerably divergent expectations about the outputs of the project's field work. Local government people expect the project to help farmers to establish NTFPs on their lands, farmers expect their incomes to increase rapidly, the implementing NGOs expect to promote rural development and the project to promote biodiversity conservation through the sustainable use of Non-timber Forest Products. Such differing expectations are likely to lead to conflict unless there is a balance between delivering outputs now while also focusing on the long term goal of the project. It is important for the project to undertake field activities during the coming planting season. Such activities are an essential aspect of maintaining good faith with farmers and local government. However, as new knowledge becomes available, for instance through the market survey, the types of activities supported by the project may need to change to focus on those

activities that are most likely to achieve the results of the project. In any case, activities that are being undertaken on behalf of the project should avoid unnecessarily putting farmers at risk or cutting off future options.

Relevance of Project Approach and strategy

The complexities of the project's partnership approach that involves both a government agency and NGOs reflects a broader process of change in Vietnam. There is a risk of considerable overlap of processes and functions as both NGOs and government agencies find new roles in the transition to market economy. There is a need for all partners to work more closely together. The project can help the partners to find solutions through developing the NTFPRC's strategic plan, conflict management, developing joint working plans and prioritising activities that have direct impact on conservation.

The NTFPRC and the project are encouraged to document and share lessons learned about these and other issues.

Approach to pilot studies

ECO ECO

The participatory action research approach adopted by the project – learn – reflect – design – test and learn, is appropriate. However, many of the initial field activities undertaken under the umbrella of the project began without a clear understanding of the issues and a top-down and technical approach to solutions. A village head we met in Ba Be told us that the project should first talk to the farmers about their problems, needs and interests and then look at the physical possibilities in the area (soil, transport, climate etc) and only then recommend potential solutions. It is also important that the field teams look beyond technical solutions to problems and begin to consider cultural and social factors that may either promote or retard progress of the project.

CRES

The review team observes that the criteria for selection of pilot villages and households in Ke Go appears to focus on relatively wealthy people that have large tracts of farmland. It was unclear to the review team whether the selected farmers were indeed dependent to any significant degree on the protected area for NTFPs. Accordingly, it is difficult to recognise a direct connection between improving the production of NTFPs on the selected farms and the conservation of biodiversity. Moreover, the mechanisms for transferring lessons learned from the selected farmers to other (potentially poorer) farmers and other communes are not obvious. While there is no urgency for this latter issue, the project does, nevertheless, need to keep it in mind.

In the longer term, project should test whether the model is appropriate to all concerned farming households and is having a positive impact on biodiversity and socio-economic conditions of the target communities. The review team notes that the direct and strong role of the village, commune and district in selecting the pilot households is likely to continue to restrict the ability of the project to include the full range of interest groups in the pilot work. Accordingly, the NGO project teams will need to ensure that they continue to build on the good levels of trust that they enjoy in the field areas and use this to slowly convince the local government officials of the need to include the full range of interest groups.

General

The project should note that for the participatory action research approach to succeed there is a need for flexibility and adaptability and to accept that mistakes will be made. The role of the Steering Committee is

very important to make sure that lessons are being learned and communicated and that the project partners are adapting to changing knowledge and conditions. This is not to suggest that constant changes and alterations to plans and agreements should be necessary, but more to suggest that a degree of flexibility is required.

- **Recommendation 10** The project should continue to monitor and evaluate the relevance of the approach and activities at the field sites.

The review team was pleased to note that the project field teams operated by CRES and ECO ECO have made progress towards addressing the concerns highlighted in the technical review and assistance mission report. Among other things, Ingles recommended:

1.1 Immediate strengthening and capacity building of field teams

2.1 Recruitment of additional field team members needs to ensure a gender balance

3.1 Familiarisation of field teams with the project's goal and objectives and training in:

3.1. the use of Rapid Rural Appraisal tools for analysing household livelihoods and NTFP resource-use;

3.2. gender awareness and analysis;

3.3. the use of market analysis and development (MA&D) methods for selecting products and undertaking feasibility studies;

3.4. reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

- **Recommendation 11** To continue the process of strengthening the capacity of the field teams, the project should consider:
  - Providing better access to transportation. At present both sites have one motorcycle each, this is inadequate for efficient use of the field team's time.
  - Improving computer facilities. While new facilities have recently been provided to the Ke Go team, the computing facilities at Ba Be are not working and require a substantial investment of ECO ECO.
  - Providing basic field equipment. The field staff may be more effective and efficient if they were provided with some basic field equipment such as small backpacks and adequate footwear.
  - Reconsider needs for field office space. While the current field office space is adequate in both sites, there is a need to look to the future and the potential for expanding the field teams and using the office space for meetings and workshops. The current offices will be inadequate for such purposes.
  - Improving staff skills. The skills of field staff vary considerably between sites and between individuals. The staff would greatly benefit from training in project management, computer operation, English language, community forestry and rural development issues and an increased awareness about NTFPs.
  - Providing short-term support on specific technical issues – The field teams have benefited greatly from their exposure to the RRA/PRA training and activities. They may also benefit from other technical inputs, for example, technical advice on the suitability of particular species for long term sustainability of ecosystem services (eg water regulation and supply, soil formation, erosion control, nutrient cycling, food production and raw materials) once these needs have been identified.

- Enabling the Senior Technical Adviser and Centre-based team to continue to undertake regular field work to strengthen the capacity of the field teams and to help them to focus on the range of potential solutions to the problems that have been identified rather than continuing to just emphasises the agroforestry model. The review team could find no restrictions in the project budget that would prohibit allocation of funds to more intensive field work by the project team.

The idea of recruiting additional field adviser(s) to assist field teams has been raised previously (see Ingles 1999), the review team found that while the Netherlands Embassy in Hanoi and the project partners were supportive of this idea, there have been some technical and timing complications for realising this in the immediate future. The review team supports the idea of strengthening the field teams through the recruitment of additional field advisors.

- **Recommendation 12** IUCN should assist the project to resolve the complications with recruiting field advisers and assist the project to find a workable solution.

Organisation and structure

The review team did not have time to meet with the project Steering Committee but from discussions with staff and partners it would seem that the Steering Committee is considered an important component of the project.

In the field the project enjoys strong support from District and local government officials. This should be nurtured.

The review team detected a certain degree of tension between partners that results from confusion over objectives and roles, differing interests and a mismatch of expectations. The project partners have made good progress towards addressing these tensions through improved work planning, more regular meetings and clearer development of joint field activities. However, there is still room for strengthening and applying these improvements.

- **Recommendation 13** The project is strongly encouraged to continue to identify and resolve tensions between partners through discussion, joint analysis and collaborative planning and M&E.

- **Recommendation 14** ECO ECO is encouraged to strengthen their ties with the project by sticking to agreed work plans, using better the improving consultation mechanisms with the project, providing more timely reports and by assigning long term project coordinators or supervisors to the project.

- **Recommendation 15** The project should continue to organise workshops or seminars to bring the partners together periodically to discuss key substantive issues and questions facing the project.

An example of a key issue to be discussed is the general practice in the country to pay farmers to plant and protect trees. This practice is likely to become increasingly controversial and is relevant for the project and beyond. There are many unanswered questions about the sustainability of such practices. It would be instructive for the project to discuss the costs and benefits (socio-economic and biological) of cash subsidisation systems.

Gender

In the pilot sites it was widely acknowledged that women and men have different knowledge of NTFPs and generally collect different types of products. Women focus on medicinal plants, rattan and fuel wood, while men collect timber and heavy fuel wood and make charcoal. Both NGO partners should target both male and female beneficiaries in the efforts to domesticate NTFPs and to establish commercially viable crops of these NTFPs on farmlands. A gender balanced approach should strengthen the role of women and lessen social-economic inequities.

The project has yet to implement the main part of its work on gender. The delay in the project's gender work is quite understandable and should be of no great concern to the project. However, it is very important for the project to move ahead on the issue of gender in the near future. Key issues that need to be addresses include the gender balance of the staff, improving the awareness and capacity of Centre and field staff about gender and reviewing field practices.

- **Recommendation 16** Gender work should be given high priority including the recruitment of short term technical support of a gender specialist, the development of a gender action plan and training of staff.

- **Recommendation 17** The project should continue to closely monitor the gender equity issues of the activities in the field. In addition the project should improve the gender balance in the NTFP RC project staff if the opportunity arises.

Management and administration

The review team did not have a great deal of time to review management procedures but a cursory review revealed no major problems. The project has made substantial progress towards developing a good planning, monitoring evaluation and reporting system. The system is still being set up and tested but it appears to have the right elements and is not overly bureaucratic. The project is encouraged to continue to refine the system and ~~to~~ the partners are strongly encouraged to support this process.

The procedures for financial disbursement seem to be effective. There have been some delays with financial reporting by ECO ECO, which should be addressed by the NGO as soon as possible. IUCN should continue to ensure that financial processes run smoothly and are supportive of the project management.

Linkages to other organisations

The duration of the review and the limited time spent in Hanoi did not allow the review team to meet with organisations other than those working directly with the project. Nevertheless, it was apparent that there are a wide range of current and planned activities in Vietnam and surrounding countries that are of direct relevance to the project. The project has made very good links with similar project and government activity in Lao PDR and with the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre in Bangkok Thailand. Other international institutions that may be relevant to the project include the Centre for International Forestry Research, the IUCN specialist groups, the Kunming Institute of Botany Department of Ethnobotany and FAO.

The review notes that national and provincial policies on NTFPs, land use and land tenure have direct relevance to the project. For example, the lack of national policies on NTFPs was cited by several informants as being a key concern. The project will potentially generate a number of lessons that may of great interest to national and provincial level policy makers. The NTFPRC could begin to put in place mechanisms for linking the project field activities with policy and policy formulation. Whilst this is no doubt a delicate area for the project to engage in, it is, nevertheless, crucial that field practice be informed by policy and lessons learned from field work be clearly and concisely informed to key policy makers. At present there appears to be a need to increase awareness about government policies at the local and field levels .

- **Recommendation 18** The project should support the NTFPRC to put in place mechanisms for linking lessons learned from project field activities with policy makers and other agencies interested in the issues that the project is working on.

Budget

Based on the present rate of expenditure, the project will be under-expended at the end of the three years. This issue requires further discussion between the NTFPRC, IUCN and the donor. Options include allocating surplus funds to extra field activities and a short 'no additional cost' extension of the project if this is agreeable to the donor and Vietnamese government.

Monitoring & evaluation systems

The recommendations of the first internal review have been followed up in an appropriate way. While not all issues raised in the technical review and assistance mission have been fully addressed, the review team is satisfied that the project has made substantial progress and indications are that they will continue to work on the key recommendations.

The project is still developing its monitoring and evaluation system. Many of the elements of a good system are in place but there is a need to develop clearer indicators for evaluating the projects assumptions and objectives. Furthermore, if the project does develop a set of 'results' for its work plan, it will need to develop indicators for this level also. It is still too early in the life of the project to assess impact so the project is concentrating on collecting base line data. The review team provided the project with some suggestions on M&E and base line data collection as shown in Appendix Two.

- **Recommendation 19** The review team suggests that the NTFPRC in collaboration with the project more clearly establishes the role and responsibilities of the Centre's Monitoring team. The review team commends the project's focus on learning, it recommends the M&E staff at the NFPRC continue their monitoring role and at the same time be given a wider mandate to a focus on supporting the field teams to more effectively learn and apply the learning to their actions. Conversely the responsibility for monitoring and evaluation among the field teams should be clarified and strengthened.
- **Recommendation 20** The project should continue to develop and adapt M&E and reporting approaches that promote the learning of lessons.

The project has already developed a range of such approaches and it now needs to consolidate some of these while at the same time ensuring that there is a balance between M&E, reporting and field activities. The role of the annual project learning cycle, described in Appendix Two, and the importance of evaluating assumptions and performance indicators are key to successful project implementation.

Conclusions

The project has made very good progress in the first year and a half of operation. While there have been some problems with getting the project up and running, these problems are not unusual for new projects. The project team is working towards resolving the key problems highlighted in the previous internal review and all project partners are encouraged by the current review to continue to support this process. The review team notes that the goal and objectives are quite ambitious for three years and a longer term view may be needed to learn key lessons and translate these into broader policy and practice. Accordingly, the forthcoming external review team may like to consider extension of the project beyond the current phase.

Appendix One List of people met and or interviewed

1. PROJECT SECRETARIAT

Name	Position
• Dr. Le Thanh Chien	• National Project Director, Director NTFPRC
• Mr. Guido Broekhoven	• IUCN Senior Technical Advisor

2. NTFP RC PROJECT OFFICE

Name	Position
• Dr. Dao Viet Phu	• Project Coordinator, Vice Director NTFPRC
• Dr. Le Thi Phi	• Marketing Officer
• Mr. Nguyen Van Duong	• Marketing Officer
• Mr. Vu Dinh Quang	• Monitoring Officer
• Mr. An Van Bay	• Monitoring Officer

3. ECO ECO - Ba Be

3.a Pilot site supervision and support, Hanoi office

Name	Position
• Prof. Nguyen Van Truong	• Ba Be Project Manager, Director ECO ECO
• Mr. Nguyen Ton Tao	• Vice Director ECO-ECO
• Prof. Ha Chu Chu	• Vice Director of ECO-ECO
• Mr. Luu Van Huan	• ECO-ECO Office Manager

3.b Field project staff Ba Be

Name	Position
• Mr. Phan Cong Binh	• Head of Field Staff
• Ms. Nguyen Thu Huong	• Accountant/Assistant to Head of Field Staff
• Ms. Nguyen Thi Duyen	• Field Project Staff
• Mrs. Tran Thi Van	• Field Project Staff

3.c Local authorities

Name	Position
• Mr. Hoan	• Chairman of Ba Be district
• Mr. Nong Quoc Doi	• Vice Chairman of Ba Be district, Chairman of Ba Be Local Advisory Board
• Mr. Nguyen Van Luan	• Chairman of Khang Ninh Commune
• Mrs. Nong Thi Chinh	• Head of Women Union of Commune
• Mr. Luong Xuan Tuy	• Chairman of mass organisation
• Mr. Hoang Van Pao	• Chairman of People Council
• Mr. Nong Thi Chinh	• Assistance for project at Commune level
• Mr. Duong Van Tuyen	• Head of Na Lang village
• Mr. Ly Van Quang	• Head of Na Co village

Ba Be National Park	
• Mr. Bui Van Dinh	• Director of NP Management Board

4. CRES - Ke Go

4.a Pilot site supervision and support, Hanoi office

Name	Position
• Prof. Dr. Le Trong Cuc	• Director CRES
• Prof. Dr. Vo Quy	• Project Advisor for CRES
• Mr. Vo Thanh Giang	• Field Project Coordinator

4.b Field project staff Ke Go

Name	Position
• Mr. Tran Van Sinh	• Head of Field staff
• Ms. Tran Thi Kim Lien	• Assistant to Head of Field staff
• Mr. Ha Huy Hue	• Field staff
• Mr. Dang Viet Vi	• Field staff

4.c Local Administration

Name	Position
Cam Xuyen District	
• Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Bao	• Chairman, PC Cam Xuyen District, Chairman, local advisory committee
• Nguyen Van Hai	• District officer
Cam Son Commune	
• Nguyen Thanh Ha	• Chairman of People Council
• Luong Huu Chinh	• Vice chairman of People Council
• Le Ngoc Cu	• Chairman of People Committee
• Nguyen Huu Luan	• Vice chairman of People Committee
• Nguyen Dinh Quang	• Head of village 2
• Tran Dinh Duy	• Commune field staff
• Tran Van Cuong	• Farmer: Project household model at village 1
Cam My Commune	
• Mr. Pham Quang Hoa	• Chairman of People Committee
• Mr. Duong Dinh Son	• Vice chairman of People Committee
• Mr. Nguyen Huu Binh	• Commune officer
• Mr. Dang Viet Vi	• Commune field staff
• Mr. Nguyen Van Hoa	• Head of village 1
• Mr. Nguyen Hung	• Vice head of village 1
• Mr. Pham Van Binh	• Head of village 4
• Mr. Pham The Nhuan	• Farmer: Project household model-village 4

5 IUCN VIETNAM PROGRAMME

Name	Position
• Mr. Nguyen Minh Thong	• Country Representative
• Mrs Nguyen Thi Yen	• Project Support Officer

6 NETHERLANDS EMBASSY

Name	Position
• Mr. Wijnand van IJssel	• First secretary, Forests and Biodiversity
• Mr. Tran Ngoc Huong	• Assistant to the First Secretary

Appendix Two Internal Review Mission Terms Of Reference

1. Introduction

1.1. The project

The goal of the project is *to promote biodiversity conservation through the sustainable use of Non-timber Forest Products* (NTFPs).

Its objectives include:

- To strengthen the Non-Timber Forest Products Research Centre (NTFP RC) and make it the pre-eminent national centre for NTFP development and management
- To organise in each pilot site appropriate collaborative management systems, which will promote and maintain sustainable use of NTFPs
- To develop and implement an effective awareness raising campaign, specifically directed at NTFP users within the pilot sites.

IUCN collaborates with the Non-Timber Forest Products Research Centre (NFPRC) of the Vietnam Forest Science Institute, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the implementation of the project. In addition, pilot sites activities are being carried out in collaboration with two Vietnamese NGOs:

- The Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) of the University of Hanoi works in the buffer zone of the Ke Go Nature Reserve (Ha Tinh Province);
- The Institute of Ecological Economy (ECO ECO) carries out activities in the bufferzone of Ba Be National Park (Bac Can Province).

Activities focus on, amongst others, building the capacity of the NTFP RC in NTFP management and marketing research. Work in the two field sites will focus on exploring practical solutions to NTFP conservation, development, management and marketing. More specifically, the activities in the field site will:

- Generate an understanding of current NTFP uses by local communities; management strategies, and the social and economic values derived from them;
- Design improved methods for sustainable harvesting and cultivation of NTFPs;
- Develop, test and apply a management and organisational framework for sustainable use of selected NTFPs; and,
- Develop marketing strategies, processing infrastructure and technical skills, which will generate cash income for local communities, while providing incentives for maintaining forest biodiversity.

Lessons learned from the pilot activities will be fed back through the NFP RC to influence, amongst others, government policy and for replication in other areas. Other stakeholders will be involved in awareness building activities as well.

The government of The Netherlands funds the project for a period of three years. The project started in the second half of 1998.

1.2 Context of the review

In addition to permanent technical and managerial assistance to the project, IUCN provides support through review missions and other short-term inputs, such as the present mission. The review will build on

an earlier internal review, which was carried out by an IUCN team in April 1999. The present review will also help the project team to prepare for the external review, which will take place in the year 2000.

2. General terms of reference

2.1 Objectives of the review

The objectives of the review are:

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

2.2 Approach of the review

It is important that the project team and the implementing partners learn as much as possible from the review, both in terms of process (How does one carry out an assessment?) and in terms of content (What does this particular assessment learn us?). Therefore, the review team will work in close collaboration with the project team. Frequent meetings and a number of workshop-like sessions and mini-seminars, together with informal interactions will form part of the activities of the mission in order to create fruitful interactions between the mission team members and the members of the project team.

3. Specific terms of reference

In principle, the mission members will review the entire project, "from project document to present activities and progress." It will focus on the general direction, approach and priorities of the project. Specific areas of attention will include:

- *Goal and objectives*
    - Are the goal and objectives still relevant, complete and achievable?
- *Approach and strategy*
    - Are the approaches and strategies selected by the project appropriate?
    - Are the approaches and strategies well articulated and understood by all relevant parties?
- *Activities*
    - Do activities reflect the project goal, objectives, approaches and strategies?
    - Are the activities carried out in an appropriate way?
    - Are the priorities right?
- *Organisation and structure*
    - Is the project structure appropriate and effective? (including Steering Committee, Advisory Committee, Project Secretariat, Project Implementation Units)
    - Are the co-ordination mechanisms between participating organisations appropriate and effective? Do they allow for the co-ordination of activities and for an exchange of information and ideas?
    - Are the role and responsibilities of IUCN (including the Country Programme and the Regional Programme) carried out in an appropriate and effective way?
- *Management and administration*

    - Are the management and administrative procedures appropriate and effective?
    - Are the project planning procedures appropriate and effective?
    - Are the procedures for financial administration, including disbursement procedures, appropriate and effective?
    - Is the management of personnel (including roles and tasks of the different project officers) appropriate and effective?
- *Linkages to other organisations*
    - Are the project's interactions with other organisations, institutions, projects, etc. meaningful and sufficient?
- *Budget*
    - Does the budget reflect the present priorities in activities? Are changes in the budget required?
- *Monitoring & evaluation systems*
    - Have the recommendations of the first internal review been followed up in an appropriate way?
    - Are the monitoring and evaluation systems of the project in place and effective?

In consultation with the Project Secretariat, the review team may wish to address additional issues.

4. Organisation and activities

4. 1 Mission team

The mission will comprise:

- The Head of IUCN's Forest Conservation Programme, who will be the Team Leader
- A Vietnamese consultant with knowledge of the institutional context in the Vietnamese forestry sector.

4.2 Activities

The mission will carry out the following activities:

- To review of relevant documents
- To conduct meetings and discussions with:
- CRES
- ECO ECO
- IUCN:
    - Vietnam Programme
    - Regional Programme
- NTFP RC
- FSIV (Chairman of Steering Committee)

- Netherlands Embassy
- Possible other resource persons or institutions, which may help the team to better the project context.
- To visit the pilot sites in Ke Go and Ba Be
- To facilitate and contribute to mini-seminars, workshops and other meetings
- To write a report with its findings

4.3 Mode of operations

The team will be working under the guidance of the Project Secretariat (National Project Director and Senior Technical Advisor), to which the final report will be submitted. Adjustments to the Terms of Reference of the mission will be discussed and agreed with the Project Secretariat before the changes become effective.

4.4 Programme

The following draft global programme is proposed. The programme may be adjusted by the Project Secretariat after consultations with the Team Leader.

Day	**What**	**Where**
Day 1	• Introductions & Discussion ToR: • IUCN • Project partners	IUCN, NTFP RC Others?
Day 2	• Mini-seminar about project self-assessment (in light of this mission) • Further meetings	NTFP RC
Day 3 - 6	• Fieldtrip, including short workshop about field activities	Ke Go
Day 7	• Report writing	Hanoi
Day 8 - 11	• Field Trip, including short workshop about field activities	Ba Be
Day 12	• Report writing	Hotel
Day 13	• Debriefings: • Project partners • Netherlands Embassy	IUCN NTFP RC Embassy
Day 14	• Departure	Hanoi

4.4 Outputs

The outputs of the mission will include:

- Increased understanding amongst the project team about project assessments and reviews
- A report prepared by the mission, including:
- A brief description of the activities carried out
- The findings and conclusions of the team
- If need be, specific proposals and recommendations for the project to improve its performance.

Appendix Three Extracts from the technical review and assistance mission for the NTFP Project

Andrew Ingles -- Hanoi and Ba Be, Vietnam 28 April - 5 May 1999

2.3.3 Discussion and suggestions

The inception report by the Senior Technical Adviser includes recommendations that are relevant to the problems and challenges described above. All of these are endorsed and some are re-emphasised or re-worded below. Some additional suggestions are also provided.

Project management

The project should urgently assist the NTFPRC to develop an overall strategic plan for its future development. This could involve undertaking institutional assessment and stakeholder analysis and facilitating a process for jointly analysing and debating a mission statement, objectives and roles for the centre in supporting the NTFP sector in Vietnam.

Within the context of a strategic plan for the NTFPRC, it may be appropriate for the centre to assemble, manage and make accessible a comprehensive information base on NTFPs in Vietnam that includes ecological, technical, social and economic aspects and uses modern information technology.

Field teams at pilot sites will need a lot of support in the social aspects of NTFP development. In a strategic planning exercise, the NTFPRC should consider if and how it might strengthen its own capacity for supporting NTFP development by adding social science and training sections to its organisational structure.

IUCN's Senior Technical Advisor should become more familiar with the field sites and gain/ maintain his own field experience and knowledge of the forests and villages.

The following collaborative mechanisms could be adopted by the project partners to enhance communication and joint planning, monitoring and evaluation:

Jointly develop specific workplans for each NGO in line with project objectives and approaches.

Continue to develop and refine M&E systems for each pilot site based on workplans.

Undertake regular joint training and reflection exercises.

Adopt the need for compulsory field trip reports and their dissemination that focus on findings and objectives of field trips, and based on team debriefing and reflection exercises following field trips.

Undertake regular field visits by project secretariat.

Conduct monthly or bi-monthly meetings of project and field teams.

Establish a management information system involving simple village and forest profiles to establish baseline information at each pilot site.

It is important that the operational mechanisms and effectiveness of collaboration between all project partners are developed, monitored and analysed so that the experience with this model is captured and can be disseminated to others.

Disbursement of funds to CRES and ECO ECO depend on the joint approval of both the Project Director and the Senior Technical Advisor. Following approval, the Senior Technical Advisor should be able to sign for withdrawals. At present he cannot. The STA should either become a signatory to the IUCN account in Hanoi or establish a separate project bank account and assume IUCN's financial responsibilities under both MOUs.

Pilot site work

On the basis of my field visit to BaBe and the discussions with ECO ECO, it seems that ECO ECO are operating under the following assumptions.

Assumption 1. The rural development approach which has been promoted previously by ECO ECO is completely compatible with the goal and objectives of the NTFP Project.

Assumption 2. ECO ECO understands already the best NTFP based forest conservation activities to be done at each site.

It is suggested that ECO ECO re-examine and discuss these assumptions with the project secretariat with the aim of improving the links between project's methods and activities and its ultimate goal and objectives. It is likely that such re-examination and discussion will identify a different set of strategies to be tested at the field sites. It is likely that gaps in the knowledge about the sites relevant to pursuing these strategies will become apparent and will need to be addressed.

It is apparent from the findings of the group that visited KeGo (see attachment 4), and from my discussions with CRES staff, that the suggestions made above and below, apply to both NGOs.

The field teams require immediate strengthening and capacity building. At least four full-time staff need to be assigned and permanently located in each pilot site area. Recruitment of additional members needs to ensure a gender balance so that the team can work effectively with women in the field.

The recruitment or re-assignment of staff for the field teams should follow a predetermined process. This should start with an agreement between the project secretariat and NGO about the terms of reference for positions and the essential and desirable criteria upon which selection is to be based. Ideally, the recruitment process should allow for the selection panel to observe candidates in the field and observe behaviour and assess skills prior to making selections.

Field teams will need to be familiar with the project's goal and objectives and receive training in:

the use of Rapid Rural Appraisal tools for analysing household livelihoods and NTFP resource-use;

gender awareness and analysis;

the use of market analysis and development (MA&D) methods for selecting products and undertaking feasibility studies;

reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

The NTFPRC needs to clarify how its own staff will support the field work at the pilot sites and negotiate these arrangements into the overall plan of work at the pilot sites. The STA should ensure that the project secretariat are aware of the budget lines available for NTFPRC involvement at pilot sites.

The idea of recruiting additional field adviser(s) to assist field teams using additional support from the Royal Netherlands Embassy was raised by IUCN. This idea is a good one. However, field advisors should be able to communicate in Vietnamese, have previous experience using RRA and PRA in rural settings, and be based full-time in the field. Junior experts could provide on-the-job training to field teams on planning, the use of participatory methods, report writing, administration, research and monitoring and evaluation.

Additional recommendations from the group that visited Ke Go:

The following recommendations presented in the separate trip report by Joost Foppes are strongly endorsed.

Monthly workplans should be prepared by field teams according to the annual workplan and sent to all project partners for comment and approval. The project secretariat should amend/ approve these plans in a timely fashion and provide budgets accordingly, on a monthly basis. No new major field activities should be undertaken without prior approval of the project secretariat. Decisions on personnel changes should be approved by the project secretariat.

For each new field activity, the project secretariat should design the methods to be employed, in cooperation with all project partners. Field teams should be properly trained in the new methods before implementing activities. Records of these training workshops should be kept and distributed among all people involved.

The project could record and analyse the recent and rapid changes in forest use in the KeGo area to identify options for participatory NTFP management inside conservation forests.

Firewood is a main product from forests. There are severe fuel wood shortages and people even collect dry leaves and pine needles. The project should consider a special study and response to the firewood situation in the KeGo area.

The cooperative based on medicinal plants in CamMy commune could be a good starting point for examining user groups of medicinal plants and the opportunities for undertaking participatory market research and domestication trials.

Field reports should be written by field teams immediately after each activity (at least two per month) and sent to all project partners without delay. This would assist the project to become a learning institution and an effective agent of change.

Concluding remarks

The big challenges are to:

define a role for the NTFPRC;

orient the work of the NGOs towards more direct NTFP-based forest conservation strategies; and,

enhance the capacities of partners.

The project needs to address these challenges immediately if it is to make better progress in the next six months.

Another IUCN review mission should be organised within six months time to follow-up on how the project secretariat and partners have responded to these challenges and the specific suggestions made in this report.

Andrew W. Ingles

Head, Regional Forest & Monitoring and Evaluation Programmes

S&SE Asia

Appendix Four Monitoring and evaluation for the Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project Vietnam

Bill Jackson, Nguyen Van San and Harry van der Linde

November 1999

IUCN - The World Conservation Union

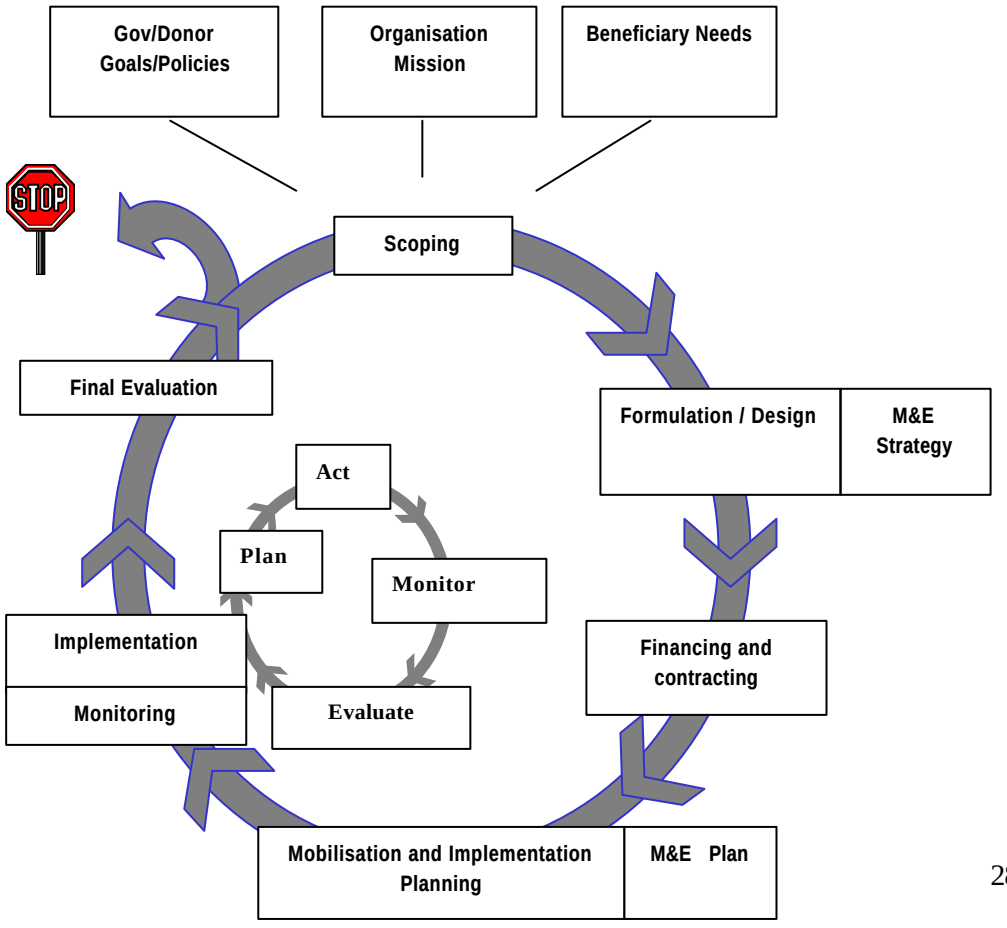
Introduction and purpose of this paper

This paper provides some thoughts on developing an approach for monitoring and evaluating the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project in Vietnam. It begins by describing the project cycle and the role of the logical framework approach. It then focuses on action research as a potential model for the project. The paper then describes some of the principles of monitoring and evaluating projects

The Project Cycle

The life cycle of most conservation and development projects involves a series of stages from scoping, through design, to mobilisation and implementation and on to wrap up (Figure 1). Ideally, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should play a crucial role in guiding the project during the implementation stage and at the end of the project to capture lessons and assist with the design of future projects and activities. In reality, M&E are often seen as something done by external 'experts' to a project at the end of the project cycle. This paper argues that M&E needs to be incorporated fully into the project cycle and be a key role for all project partners.

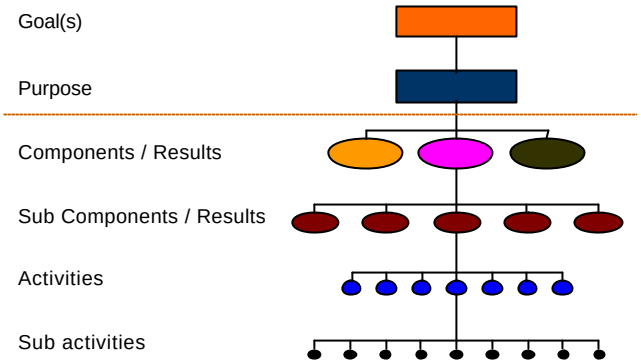
Figure 1 The project cycle (Woodhill, 1999)



Adapted from Materials Developed by ITAD

Most conservation and development projects are designed with at least some use of the **logical framework** (or logframe) approach. Used correctly, logframes provide a structured, logical approach to identifying key problems, setting priorities and outlining the intended results and activities of a project. They can provide a sound mechanism for developing a project concept into a comprehensive project design document (Jackson, 1999) and enable M&E. In the simplest form, the logframe approach is an **ends – means hierarchy** (Figure 2) that indicates a logical sequence of means (activities, outputs and results) towards and end (goal).

Figure 2 An objective hierarchy (Woodhill, 1999)



The objective hierarchy is usually not presented as a chart as shown in Figure 2, but appears as text (goals, purpose etc) in the project document and often as a logframe table (Figure 3) where the objectives, purpose, outputs/results and activities are shown in columns and rows in a matrix. The logframe table emphasises the logical hierarchy of goals, purpose, results and activities, outlines the indicators that are needed to show progress towards achieving the goal, means of verifying the indicators and the assumptions behind each level of action in the project. The numbers shown in Figure 3 represent the order in which a logframe matrix is normally completed.

Determining the assumptions behind a project is often overlooked. Yet it is often the level of attention to assumptions (or external factors) that determines the success of the project. Often it is just as important for project partners to monitor and re-evaluate assumptions as the project develops as it is to monitor activities and outputs. For example, projects that focuses on raising awareness often have two major (and occasionally untested) assumptions – first, that the target beneficiaries of the project are unaware of the key issues and they need to be informed and second, that improved awareness will result in changed behaviour towards conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Often, both of these assumptions prove to be false – target beneficiaries are often very aware of the adverse impacts of their actions on nature conservation and it is not lack of knowledge or awareness that precludes them from altering their practices.

Figure 3 The logical framework matrix (Jackson 1998)

Objectives/activities	**Indicators**	**Means of verification**	**Assumptions**
1 Overall Objectives	15 Indicators	16 Means of verification	8 Assumptions
2 Project Purpose	13 Indicators	14 Means of verification	7 Assumptions
3 Results	11 Indicators	12 Means of verification	6 Assumptions
4 Activities	9 Means and Indicators	10 Costs and Means of verification	5 Assumptions

Action research for projects

In many conservation and development projects it is difficult to determine the correct assumptions, goals, purposes, results and actions during the design phase because the situation that the project is dealing with is surrounded by considerable uncertainty. The logframe approach can often create serious implementation problems for conservation and development projects that hope to learn and adapt as the y proceed because the nature of the problem and the solutions are pre-determined at the beginning of the project. In many cases a more adaptive approach that allows the project to learn and adjust as it develops is a more suitable approach. In such cases it is important to strike a balance between maintaining a focus and being adaptive. The role of the project advisory group or committee is critical in this situation, but the capacity of the committee to make sound decisions on project direction is influenced by the quality of the M&E system.

Fisher and Jackson (1998) suggest that **action research** provides a learning based approach to dealing with complex situations where people don't really know where to start or what to do next. Action research[1] is a term that is used to describe an approach that involves the deliberate interlinking of learning (or research) and action in an iterative process or 'cycle'- research informs action, reflection on the outcomes of action directs further research. A cycle that continues until a result is obtained or the cycle is abandoned. For conservation and development projects, such as the Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project, an action research approach would involve research to increase understanding on the part of the researcher or the client, or both and action to bring about change in the target communities and organisations and r organisation or program (see Dick 1993: 2).

As the project moves through the action research cycle, hypotheses and theories can be modified, models and methods tested, adjusted and or abandoned and planned interventions can be altered as new knowledge emerges. Examples of the cyclical process of action research is shown in Figure 4 and 5.

Action research gains its rigour from the cyclical process of observation, reflection, planning and action and by allowing the researcher to constantly challenge assumptions as the process is undertaken. Each loop of the cycle represents a refinement in knowledge and a progression in action. If the process is not rigorous, the lack of appropriate action following intervention should indicate that the process is being incorrectly followed.

Figure 4 The action research cycle (Checkland 1992)

[1] Action research and participatory action research are similar if not identical approaches.

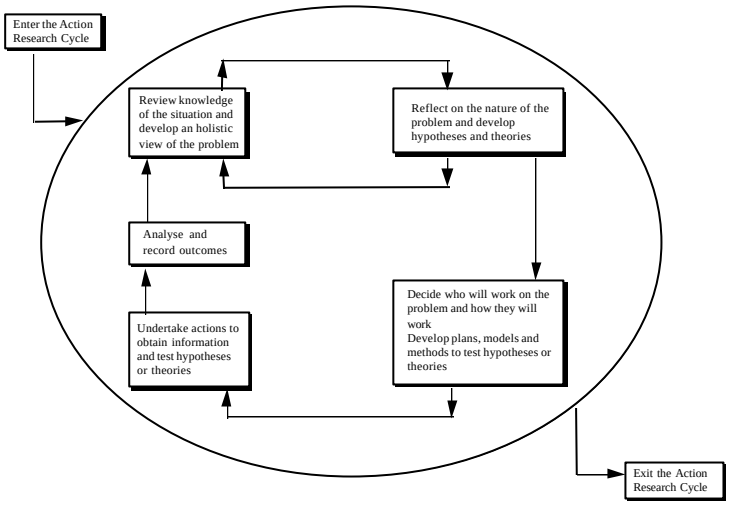
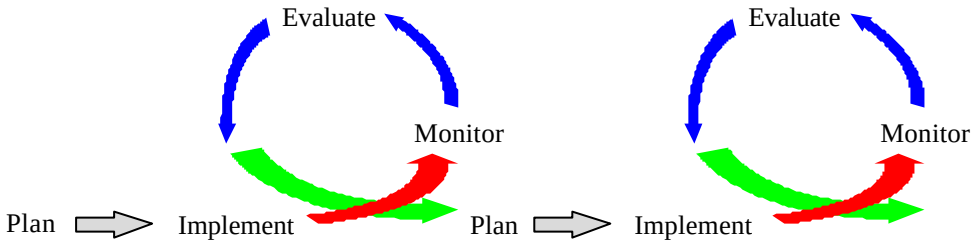


Figure 5 The iterative planning cycle



Techniques for Project Monitoring and Evaluating

Project evaluation can be undertaken towards the end of the project cycle (a summative approach), as an ongoing process during the project (a formative approach), or a combination of these approaches. Summative evaluation usually involves a baseline study and monitoring of indicators to measure change (Fisher at al., 1996). Such an approach helps to ensure that lessons have been learned and to assess whether the donors' investment has been worthwhile. However, summative evaluation has a number of limitations including:

- Detailed identification of baseline indicators presents problems as it is difficult to account for unintended consequences;
- Does not help with the recognition of problems during implementation and in particular can result in loss of opportunities to maximise benefits and minimise unintended consequences;
- Cannot guarantee that you will be able to identify causal linkages between activity and change. (Fisher at al., 1996).
- A reliance on external evaluators so does not promote local ownership or skills.

Ongoing or formative evaluation is concerned with identifying issues as they emerge and taking corrective or compensatory action to build on success and minimise negative consequences (Fisher at al., 1996). It also helps projects to build skills in recognising problems and opportunities and reduces dependency on outsiders to identify problems and suggest solutions. In most instances, a combination of formative and summative evaluation is most appropriate for conservation and development projects.

Baseline surveys

Whether a summative, formative, or combined approach is used, an effective evaluation requires a baseline survey. Developing a baseline can be difficult as it is impossible to predict all the possible

outcomes of a project at the design stage. However, it is usually possible to identify broad areas that will reflect on the extent to which the project or programme has achieved its broad purpose. A case study approach is often most suited to developing a baseline for a collaborative management project.

Case studies

A case study approach involves selecting a set of pilot villages from within the project area, undertaking a baseline study for each pilot village and the surrounding natural resources and using the same sites as the basis for ongoing monitoring. Case studies at the village level are best undertaken in collaboration with local people. This calls for the use of participatory approaches. Such approaches are referred to by a variety of names including Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) or more simply as Participatory Approaches

The following example of a format for a case study approach was adapted from Fisher at al., (1996). A village profile should be prepared for each pilot (case study) site. Because the approach is meant to be participatory it is essential that the villagers in the selected village agree to the selection. The case study comprises a written document and maps, it is not a computer data base. Information is largely collected through participatory techniques. The indicators can be a mix of local village-level indicators and indicators that the project considers are relevant to their work. The village profile should be completed by the field team.

The village profile format follows a list of topic headings. It is not a questionnaire, but rather a checklist of the minimum information required. Field teams should ask any additional information that they feel is relevant. They should include opinions about issues as well as factual information. The contents of the village profile should be discussed by the field team during preparation. The village profile should be kept in a box file within which field reports on village visits, maps and other information, such as photographs and village plans are also kept.

Relevant information should be added to the profile as appropriate; for example, information from maps, local government records, records held government agencies, national records (for example census data), records and local knowledge of NGOs and reports from surveys and studies.

A sufficient number of case studies is necessary to cover the range of (socio-economic and biophysical) conditions that occur within the area, and to provide opportunities for comparisons between case studies.

An Example of a Village Profile (from Fisher at al., 1996)

Author and date of completion of village profile

Village name and location (administrative address): *Photographs, maps, diagrams.*

General description *Dates and reasons for establishing the village: access, political boundaries, distances to towns and other villages, land forms and elevation, village maps (participatory maps and social maps), land use maps.*

Infrastructure and development projects *Existing infrastructure and services (roads, toilets, irrigation etc), villagers' expressed needs. Other development projects or prior assistance.*

Demography *Population; number of households; names and resident ethnic groups; languages spoken; breakdown of population by gender and age. Any indications of the population trends and significant in or out migration (by gender and age).*

Health: *Hygiene, sanitation practices, status of nutrition, common illnesses (e.g. malaria). Access to health services.*

Education *Access to education, distance to school, grades available, number of students (female/,male), number of teachers. Any informal education activities or adult literacy classes.*

Village Organisation *Village organisation and leadership. The process of decision making for village rules, regulation and activities.*

Economic activities:

Livestock *Types and numbers of livestock, comments on management, marketing and consumption.*

Agriculture *Types of crops, types and areas under cultivation, crop deficit or surpluses for sale.*

Fisheries *Location and type of area fished. Species caught by numbers. Sales and local consumption of fish, fresh water and marine products.*

Forests/Woodlands *Location , type and area of woodlands and forests. Products obtained, type and volume. Management practices. Ranking of usage and management by various stakeholders. Use and sale of products.*

Wage Labour *Inside village and outside village*

Labour *Availability of labour, major labour requirements, division of labour by gender and age, seasonal calendar, labour exchange relationships*

Wealth ranking *Results of wealth ranking exercises, including criteria used.*

Marketing systems, traders and exchange relationships *Who are the traders who obtain products (particularly products from natural resources) from the villagers?*

Land, tree, forest and fisheries tenure *What arrangements exist to regulate access to agricultural lands, fisheries and forest products.*

Reasons for selecting the village *An explicit statement of the reasons for selecting the village*

Target groups *Specify particular target groups*

Threats to socio-economic success *Are there any potential factors identified on the field visits which are likely to lead to undesirable impacts on the villagers or sub-groups of villagers in terms of well-being, equity and exposure to risk?*

Developing a monitoring and evaluation strategy

An effective monitoring and evaluation strategy involves specifying **what** is going to be evaluated, deciding on the level of detail that the evaluation is concerned with and establishing procedures for collecting, analysing and then communicating information to interested parties. Key questions to be asked when developing an M&E strategy include:

- Who is going to make the evaluation?
- Who to collaborate with? (resource users, extension agents, local governments, NGOs, business people?);
- What indicators will be used?
- What tools and methods will be used for collecting and analysing information?
- What resources are available for monitoring indicators? (human resources, money);
- When will the monitoring be done? (timing and frequency).

It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to suggest details of how the Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products Project should monitor and evaluate its progress and impact. However, we recommend that the project consider the systems assessment method (SAM) developed by IUCN and IDRC as one possible approach. SAM involves the following six stage cycle:

1. ***Define the system and goals***. The system consists of the people and ecosystem of the area to be assessed. The goals encapsulate a vision of sustainable development and provide the basis for deciding what the assessment will measure.

2. ***Identify issues and objectives***. Issues are key subjects or concerns—features of human society and the ecosystem that must be considered to get an adequate sense of their condition. Objectives make the goals more specific.

3. ***Choose indicators and performance criteria***. Indicators are measurable and representative aspects of an issue. Performance criteria are standards of achievement for each indicator.

4. ***Measure and map the indicators***. Indicator results are recorded in their original measurements, given scores on the basis of the performance criteria, and mapped.

5. ***Combine the indicators***. Indicator scores are combined up the hierarchy: indicators into sub-issue indices; sub-issue indices into issue indices; issue indices into dimension indices; and dimension indices into subsystem indices (separate indices for people and the ecosystem).

6. ***Map the indices and review results***. Indices are mapped to give a visual reading of results and to reveal the big picture and patterns of performance. The review links the assessment to action by analyzing the patterns and the data behind them to suggest what actions are needed and where. The review also provides the diagnosis for the design of programs and projects.

The SAM approach can show:

- Condition and trend of people.
- Condition and trend of the ecosystem.
- Overall wellbeing.
- Progress toward sustainable development.
- Condition and trend of major components (health, economy, land, species diversity, etc.).
- Issues where performance is weakest (or strongest).
- Key relationships, such as benefits from resource sectors per unit of ecosystem stress.
- Priority information gaps.

Developing Indicators

Developing suitable indicators is often one of the most difficult tasks for project partners. There is often a tendency to include large numbers of indicators on the assumption that more information is better than less information. Nevertheless, without a good set of indicators, it is impossible to evaluate the project. Generally, a set of indicators is needed for each result (output) and activity of the project. Indicators should be 'SMART':

Specific	An indicator must be capable of picking up changes over the time period that we are interested in
Measurable	An indicator must be able to be measured in either quantitative or qualitative terms
Achievable	An indicator should be achievable in terms of finances, equipment, skills and time available
Realistic	An indicator should reflect what we are trying to measure in an accurate way
Timebound	An indicator should be able to provide information in a timely manner

Prescott-Allen (1997) differentiates between performance indicators and descriptive indicators. Performance indicators measure the achievement of objectives. For example, the % annual change in forest area; life expectancy at birth. Descriptive indicators measure phenomena that may influence objectives but which the objectives are not expected to change. For example, national monthly rainfall index; ethnic composition of population. He provides the following details about indicators:

- Performance indicators measure results and responses.
- Results are more convincing indicators than responses.
- The more direct the indicator the more reliable it will be.
- Conditions or states are the most direct measures of results.
- Pressures are strong substitutes for conditions/states.
- Responses are weak substitutes for conditions/states.
- He continues, a high quality performance indicator:
- Relates to an explicit objective.
- Accurately and unambiguously reflects the degree to which the objective is met.
- Is measurable.
- Depends on data that are either readily available or obtainable at reasonable cost.
- Is analytically sound and uses standardized measurement wherever possible to permit comparison.
- Shows trends over time and is responsive to changes in conditions and sensitive to differences between places and groups of people.

Means of Verification

Once indicators have been developed, the source of the information and means of collection (means of verification (MOV)) should be established for each indicator. An MOV should test whether or not an indicator can be realistically measured at the expense of a reasonable amount of time, money and effort. The MOV should specify:

- The format in which the information should be made available (e.g. reports, records, research findings, publications).
- Who should provide the information.
- How regularly it should be provided (adapted from ITAD, 1996).

The task of developing indicators is often grossly oversimplified and can be a very time consuming task. For many objectives, simple quantitative indicators that can be quickly and easily monitored do just not exist.

References

Checkland, P (1992) From Framework through Experience to Learning: the essential nature of Action Research. In Information Systems Research: Contemporary Approaches and Emergent Traditions. Eds. Missen, H.E. Klein, H.K. and Hirschheim, P. Amsterdam, Elsevier.

ITAD Ltd (1996) “the logical framework approach - a project management tool”.

IUCN (1999) The System Assessment Method (SAM). IUCN Gland Switzerland.

Prescott-Allen R. (1997) The Barometer of Sustainability. IUCN Switzerland.

Annex 1 Gender analysis

Indicators should show who is benefiting from the project and allow for evaluation of the intended and unintended impacts of the project on various social groups and stakeholders. This requires the collection of information separately for men and women, for different ethnic groupings, for different age groupings (children, adults, elderly) and for different economic (rich, poor) and social groupings (agriculturalists, pastoralists, businesses).

One participatory tool that is of particular importance to monitoring and evaluation of collaborative management is gender analysis. Gender refers to a dynamic, historically and culturally determined social construct created by men and women to define their relationships with each other and with their environment. FAO (1995) describe gender analysis as a practical tool for examining community diversity and the implications of this diversity for development. It focuses on the activities and resources of both women and men, clarifying where they differ and where they complement each other. Because women and men can use different natural resources or the same resources in different ways their interests and needs can be quite different.

Gender is only one of many important social characteristics - along with ethnicity, race, caste, class, age and occupation. These characteristics should be included in gender analysis. It is important to remember however, that gender cuts across all the others. Whatever their class or ethnicity, women and men have different roles, responsibilities, resources, constraints and opportunities - because of gender. Therefore, information is not precise enough for development projects unless it is disaggregated by gender. This includes information about women and men's ecosystem management activities.

Gender analysis contributes to positive social impacts of forestry development

Projects which are deemed successful in environmental terms may have components which result in undesired social changes or trends. Everyone recognises that deforestation reduces people's access to forest foods, building materials, fuel wood, medicinal plants and wildlife, or that over-fishing results in depleted fish resources. This creates hardships for everyone, but since women are often responsible for more subsistence-related activities than are men, women's burdens may be substantially increased if their access to natural resources is jeopardised. This means that their ability to contribute to other production activities may be diminished.

Projects which aim to address both environmental and social needs require gender-disaggregated information to determine who does what - women or men or both - and therefore who benefits or loses when development intervenes.

Gender analysis contributes to project success

A second reason for examining gender roles in each specific context is to avoid project failure. Projects which aim to improve the livelihood of local people must take into account gender-based divisions of labour, gender-based access to resources and control over those resources. Otherwise, decisions may be based on mistaken assumptions. Gender-disaggregated information reveals the relationship between people and the environment, how women use and manage natural resources, how men use and manage natural resources, and the importance of these activities for subsistence and income. Without such information, ecosystem management projects may not be appropriately designed and may result in negative impacts or failure to reach objectives.

Gender-disaggregated information also reveals what rural women and men know and what they need. Women and men are both sources of ecosystem knowledge and sustainable resource management practices, but each may be knowledgeable about different species and practices, according to their activities. Building on local knowledge is a way to enhance the success of ecosystem management projects.

Gender analysis helps make efficient use of scarce resources

A third reason for using gender analysis is that when the roles of women and men are incorrectly assumed or overlooked, achievement of development objectives can be delayed. Although the programs can sometimes be salvaged, millions of development dollars may be lost in the process of analysing what went wrong and discovering the means to correct it.

Whether women, or men, or both, should be participants in specific ecosystem management activities is a contextual question. The answer depends on the roles and priorities of the women and men in specific locations.

Steps in a Gender Analysis Framework

The gender analysis framework suggested by FAO is a participatory process of analysing the different roles of women and men and how this effects planning and implementation of development programs. The analysis is done by people in the community, and facilitated by a field worker, so that the implications can be discussed and explored within the community.

The framework consists of four step:

1. Identify the physical, social, economic and political patterns which effect ecosystem management in the area, listing the supports and constraints, and answering the questions *What is getting better?* and *what is getting worse*?
2. Identify women's and men's activities and roles, answering the question *Who does what?*
3. Identify women's and men's access to and control over resources, answering the questions *Who has what?* and *who needs what?* and
4. Identify the forestry program actions needed, answering the question *What should be done to close the gaps between what women and men need and what the project delivers?*

The framework allows you to organise and analyse information so that you can develop strategies to increase women's and men's participation and benefits, or determine whether existing project activities are meeting the needs of both men and women and whether modifications are necessary - the framework can help in determining what modifications to make. Monitoring and evaluation provides an excellent opportunity to introduce gender analysis to the project planning cycle.

Women's involvement in development can be facilitated by:

- Getting opinions on problems and solutions from both women and men. Always remember to ask "What do the women think?", "What do the men think?" and "How can the needs of both women and men be met?"
- Approaching and contacting women through male leaders and through women who are acceptable and easily accessible to them: the older, the wiser, the skilled and respected.
- Meeting with women in places where they are comfortable: in the home; in the field; at the village well; or in places where they gather firewood, fodder and leaf-litter, rather than only in public meetings.
- Identifying women who have credibility and then training and helping such women develop their skills as agents of change. Let these women guide the work and take messages across to the other people.
- Discussing with both men and women, the value of women's knowledge and experience and the importance of involving them in decision making.

adapted from UNICEF/UNFPA - Nepal (1985)

Books, papers and manuals to look for

GENESYS (1994) *Gender and Sustainable Development: A Training Manual*. GENESYS - a project for the United States Agency for International Development Office of Women in Development (USAID/G/R&D/WID)

Williams, S., Seed, J. and Mwau, A. (1994) *The Oxfam Gender Training Manual*, Oxfam (UK and Ireland), Oxford, UK.

Wilde, V.L. and Vainio-Mattila, A. (1995) *Gender Analysis and Forestry*, FAO, Rome, Italy.