

Strategic Framework 2007–2011

Conservation for Sustainable Livelihoods in Lao PDR – Refreshed Thinking



IUCN Lao PDR Country Office

Governance, Protected Areas, Agrobiodiversity and *Nam* (water resources),
IUCN's ecosystems and livelihoods approach in Lao PDR

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together states, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and some 10,000 scientists and experts in its six commissions from 181 countries, in a unique worldwide partnership. The IUCN Secretariat comprises more than 1,000 staff in offices covering 42 countries around the world.

In 1969, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic became a state member of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and in 1992 the IUCN Lao PDR Country Office was established. Since its beginnings, the office has been drawing on its in-country experiences and global network to offer key technical and knowledge-based support to the Government on conservation and livelihood issues.

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Lao PDR Country Office
082/01 Fa Ngum Road
PO Box 4340
Vientiane, Lao PDR
Tel: +856 21 216127
Email: info@iucnlao.org
www.iucn.org/places/asia

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Foreword

Lao PDR is a beautiful country of mountains, forests, fields and rivers. Visitors coming to this 'green jewel' of the Mekong often comment on its tranquility, especially when compared to its neighbors. But what of the future? As the *Strategic Framework* notes, Lao PDR is the *center* of the Mekong region, and *links* the countries it borders – Thailand, Viet Nam, China, Cambodia and Myanmar. As the national economies in the Mekong region continue to grow and become more integrated, it is through Lao PDR that an increasing portion of economic trade and commerce will occur.

And Lao PDR is itself experiencing rapid rural economic change. While still one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, its annual growth rate in recent years has been close to 7%. Lao PDR is committed to reaching its ambitious targets for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Some of the key targets for poverty and health include: halve poverty and hunger, enroll 98% of all children (both girls and boys) in primary school, and reduce the infant mortality rate from 134/1000 in 1990 to 45/1000 in 2015. The targets for *Environmental Sustainability* (Goal 7) for forests and biodiversity are still under consideration by the government. While agriculture continues to be the major sector of the economy, the nature of agriculture is in some areas changing from small rice fields to plantations of industrial trees such as rubber, eucalyptus and palm oil. There has been major foreign investment in hydropower and investment in the mining sector is growing rapidly. The Lao PDR of the future will be very different from that of today. How to achieve the MDG goals and transform its economy, while at the same time ensuring that its natural resources are sustainably managed is the challenge that Lao PDR is facing.

It is in response to this challenge that IUCN Lao PDR has prepared this *Strategic Framework 2007-2011*. The framework builds on a long term partnership of close collaboration between IUCN and the Lao PDR that began in 1992 with the opening of the IUCN Lao PDR office in Vientiane. This partnership entered a new phase in 2001 when, through a collaborative process with the government, a five year Strategic Framework for IUCN's Programme in Lao PDR, *Conservation for Sustainable Livelihoods*, was developed and implemented. A new framework, *Conservation for Sustainable Livelihoods in Lao PDR – Refreshed Thinking*, has now been prepared.

Through a collaborative process of consultations and workshops with Government, NGOs, national institutions, and international organizations, the current strategy reflects our continuing commitment to partnership, capacity building, dialogue, participatory processes, and integration of conservation and development objectives. This new strategy calls on us to *refresh our thinking* in order to boldly address the emerging economic and environmental pressures. IUCN welcomes the opportunity to continue to work in partnership with the Government and people of Lao PDR in identifying new approaches, *refreshed* thinking, that will support sustainable development by integrating both environmental and economic objectives.

I am very pleased with the direction in which our programme in Lao PDR is moving, its continuing strong partnership with the Government and the new partnerships it is building for the future. IUCN continues its commitment to assisting Lao PDR in conserving its natural resources for future generations while bringing benefits to those in poverty today.

Katherine Warner, Ph.D.
Country Group 1, Head

Abbreviations and acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDS	Centre for Environment and Development Studies
CITES	Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species
COPs	Conventions of the Parties
CPI	Committee for Planning and Investment
DoE	Department of Environment
DoF	Department of Forestry
DFRC	Division of Forest Resource Conservation
ELG	Ecosystems and Livelihoods Groups
EPF	Environment Protection Fund
ERI	Environment Research Institute
FoF	Faculty of Forestry
FoS	Faculty of Science
FS2020	Forestry Strategy to the Year 2020 of the Lao PDR
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
IUCN Lao PDR	The World Conservation Union Lao PDR Country Office
KEG	Knowledge, Empowerment and Governance
NLMA	National Land Management Authority
Lao PDR	Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic
LAReC	Living Aquatic Resource and Research Centre
LNCCI	Lao Chamber of Commerce and Industry
LNMC	Lao National Mekong Commission
LNTA	Lao National Tourism Administration
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MEA	Multilateral Environment Agreements
MoCI	Ministry of Commerce and Industry
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute
NMLA	National Land Management Authority
NBS	National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Action Plan to 2010
NEC	National Environment Committee
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy 2020
NPA	National Protected Area
NTFP	Non-timber forest product
NUoL	National University of Laos
Ramsar	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
SSC	Species Survival Commission
STEA	Science, Technology and Environment Agency
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WANI	Water and Nature Initiative
WB	World Bank
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Areas
WCD	World Commission on Dams
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WRCC	Water Resources Coordination Committee
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature
WWRP	Water and Water Resources Policy

Executive summary

In the fifteen years since the opening of the Country Office of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Lao PDR much progress has been made in strengthening the institutional, technical and knowledge foundations for conservation of Lao PDR's biological diversity and natural resources. However, conservation of the natural assets of the Lao PDR remains an undeniable priority for the nation. The end of the 2001–2006 period of IUCN Lao PDR programming presents a valuable opportunity to reassess IUCN Lao PDR's strategy in support of this priority, incorporating new understanding, tools and approaches emerging from experience at the local, regional and global levels.

In 2006, IUCN Lao PDR undertook a series of extensive strategic planning exercises, consisting of critical internal reflection and extensive external consultation with partners and stakeholders. The resulting programme of refreshed thinking for 2007–2011 is founded on three basic operational principles: 1) long-term partnerships; 2) Knowledge, Empowerment and Governance; and 3) responsiveness. Through this process, IUCN Lao PDR has developed a set of clear directions to address key challenges – including undervalued resources, increasing pressures on these resources and insufficient governance structures to effectively meet these rising challenges – and provide necessary support to Lao PDR partners. Guided by a **livelihoods approach to conservation**, a commitment to the poorest groups in society and the ecosystems upon which they depend, the 2007–2011 strategy consists of four core programme themes:

1. **Governance**, lying at the centre of the programme, represents IUCN Lao PDR's continuing efforts to build the capacity of Lao PDR institutions – at many levels and across the range of stakeholders – to achieve national conservation and development goals. The governance focus embodies a commitment to decentralised decision making, integrated approaches and inclusive and accountable decision making.
2. **Protected areas** and the natural resources they hold are key to livelihoods and development. Renewing its focus on protected area management, IUCN Lao PDR will assist in clarifying Lao PDR's protected area system using IUCN's protected areas categories, and seek to increase management effectiveness, enhance conservation at realistic scales, and contribute to poverty reduction at the community level in ways appropriate to existing capacities.
3. **Agrobiodiversity** is the variety of living things contributing to the sustainability of food and agriculture resources, upon which local livelihoods are highly dependent. IUCN Lao PDR is committed to increasing knowledge, demonstrating wise use and institutionalising planning processes at multiple levels in the areas of non-timber forest products, plantations and landscape-scale activities.
4. **Nam: water, wetlands and watersheds** activities are holistic in scope, focusing on water-based and wet landscapes and associated resources, in addition to bodies of water and their multiple uses. Using its convening power and position as a neutral body, IUCN Lao PDR will continue its *Nam* work by convening diverse stakeholders to the table to improve understanding of this resource, enhance effective governance and raise awareness of the rising pressures on Lao PDR's water resources.

1. Introduction

Geographically located in the heart of Southeast Asia, the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is bordered by China, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Viet Nam. Lao PDR's comparatively undeveloped natural environment, along with its small population of approximately 6.5 million, propounds the myth of Lao PDR as an undiscovered treasure in the region.

Despite the common perception of Lao PDR as protected by isolation, the country has begun to think of itself as *land-linked* rather than *land-locked*. Lao PDR is taking part in the trends of integration and cooperation that have come to define the mainland Southeast Asia region. This means that the challenges are mounting for the ability of the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) to manage its natural heritage and promote the wellbeing of its people. Yet the GoL has made encouraging progress in improving the overall national framework for conservation and development. In addition to the enabling policy and legal environment, the GoL is seriously considering its obligations and opportunities under the international environmental agreements to which it is party.

In terms of the natural environment, Lao PDR is arguably the keystone of the region. This is particularly true with regards to biological diversity, forest cover and water resources. Lao PDR's environmental endowments represent a heritage of critical natural, cultural and economic values at the regional and global level. The natural resource base will continue to be the backbone of the Lao economy for the foreseeable future, and this same dependence will place enormous pressures on the integrity of Lao PDR's ecosystems.

Lao PDR currently possesses one of the highest levels of poverty in the world and is typified by intense human dependence on biodiversity and natural resources for livelihoods, such as the provision of fish and aquatic resources that comprise up to 90% of locals' diets, and the reliance on non-timber forest products (NTFP), which account for an estimated 30% of Lao PDR's Gross National Product (Emerton 2005).

In 2001, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Lao PDR Country Office published a *Conservation for Sustainable Livelihoods Strategic Framework* in collaboration with local partners, with the aim of contributing to Lao PDR's development in a socially equitable and ecologically sustainable way. IUCN Lao PDR has elaborated on this new thinking – including areas of substantive work, collaborative partnerships, institutional strengthening and the communication of ideas – in the current *Strategic Framework 2007–2011*. This document is the product of a critical review of IUCN Lao PDR's past work, intensive consultation with present and potential partners, and consideration of IUCN's comparative advantage as an organization networking across the local, regional and global levels.

The GoL continues to express support for an ambitious IUCN Lao PDR programme. It is the aim of this document to provide a platform for further discussion with partners and stakeholders, and serve as a reference point for collaborations over the coming five years. At the same time, it should provide a guide for IUCN Lao PDR country office's internal planning and monitoring activities in the country.

2. IUCN Lao PDR's refreshed thinking 2007–2011

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Lao PDR Country Office falls within IUCN Country Group 1, a coordination unit of the Union in Southeast Asia that is managed from Hanoi, under the umbrella of the global World Conservation Union (IUCN) headquartered in Gland, Switzerland (further background information available in Annex 1). As such, IUCN's work in Lao PDR supports and contributes to the IUCN global mission:

To influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that the use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

IUCN Lao PDR's refreshed thinking confirms its commitment to the overarching Lao programme goal:

To ensure that the ecosystems and natural resources of Lao PDR are effectively conserved and sustainably utilised in an equitable manner that contributes to the socio-economic development of the country.

The current refreshed thinking guides IUCN Lao PDR's strategic way forward in 2007–2011. It reflects IUCN Lao PDR's understanding of its past roles and vision for the future:

- Renewing IUCN Lao PDR's commitment to livelihoods and the idea of conservation for sustainable livelihoods;
- Acknowledging and building on the World Conservation Union's history of assisting Lao PDR in its conservation efforts; and
- Reassessing and modernising how IUCN Lao PDR delivers on future conservation work to meet the vision of understood, valued and well-managed natural resources that fulfil their potential to equitably improve the livelihoods of all Lao people.

2.1 IUCN Lao PDR: conservation for sustainable livelihoods

Key to IUCN Lao PDR's reflection is the conservation for livelihoods approach:

A concern with the poorest groups in society ...especially through minimising the negative impacts of conservation on the poor and reducing the incidence of poverty through sustainable and equitable ecosystem conservation and use. (IUCN Asia 2003)

In 2002 IUCN Lao PDR's five-year Strategic Framework, *Conservation for Sustainable Livelihoods*, presented a change in thinking towards the incorporation of a concern for livelihoods in natural resource management and the role conservation plays in providing for people. IUCN Lao PDR's shift was at the forefront of an evolving vision throughout IUCN Asia and global programmes. IUCN Lao PDR's work over the next five years will build upon this work, further using the concept in policy and implementation.

2.2 Lessons learnt during 2002–2006

The IUCN Lao PDR *Strategic Framework 2007–2011* aims to build on successes, fill in gaps, and strategically integrate and streamline key programme areas from its work under IUCN Lao PDR's previous Strategic Framework. Critical reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of this work over the course of the strategic planning process produced the following lessons learned:

- In addition to continued support to its traditional government partners, IUCN Lao PDR's governance work endeavours to increasingly engage with a broader set of actors, including educational institutions, non-profit organizations and the private sector;
- While protected areas' work has yielded many achievements, it does not meet rising management demands nor successfully addresses increasing pressures; a refreshed approach is needed;
- IUCN's main role as an organization is to support its partners by identifying issues and facilitating the overall delivery of conservation and livelihoods results; IUCN Lao PDR has recognised the need to direct resources into the conservation of flora or *Agrobiodiversity* for sustainable livelihoods and enhanced ecosystem functions; and
- Some of IUCN Lao PDR and the Asia regional programme's best work has been in convening multi-stakeholder dialogue about water, wetlands and watershed pressures in Lao PDR and the mainland Southeast Asia region; using its convening power and position as a neutral body, IUCN Lao PDR should continue to engage diverse stakeholders in dialogue, extending its work to create important linkages between social sectors.

IUCN Lao PDR's reflection has drawn significantly on insights and recommendations from partners. Stakeholder consultations were held between August and December 2006 to solicit feedback and concrete inputs regarding areas of substantive engagement, approaches to partnership, strategies for policy dialogue and information sharing.

This reflection has resulted in a reorganization of IUCN Lao PDR's operational objectives and activities, in response to recent developments in the policy framework of Lao PDR and increasingly clear articulations of partner priorities.

2.3 Refreshed thinking and approaches

IUCN Lao PDR's approach for the coming 2007–2011 period is founded on three basic operational principles:

1. *Long-term partnerships* that help build society's ability to address conservation and livelihood issues—Linked to this principle is IUCN Lao PDR's commitment to participatory processes and to the idea of mutual reinforcement - that all sectors in society mobilise diverse constituencies to agree on common goals and collaborate towards realising them;
2. *Knowledge, Empowerment and Governance (KEG)* for conservation and sustainable use—This is a core strategy for IUCN's global programme and is based on the assumption that when knowledge is available and people and institutions are empowered to use it, they can participate more effectively in decision making to improve laws, policies, instruments and institutions; and
3. Commitment to acting as a *responsive* institution—Having established its position in Lao PDR with key partners and stakeholders, IUCN Lao PDR is now well placed to approach emerging environmental and development challenges in Lao PDR in a responsive, proactive and timely manner.

As part of its refreshed thinking, IUCN Lao PDR has begun to renew its relationships in a new strategic light, with other international non-governmental organizations in Lao PDR, as well as the donor community. These partnerships are crucial parts of scaling up experiences, and increasing the effectiveness of policy messages. Strategic partnerships with international non-governmental organisations will enable IUCN Lao PDR to leverage appropriate technical and policy inputs to the new programme. Importantly, IUCN Lao PDR has also benefited from renewed framework support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), and IUCN Lao PDR will use the opportunity of this new Strategic Framework to pursue options for similar agreements with other bilateral donors.

In addition to its strategic partnerships within Lao PDR, the Country Office will draw on the resources and expertise housed in the IUCN network and on the Ecosystems and Livelihoods Groups (ELG) of the Asia Regional Office. Technical support and a rich base of expertise in diverse country situations within and beyond the Asia region will be leveraged in support of IUCN Lao PDR's programme.

Furthermore, IUCN Lao PDR's refreshed thinking places high importance on the trans-boundary nature of many of the conservation and development challenges the country faces. Direct involvement in trans-boundary and regional initiatives, and support to partners to participate in such activities, are important components of IUCN Lao PDR's programme.

3. The 2007–2011 thematic programme for IUCN Lao PDR

This Strategic Framework outlines a set of thematic programmes and introduces areas of cooperation with partners. The process of stakeholder consultation is summarised in Annex 2.

While IUCN Lao PDR's programmatic goal remains unchanged, recent programme work has revealed that one of the greatest challenges for the country office in the coming years will be how it continues to implement its 'conservation for livelihood' approach.

IUCN Lao PDR, together with its key partners, has developed an integrated programme of four core areas of work—*Governance, Protected Areas, Agrobiodiversity, and Nam: Water, Wetlands and Watersheds*—placed within the overall context of a livelihoods approach. *Governance* lies at the centre of the 2007–2011 programme, integrated within each of the other three thematic programmes. At the same time, *Governance* is treated as a distinct area of programmatic activity. This position reflects IUCN Lao PDR's commitment to ongoing achievements in generating and disseminating knowledge, empowering diverse groups within society and strengthening overall governance within a variety of sectors in Lao PDR.

IUCN Lao PDR's programmatic themes and objectives are summarised below:

Governance

- Enhanced and sustained coordination among government agencies on key policy and implementation issues (related to *Protected Areas, Agrobiodiversity* and *Nam*);
- Meaningful involvement of civil society organizations and the private sector in environmental decision making;
- Policy processes that draw on multiple sources of scientific information; and
- Transparent and inclusive implementation of selected Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and regional cooperation.

Protected areas

- Effective national protected area (NPA) system that addresses the particular conservation needs of each NPA and supports the meaningful involvement of local communities;
- Deepened understanding of links between poverty reduction and conservation that feeds into decision making; and
- Financially viable and sustainable NPA system.

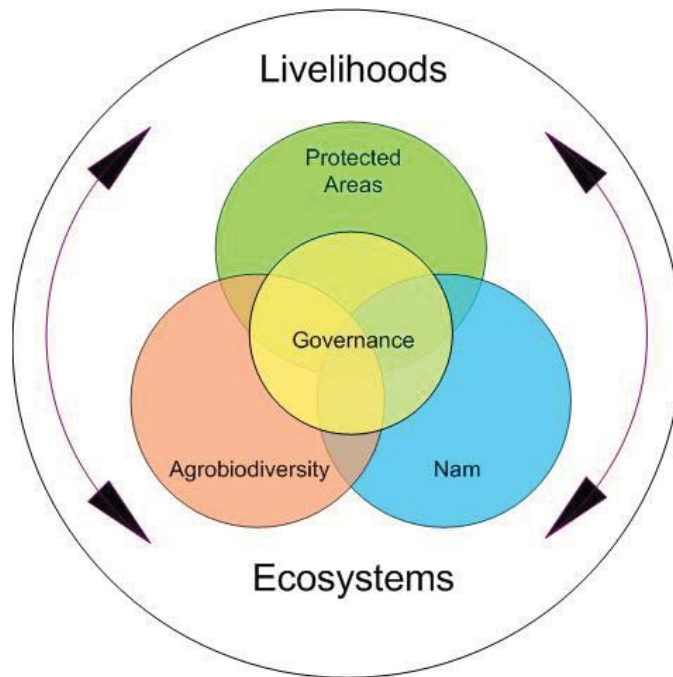
Agrobiodiversity

- Increased knowledge base for better understanding of agrobiodiversity;
- Demonstrated wise-use of Lao PDR's agrobiodiversity for improving livelihoods; and
- Institutionalised planning process at multiple levels for the fair and equitable use of Lao PDR's agrobiodiversity.

Nam: water, wetlands and watersheds

- Improved understanding of the ecosystems and livelihoods approach to water resource management;
- Enhanced water-related governance processes and institutions for informed and effective policies and agreements; and
- Higher profile of the increasing pressures on water-related resources.

IUCN Lao PDR believes that a key to successfully implementing its livelihoods approach is to pay specific attention to the areas of substantive and strategic overlap between the three themes of *Protected Areas*, *Agrobiodiversity* and *Nam*. These mutually reinforcing domains, considered within the shared context of *Governance*, provide a rich opportunity to articulate the policy, technical and procedural paths to desired conservation and development outcomes.



Through these strategic avenues, IUCN Lao PDR plans to make substantial contributions to the planning, implementation and monitoring of the following policies:

- *The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy 2020 (NGPES)*
- *The Forestry Strategy to the Year 2020 of Lao PDR (FS2020)*
- *The National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Action Plan to 2010 (NBS)*
- *The Water and Water Resources Policy (WWRP)*
- *The National Strategy on Environment to the Year 2020 and Action Plan to 2010*
- *Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA)*, including:
 - *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*
 - *Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar)*
 - *Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITE)*
 - *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*
 - *Kyoto Protocol*
 - *World Heritage Convention (WHC)*

4. Governance

The Government of Lao PDR has made advances in clarifying the policy framework for natural resources management and advancing a programme of decentralisation, but mechanisms to ensure involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, strengthen cooperation across multiple levels and increase the flow of information are insufficient.

4.1 Why Governance? Enhancing the outcomes of conservation and development

The *Governance* theme incorporates all work related to strengthening institutional ability to better conserve and sustainably use natural resources. Development agencies, governments and researchers around the world have widely recognised the importance of governance to development and conservation activities.

Governance in nature conservation is "... the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say in the management of natural resources – including biodiversity conservation." (CMWG, TILCEPA 2004)

Governance, conservation for poverty reduction and sustainable development are intimately linked. The architecture of institutions within Lao society, from local to national levels, and their future roles, will be crucial determinants of successful policy and programmes for conservation and sustainable development in the future. The attention to governance raises the question not only of which decisions are made, but also *on what* these decisions are based and *who* participates in the

processes. In other words, information, capacity and participation become key elements in understanding the social and environmental outcomes of policy.

4.2 Governance in Lao PDR: clarification of roles and responsibilities among actors

Traditionally, Lao PDR has been heavily centralised in its structures and processes. However, several important efforts have been initiated to improve governance in the country. Central to these efforts are the promotion of decentralised administrative approaches to planning and implementation, the enhancement of public participation, and the establishment of coordinating bodies to facilitate inter-agency and cross-sector collaboration. There is a clear emphasis on the clarification of roles and responsibilities – including capacity, authority, resources and processes – of the actors involved in governance. IUCN Lao PDR's strategic planning process has taken up this focus on the actors involved in governance as the starting point, analysing the potential for contributing to enhanced governance in Lao PDR.

Government actors: decentralisation and coordination

The Government of Lao PDR (GoL) has focused significant efforts on how to improve the management of the country's resources and the outcomes of national development. It has embarked on a process of decentralising administration. In essence, this effort is aimed at reallocating roles and responsibilities to the most appropriate sub-national levels in province, district and village. It is hoped that a more nuanced allocation of roles across the levels of administration will improve the flow of information and the delivery of services to local people. However, capacity of understanding these rearrangements, in addition to some lingering confusion about the scope of roles at each level, have formed a bottleneck in the decentralisation process. Nonetheless, more meaningful roles of government agencies at the sub-national level may hold exciting opportunities for improving the outcomes of conservation and development.

Inter-agency coordination is another challenging area of governance in Lao PDR. While the institutional and legal frameworks have made some encouraging progress, many functions of the public administration are still hindered by unclear processes of dialogue and information exchange across government agencies. This horizontal clarification of roles and responsibilities is an important complement to the vertical adjustments promoted in decentralization. With growing trends in natural resource management such as integrated water resources management and poverty reduction, the need for inter-agency coordination and cooperation will intensify in the future.

New actors: broadening Governance

Governance is a broad concept that is not limited to the domain of government decision making (IUCN, 2002). The governance concept expands the space of decision making to also involve the private sector, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, professional associations and institutions of higher learning and research. In recent years, Lao PDR has seen an increasingly diverse range of actors in society contributing to the national agenda of economic growth and poverty reduction.

The most active of the emergent groups are non-profit associations registered with the Prime Minister's Office, such as the Community Environmental Development Association. In addition, the National University of Laos (NUoL) has begun to define a more proactive role in research and information dissemination to complement its more traditional educational role. Mass organizations such as the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations and the mass media have also increased their involvement in a range of activities relevant to conservation and development. These organizations are working to redefine their role in Lao society.

The private sector has been growing steadily since the adoption of the *New Economic Mechanism* in the eighties, which promoted a move towards a market economy and the establishment of private firms. Today the sector is categorised mainly by micro, small and medium businesses, predominately in the agriculture, garment manufacturing and industrial sectors. Other notable sectors on the rise in recent years include tourism, hydropower and mining, due to increased flows of foreign direct investment. As this sector continues to grow, so too will demands on the country's natural resources and, in turn, the need for good policy and regulation to ensure equitable and sustainable use. In fact, many areas of the country are beginning to see the correlations between private sector involvement and landscape change. The economic benefits of private sector involvement in local development are becoming clearer as well, but the implications for environmental quality, poverty reduction and social equity are not well understood. Nonetheless, the private sector itself, including the associations that represent it, is emerging as a potential partner in conservation and development activities.

4.3 IUCN Lao PDR and Governance

As indicated above (section 2.3), IUCN Lao PDR's programme is based on the KEG cycle—the cycle of Knowledge, Empowerment and Governance, and the belief that when knowledge is available and people and institutions are empowered to use it, they will participate more effectively in decision making. IUCN Lao PDR also uses mutual reinforcement—the idea that if all sectors in society mobilise diverse constituencies to agree on common goals and help realise them, outcomes will be more equitable and contribute to poverty alleviation.

During the last five years, IUCN Lao PDR has assisted government agencies to actively engage in international environment agreements. In 2005, IUCN accompanied representatives from the Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA) and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) to the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and

assisted in pre- and post-COP preparation and dialogue. IUCN Lao PDR is also assisting the GoL to increase recognition of key natural sites. Recently, IUCN Lao PDR has provided technical assistance to both central and provincial authorities in the process of listing Hin Nam No National Protected Area as a trans-boundary Natural World Heritage site with the Phong Nha Ke-Bang National Park in Viet Nam. These invaluable experiences have led to the strengthening of domestic policy and highlighted the need to continue this work.

The Rapid Trade and Environment Assessment Project led by the International Institute of Sustainable Development and in partnership with IUCN Lao PDR, has shown the importance of multi-sectoral and multi-agency approaches to reinforcing governance. IUCN Lao PDR has convened a multi-stakeholder panel, including trade and investment actors such as the Committee for Planning and Investment (CPI), the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) and the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI), and representatives from environment and natural resource agencies such as MAF and STEA. Working together on trade and environment linkages, this group is providing integrated advice to important policy development and nurturing inter-organisational relationships for increased coordination and cooperation in the future.

Whilst implementing its previous Strategic Framework, IUCN Lao PDR has identified the continuing need to build the capacity of, and links between, institutions and the importance of focusing on concrete, pragmatic programmes that reinforce decentralised decision making, strengthen integrated approaches and promote inclusive and accountable governance. During 2007–2011, IUCN Lao PDR will work towards:

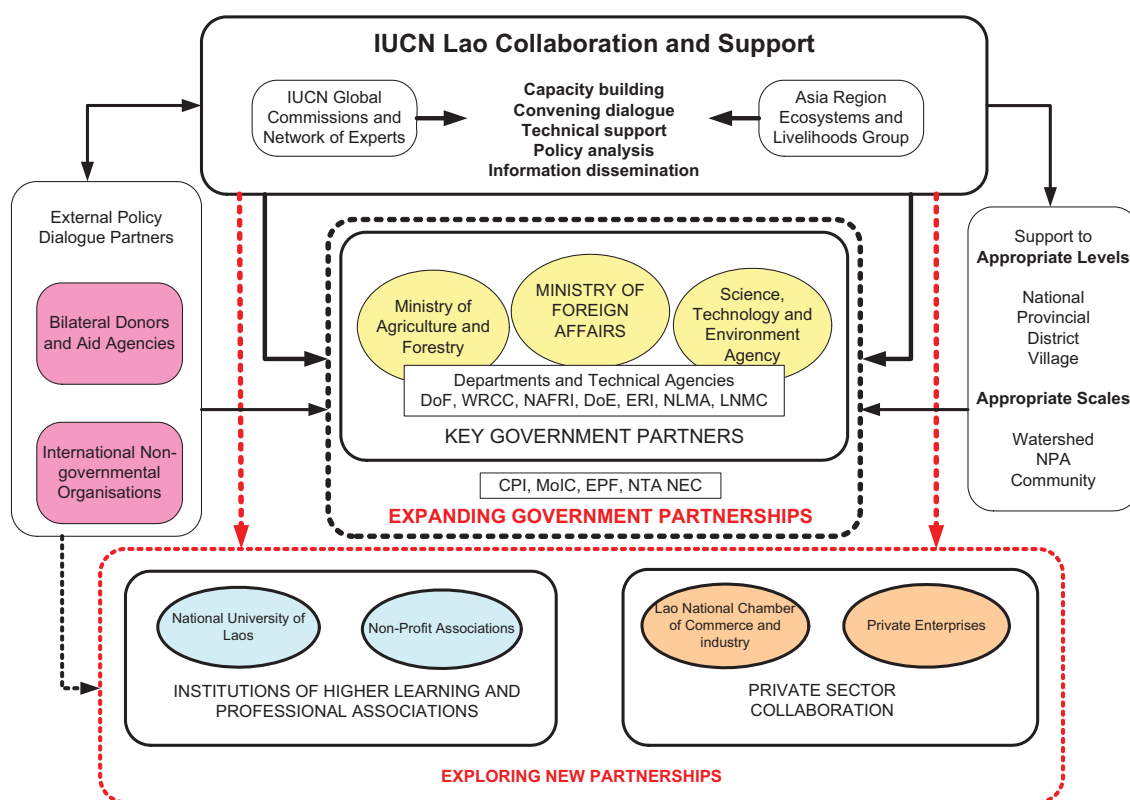
- 1. Enhanced and sustained coordination among government agencies on key policy and implementation issues (related to *Protected Areas, Agrobiodiversity and Nam*).**
 - Convene multi-sectoral dialogues, working groups and mechanisms for collaboration around specific issues; and
 - Support efforts to institutionalise decentralised decision making.
- 2. Meaningful involvement of civil society organizations and the private sector in environmental decision making**
 - Convene multi-stakeholder dialogues at different levels and scales; and
 - Support partners to participate in activities.
- 3. Policy processes that draw on multiple sources of scientific information**
 - Increase capacity of partners to conduct research and analysis, and deliver information to decision makers and the public.
- 4. Transparent and inclusive implementation of selected Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) and regional cooperation**
 - Assist government to develop frameworks for implementation of MEAs such as CBD, CITES, Ramsar and the World Heritage Convention, facilitate multiple sources of inputs and participation.

4.4. Partnerships for enhanced *Governance*: a programme-wide commitment

Governance has been placed at the centre of the World Conservation Union’s country programme for 2007–2011 in order to address the pressing need for increased involvement, cooperation and understanding of conservation and livelihood issues across all sectors of Lao PDR society. It also reflects IUCN’s underlying commitment to the development of long-term partnerships to achieve its key thematic goals.

These *Governance* objectives and key areas of work will be achieved through engagement with key stakeholders across the three sectors of the society—government, civil society and the private sector—and across the other programme themes of *Protected Areas*, *Agrobiodiversity* and *Nam*.

The diagram below represents IUCN Lao PDR’s renewed approach to the way it engages society in Lao PDR to fulfil its mission of building a just society which values and sustainably uses its natural resources.



Relationships with key government partners lie at the centre of the programme’s work, although IUCN Lao PDR has already begun a process of expanding its partner base. At the same time, the diagram shows a vision of increasing engagement with non-governmental actors. Some of these relationships have already been initiated. This strategy aims to increasingly bring together actors from these three sectors through collaborative activities.

4.4.1 Government

IUCN Lao PDR will continue to strengthen its relationships and enhance cooperation with key line agencies in Vientiane. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA) have been the cornerstones in IUCN Lao PDR's partnership with the GoL. IUCN Lao PDR's relationships with these agencies are based on a solid tradition of collaboration, and will take full advantage of the synergies between the GoL and IUCN Lao PDR priorities.

In the next phase of activities, IUCN Lao PDR plans to sustain its efforts to enhance relationships with other key agencies in order to:

- Further promote the relationship between environmental issues and government priorities in planning and implementation;
- Build the capacity for implementing MEAs; and
- Strengthen environmental monitoring and impact assessment.

The National Environment Committee (NEC), the Environment Protection Fund (EPF) and the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA) will likely emerge as important government partners.

Moreover, in support of the Government's decentralisation efforts, IUCN Lao PDR's collaboration will increasingly include various levels of administration within stakeholder agencies, where appropriate. The province and district levels of government—where policy hits the ground through implementation—will be engaged to strengthen implementation capacity and enhance the flow of information and analysis within the administrative and technical hierarchies.

4.4.2 Institutions of higher learning

The National University of Laos (NUoL) is the main institution of higher learning. Support for NUOL will be heavily focused on capacity building, including development of lecturers and teachers, input into curriculum development, support of research activities, and strengthening of the role of these institutions as producers of quality information and analysis. Key partners include the Faculty of Forestry (FoF), the Centre for Environment and Development Studies (CEDs) and the Faculty of Science (FoS). This reflects NUOL's own vision of increasing its capacity to be involved in important areas of decision making as a centre of knowledge and data. IUCN Lao PDR has signed memoranda of understanding with FoF and CEDs, which will serve as institutional frameworks for collaboration. IUCN Lao PDR will also work closely with international organizations such as the German Technical Agency (GTZ), the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which are actively engaging with the university.

4.4.3 Private sector

Over the next five years, through an emerging *Business and Biodiversity Programme*, IUCN Lao PDR will also seek opportunities to partner with key businesses and associations to facilitate their involvement in dialogue on conservation and development issues. One indicative example of IUCN Lao PDR's potential private sector engagement is the plan to convene a *rubber working group* that brings together the Government, enterprises and other relevant private sector groups to exchange information and ideas about the future of rubber in Lao PDR. Additionally, the Lao Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and its 17 industry groups and associations represent the growing private sector in Lao PDR. IUCN Lao PDR has made initial contact with this body through the Rapid Trade and Environment Assessment project and hopes to build on this relationship in the future. Other key stakeholders for IUCN's private sector engagement include government bodies mandated to work with the private sector, such as the Committee for Planning and Investment (CPI) and Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI).

4.4.4 Bilateral donors, international non-governmental organisations and development agencies

IUCN Lao PDR will continue to develop and further refine its strategic partnerships with leading actors in the international community in Lao PDR, in order to more effectively coordinate support to Lao partners and to improve the delivery of policy recommendations. Key partners include Sida and IUCN global members, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

4.4.5 Non-profit associations

The status of non-profit associations has still to be defined in Lao PDR. IUCN aims to support non-profit associations to participate in discussions about selected conservation and development issues. IUCN Lao PDR has nascent relationships with the Community Environment Development Association and the Lao Bar Association.

4.4.6 IUCN global and regional networks

IUCN Lao PDR draws on the technical and institutional resources from its global network. This network includes IUCN regional thematic programmes called Ecosystem and Livelihood Groups (ELG) based in Bangkok and Colombo, and the six IUCN Commissions at the global level (see Annex 1). IUCN Lao PDR will continue to use this extensive network in the delivery of its 2007–2011 programme.

5. Protected areas

An extensive system of protected areas exists, but ineffective or absent management of these areas, and intensifying pressures on the natural resources they house, continue to threaten the integrity of ecosystems and the stability of livelihoods.

5.1 Why *Protected Areas*? Strengthening the foundations

IUCN's *Protected Areas* theme encompasses all programme work situated in and around Lao PDR's National Protected Areas (NPA) with a key focus on the people who rely on the natural resources that protected areas provide. The *Protected Area* theme also consists of trans-boundary collaborations for improved protected area management at the landscape level and enhancement of buffer-zone activities for NPA protection and livelihoods improvement.

Establishment and maintenance of NPAs are crucial for ensuring the conservation of a country's natural resources, which are essential for the sustainable livelihoods of local people and for local and national economies. Protected areas and surrounding zones are also an important mechanism for land-use management on an ecosystem scale, as the resources they seek to protect often cross district, provincial and even national boundaries.

5.2 Lao PDR's *Protected Areas*: reclassification for diverse objectives

Formally established in 1993, Lao PDR has one of the youngest yet most comprehensive NPA systems in the world. Encompassing 20 protected areas, and almost 14% of the land surface area, this figure well exceeds the IUCN global target of 10% under protection status in each country. There are over 1,100 villages located inside or within five kilometres of NPAs in Lao PDR, the residents of which often face extreme poverty and struggle with land and food security issues (Robichaud et al 2001).

The country's NPAs provide food security and micro-economic development opportunities for the people living in and around these zones. They play a key role in food security for some of the poorest families by providing the majority of the non-rice diet, including fish, bamboo shoots, greens, wild tubers and invertebrates such as snails and insect larvae. Other non-timber forest products (NTFPs), such as bamboo and rattan, provide for small but significant forms of rural income. Ecosystem services such as watershed protection bring widespread benefits such as flood prevention and control, village water supply, irrigation and sediment control which assist the performance of hydropower facilities.

Emerging sectors that rely on the resources NPAs provide, such as ecotourism, sustainable NTFP harvesting, and bio-prospecting, are key to the country's development. For example, ecotourism in Lao PDR has thrived on the country's image as the *Green Jewel* of the Mekong and from marketable products and services derived from resources in and around NPAs. Government of Lao PDR (GoL) research suggests that just over half of all arrivals to Lao PDR are interested in the natural environment. If targets are realised, tourism earnings are expected to be around \$500 million per annum by 2010, ensuring tourism continues to be one of the most significant sectors of the Lao PDR economy (LNTA 2005)

Several major national strategies recognise these key contributions that NPAs provide to Lao PDR, including the *National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, Forest Strategy to the Year 2020* (FS2020) and the *National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan* (2005–2010). These policies represent opportunities for IUCN Lao PDR to make a unique and concrete contribution to implementing an effective framework for NPAs in Lao PDR. Increasing threats to the integrity of NPAs, including illegal logging, cash crop encroachment, excessive and unsustainable NTFP harvesting and illegal hunting make the implementation of these strategies even more critical.

Furthermore, while the establishment of the NPA system has been a substantial achievement, at present there are a number of management problems that result from the high management needs of NPAs and low management resource availability and effectiveness. As the 2003 Protected Areas and Development Review (ICEM 2003) highlighted, most of Lao PDR's NPAs can be classified as a single zone designated for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems. NPA managers are struggling with strategic and day-to-day management issues as a result of trying to manage large areas using uniform and ambiguous management objectives, and local people are left unclear about how to use these resources sustainably. This homogenous approach could be improved by a clarification and diversification of the existing NPA system's management strategies.

The six IUCN categories for managing protected areas

Definition of protected area: An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.

- Category 1a** Strict nature reserve: protected area managed mainly for science
- Category 1b** Wilderness area: protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection
- Category 2** National park: protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation
- Category 3** Natural monument: protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features
- Category 4** Habitat/species management area: protected area managed for conservation through management intervention
- Category 5** Protected landscape/seascape: protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation
- Category 6** Managed resource protected area: protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas 2006

5.3 IUCN Lao PDR and *Protected Areas*

IUCN Lao PDR has had a long and intimate relationship with the NPA system of Lao PDR. From the outset of the GoL's efforts in the 1980s, IUCN Lao PDR has provided technical advice and support to the design and establishment of national system of protected areas. Over the last five years, it has become increasingly clear that present approaches to supporting NPAs are not keeping pace with increasing pressures. The programme now seeks to reinvigorate protected area work in Lao PDR with a refreshed and practical approach.

Over the last five years, IUCN Lao PDR has had extensive firsthand experience in working to improve NPA governance through developing and testing integrated conservation and development models, helping to strengthen institutional and human capacity for NPA management and providing advice on the legal and enabling framework. Most recently, IUCN Lao PDR has partnered with central, provincial, district and community stakeholders to discuss, both individually and within the setting of a stakeholders' forum, issues concerning NPAs in Lao PDR. This engagement revealed a growing consensus that the management challenges mentioned above require a concerted effort to review the NPA system in a comprehensive manner and explore innovative and modern ways to move forward.

Starting with clarifying Lao PDR's NPA system by implementing IUCN's protected areas categories, IUCN Lao PDR will seek to increase management effectiveness, enhance

conservation at realistic scales, and contribute to poverty reduction at the community level in ways that are appropriate to existing GoL capacities.

5.4 Protected areas objectives and strategic directions

IUCN Lao PDR is renewing its focus on NPA management more than two decades after first playing a key role in their establishment. Key objectives include:

- 1. Effective NPA system that addresses the specific conservation needs of each NPA and supports the meaningful involvement of local communities**
 - Apply IUCN NPA categories, including review of NPA management experience, clarification of conservation objectives for each Lao PDR NPA and support for development of management capacity;
 - Test, document and disseminate examples of effective co-management; and
 - Explore and pilot innovative approaches and partnerships (eg private sector) at the provincial, district and community level, that address human resource challenges in NPA management.

- 2. Deepened understanding of links between poverty reduction and conservation that feeds into decision making**
 - Demonstrate links through field activities, disseminate information to decision makers and public, scale up understanding and lessons learned.

- 3. Financially viable and sustainable NPA system**
 - Revive donor commitment to NPAs; and
 - Develop innovative mechanisms for financing NPAs (linking with watershed financing mechanisms under the *Nam* programme).

5.5 Principle partners: Protected Areas

IUCN Lao PDR's principle partners in this area have been identified as MAF's Division of Forest Resource Conservation (DFRC) within the Department of Forestry (DoF); the Implementation Committee of the *Forestry Strategy to the Year 2020*; the Faculty of Forestry at NUoL; relevant provincial /district agriculture and forestry offices and communities living in and around the country's 20 national protected areas. IUCN will explore the potential for involving private sector actors at both national and local levels. Resources will also be directed towards solidifying emerging partnerships with organisations such as the LNTA and the National Land Management Authority (NLMA).

Regionally, the IUCN Lao PDR *Protected Area* programme will continue to call on technical expertise from the Ecosystems and Livelihoods groups in the IUCN Asia Regional Office and its forest, protected areas, biodiversity, environmental law and economics specialists¹. Support from the IUCN global programme on Protected Areas and the World Commission on Protected Areas will also be called upon when needed.

¹ The IUCN Regional Ecosystems and Livelihoods Groups are based in Bangkok and Colombo and composed of the eight regional thematic programmes, biodiversity and species conservation, environmental economics, environmental law, forests, marine and coastal resources, mountains, protected areas and water and wetlands.

6. Agrobiodiversity

The biological diversity of Lao PDR landscapes will continue to be a keystone of local livelihoods, but increasingly, market demands and insufficient knowledge and planning are drivers of unsustainable exploitation that threaten ecosystem goods and services and their equitable use.

6.1 Why *Agrobiodiversity*? Diversity of flora and working landscapes

Agrobiodiversity is the variety of living things that contribute to the sustainability of food and agriculture resources. This encompasses all varieties that contribute to nutrition, livelihoods and the maintenance of habitats. While some definitions of agrobiodiversity include animal species such as pollinators and farm animals, IUCN Lao PDR focuses solely on plant species (FAO, 1998), including:

- domesticated crops
- 'wild plants'
- non-harvested species within agro-ecosystems
- non-harvested species in the wider environment

Agrobiodiversity provides people with nutritious food and other natural resource-based goods on which livelihoods depend. Sustainable management of agrobiodiversity helps to maintain areas of land and water that sustain the production of these goods and ensures the delivery of wider biological ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration and clean watersheds.

6.2 Lao PDR's *Agrobiodiversity*: pillars of livelihoods and ecosystems

Lao PDR's rich biodiversity plays a key role in both the country's unmatched natural beauty and the livelihood of its six million people. In direct values alone, biodiversity is worth some US\$650 million a year at the national level (Emerton 2005). Non-timber forest products (NTFP) such as bamboo, rattan and yang tree oil play a vital role in food security for some of the poorest families in Lao PDR and are also used by local populations for medicine, traditional ceremonies and trade. At the national level, NTFPs are calculated to be worth US\$320 per year for rural households, making up 44% of subsistence value, 55% of cash income and 46% of the total household economy (Emerton 2005).

Biodiversity is also vital for agriculture, which is the largest sector of the Lao PDR economy, widely influencing land use, forest cover, income generation, water use and environmental flow. Over the last five years, both government and private initiatives have responded to the importance of agriculture for income generation and profit, promoting coffee and tea exports, the establishment of rubber plantations, and fruit and vegetable production.

While recent studies suggest that biodiversity is still under-valued in national economic statistics and in turn, development decision making, this situation is changing and the resource is increasingly being recognised by the Government of Lao PDR as a principle resource for both maintaining the country's environmental health and reducing poverty. The *National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Action Plan to 2010* addresses conservation and sustainable management of indigenous biodiversity for the protection of Lao's biological diversity, within the context of sustained development and poverty eradication. The *Forestry Strategy to the Year 2020* (FS2020), released in July 2005, addresses conservation of forests and sustainable agriculture systems for forest protection and poverty reduction. Enhancing its commitment to conserving the country's biodiversity, Lao PDR also became a party to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) in 1996 and the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) in 2004.

While the value of biodiversity is becoming increasingly recognised, insufficient knowledge of the state of this resource, coupled with increasing market demands and unsustainable exploitation in some areas, constitute key challenges for Lao PDR now and in the future.

6.3 IUCN Lao PDR and *Agrobiodiversity*

IUCN Lao PDR has identified a niche for itself in *Agrobiodiversity*, or flora as it is often described, based on the needs and current gaps within Lao PDR itself and within other conservation organizations in Lao PDR.

The IUCN programme in Lao PDR has been involved in convening stakeholder groups, conducting research and disseminating information about biodiversity since its establishment, particularly for non-timber forest products, trade within multilateral environment agreements such as CITES, and forest management. Current agrobiodiversity-based activities range from collaborations with international research institutions, to supporting the implementation of these agreements, to conducting and disseminating information about flora and its actual value.

In 2005, IUCN Lao PDR hosted the Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh and worked with its Darwin Initiative to expand the knowledge base of flora in Lao PDR. In 2006 IUCN also assisted the Programme on Forests (PROFOR) to conduct an assessment of the long-term impacts of a previous five-year NTFP project at Ban Nampheng with the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI). The study revealed that the previous work produced long-term positive results and among the many findings, the importance of implementing a package of interventions to address a range of interconnecting issues such as food security, forest use and access rights, organised NTFP commerce and the creation of local development funds.

Under the direction of this Strategic Framework, IUCN Lao PDR will increasingly engage with the private sector while continuing to partner principally with the GoL on sustainable development issues, and will encourage participation in effective national policy development. Using its strengths in technical expertise, training, capacity building and multi-stakeholder convening, IUCN Lao PDR is currently working with the GoL towards the sustainable and effective implementation of the FS2020. Key areas of work will include non-timber forest products, plantations and landscape-scale activities such as engagement with farming systems.

6.4 *Agrobiodiversity* objectives and strategic directions

IUCN Lao PDR is committed to working with its partners to promote the conservation and sustainable use of Lao PDR's agrobiodiversity. It has defined the following objectives and strategic directions for 2007–2011:

1. Increased knowledge base for better understanding of *Agrobiodiversity*

- Conduct research on key agrobiodiversity issues;
- Build institutional capacity for research (e.g. CITES Scientific Authority);
- Translate and disseminate agrobiodiversity documents;
- Consolidate and synthesise existing agrobiodiversity information; and
- Establish an information hub with relevant and up-to-date agrobiodiversity information.

2. Demonstrated wise-use of *Agrobiodiversity* in Lao PDR for improving livelihoods

- Conduct field activities (research, trials) in selected sites; and

- Promote agrobiodiversity within the *IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme* focusing on market access and fair value chains, and linking to the IUCN Asia Regional Business and Biodiversity Programme Strategy 2005.

3. Institutionalised planning process at multiple levels for the fair and equitable use of agrobiodiversity in Lao PDR

- Establish network of information centres (e.g. linking with NAFRI);
- Influence selected policies (e.g. FS2020) with concrete inputs regarding institutional options;
- Conduct targeted dissemination of agrobiodiversity-related information; and
- Build capacity of institutions to monitor and oversee planning processes (e.g. CITES Scientific and Management Authorities).

6.5 Principle partners: *Agrobiodiversity*

Work towards achieving the *Agrobiodiversity* programme's objectives is multi-faceted and involves collaboration with a wide range of partners, including the central and provincial governments, local communities, the tertiary sector, domestic and international research institutions, and the business community. The programme's key partners have been identified as DoF, NAFRI, the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) and NUoL's of FoF and FoS.

Links will also be sought with key regional and international organizations such as the Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh and the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC) in Bangkok, Forest Trends and the Centre of International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in Bogor.

IUCN Lao PDR will continue to draw support from IUCN regional Ecosystems and Livelihoods Groups in forest, biodiversity, environmental law and economics. The IUCN Lao programme will also call on the expertise of CITES Secretariat and of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Access to the IUCN broader network of six Commissions of experts (see Annex 1) is also a key strength.

7. *Nam*: water, wetlands and watersheds

While Lao PDR is rich in water resources and depends on them for its development, competing demands on water and water resources continue to intensify, and the current institutional arrangements and mechanisms for sustainable and equitable management of these resources are inadequate.

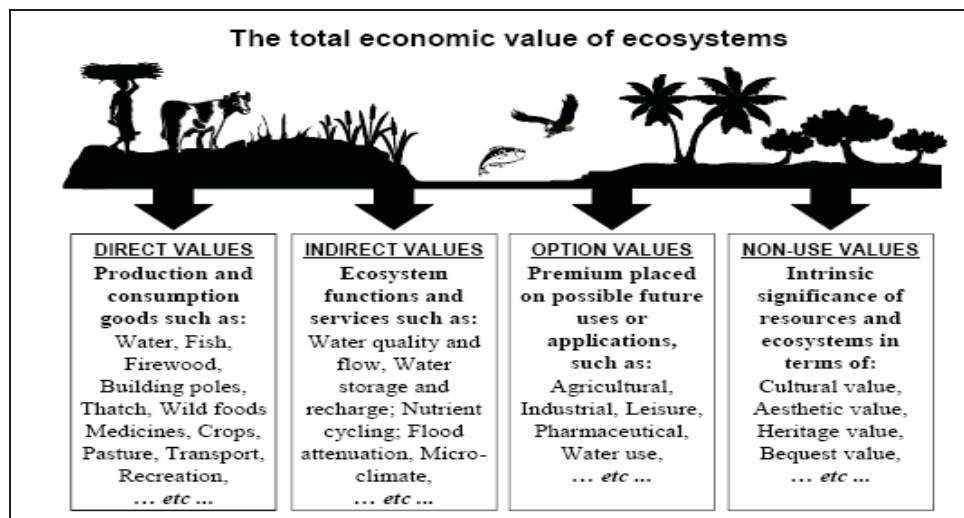
7.1 Why *Nam*? Foundation of prosperity, health and security

In the Lao language, *nam* is the word for water. In the IUCN Lao PDR programme, *Nam* refers to all water, wetlands and watershed resources in Lao PDR. As the use of a general term for water for the theme title suggests, *Nam* activities are holistic in scope, focusing on water-based and wet landscapes and the resources that contribute to their effective management, in addition to bodies of water and their multiple uses.

Water is a historically sought-after resource due to its necessity for life and the resulting benefits for those who control its use. Local people use water for consumption, small-scale irrigation, fisheries and sanitation, among other things. On a larger scale, industries such as hydropower and mining, and nearly all actors that contribute to national development and income, rely on water resources to function.

7.2 *Nam* in Lao PDR: recognising the values of abundance, the abundance of values

Water is central to life in Lao PDR. The country has the highest per capita water supply in Asia, owing to the central Mekong River and its tributaries, and the numerous other freshwater rivers that run through the entire landscape of the country. Water resources directly benefit households and industry in Lao PDR through use for energy, transportation routes, consumable aquatic resources and irrigation for agricultural purposes. They also provide myriad indirect benefits such as ecosystem protection, nutrient retention, micro-climate stabilisation, water treatment and water pollution retention.



Emerton L. (ed) 2005

The Government of Lao PDR (GoL), through its *National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy*, identifies the country's abundant water as a primary resource for meeting poverty eradication and development goals. To ensure sustainable use and management of these resources, a number of steps have been taken, including signing the *Agreement on Cooperation of Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin* (1995), the adoption of the *Water and*

Water Resources Law 1996, the preparation of the *Water and Water Resources Policy (2000)* and the establishment of the Water Resources Coordination Committee (WRCC). Despite this progress, the current institutional frameworks and lines of authority for water governance are unclear and sometimes inconsistent within the current policy and legislation. This lack of clarity is compounded by growing local and regional demands for water and increasingly complex stakeholder interests.

The increase in volume and complexity of demands has risen visibly even since 2001, when IUCN Lao PDR last presented the strategic directions for its water programme. While water supplies remain abundant and water quality comparatively good, continued demand for fresh water is escalating and increased competition among the many different water dependant sectors is emerging.

The hydropower sector in Lao PDR has taken off with over 30 new dams currently undergoing feasibility studies or and awaiting future development and investment (Osborne 2006). Agricultural production with large-scale irrigation is increasing steadily (e.g. rice), and the tourism sector, which often uses water resources such as rivers and wetlands, has grown considerably to 1.09 million visitors in 2005, 60% more arrivals than in 2001 (LNTA 2005). While these sectors are fundamental to the development of the country, it is important to ensure that development decisions about the use of resources are made within the wider socio-economic and environmental context. The same development that has brought many benefits to the country has also increased pressure on water resources, closing off other development options, and affecting the ability of water resources to provide natural benefits. Wetlands for example face a rapidly growing number of threats including conversion to other land uses, pollution from agro-chemicals, excessive harvesting of wetland products and impacts of large infrastructure projects which in turn affect their ability to purify water supplies and support an array of important biodiversity.

7.3 IUCN Lao PDR and *Nam*

Over the last five years, IUCN Lao PDR has worked closely with the IUCN Regional Water and Wetlands Programme, the Mekong River Basin Wetland Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) and GoL partners such as the Water Resources Coordination Committee (WRCC) and the Lao National Mekong Commission (LNMC), in promoting the wise use of water and wetland resources in Lao PDR.

Facilitating regional and national dialogues on specific water issues has been a particularly fruitful aspect of IUCN's work. In 2006, IUCN Lao PDR assisted the IUCN Regional Water and Wetlands Programme in generating and disseminating knowledge on *Integrated Water Resource Management Approaches* and supported the GoL to host a *Regional Water Dialogue* in Vientiane. This dialogue brought together representatives from governments, NGOs and the private sector from across Asia. It provided a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to share their views and ideas for strengthening water management in the region. IUCN Lao PDR also coordinated a productive *National Water Dialogue* to complement the regional dialogue. IUCN will continue to facilitate national dialogue during 2007–2011, providing a useful platform for national stakeholders to link with regional and international discussions. This will also give an opportunity to share information from pilot experiences to be carried out by IUCN Lao PDR and other conservation organizations.

The Upper Mekong Project, which convened Government officials at various levels to conduct a series of scoping missions between 2003 and 2006, has been a key initiative over the last few years. This project has revealed some of the mounting development pressures on the Mekong River in the Northern provinces of Lao PDR. Recently the joint GoL and IUCN Lao PDR project team recommended that a range of governance-strengthening practices be adopted in response to further development initiatives in the Upper Mekong region. The coordination and collaboration among riparian Mekong communities, an increased role of local authorities and

communities in planning, the implementation of development initiatives and an improved access to knowledge and information were among these proposed governance efforts.

IUCN Lao PDR will continue to work on the premise that improving water governance in the Mekong region is vital if water is to be managed equitably and sustainably. Steps to improving water governance include clarified and improved lines of authority and coordination among government at all levels, mobilisation and involvement of local communities in on ground management and use, continued advocacy of local resource rights, institutional capacity and community participation in national and regional water policy by NGOs.

7.4 Nam objectives and strategic directions

Key objectives and strategic directions for the IUCN Lao PDR *Nam* programme during 2007–2011 are:

1. Improved understanding of the ecosystems and livelihoods approach to water resource management

- Promote and pilot environmental flows approaches;
- Promote and pilot health and environment initiatives (wetlands conservation for nutrition);
- Convene key decision makers and stakeholders (national water groups);
- Explore opportunities for payments for environmental services; and
- Feed results of monitoring and assessment activities into community-based resource-planning activities, and disseminate findings.

2. Enhance water-related governance processes and institutions for informed and effective policies and agreements

- Convene national and regional dialogues;
- Build capacity of key institutions such as the Water Resources Coordination Committee (WRCC);
- Mainstream the World Commission on Dams' (WCD) strategic priorities in decision making;
- Support accession to and implementation of Ramsar;
- Conduct reviews of policies and their impacts (e.g. environmental impact assessments and other selected water and wetland-related policies); and
- Scale up integrated water resource management case studies.

3. Raised profile of increasing pressures on water-related resources

- Conduct outreach campaign to raise the profile of pressures on water resources;
- Promote and support water-related education;
- Support establishment of wetlands managers information network;
- Establish a water resources information hub; and
- Arrange water resources study tours.

7.5 Principle partners: *Nam*

Main partners of IUCN Lao PDR *Nam* programme have been identified as the Water Resources Coordination Committee (WRCC), the Lao National Mekong Commission (LNMC) and Living Aquatic Resource and Research Centre (LARReC).

The activities of this theme will dedicate a large amount of time and resources to convening the many stakeholders involved in developing a coherent institutional framework and working processes for integrated water resources management. Other important partners include the

Department of Livestock and Fisheries; Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF); the Department of Irrigation; the Ministry of Energy and Mining; the Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction; provincial and district authorities and water user groups. The link between water resources and health is increasingly acknowledged and IUCN Lao PDR will explore new partnerships with the Ministry of Health and provincial public health departments. It is hoped these activities will catalyse and help to institutionalise inter-agency exchange, and it is probable that the range of partnerships will expand substantially within both the national and regional frameworks.

In carrying out its activities, the Country Office will continue to draw on IUCN's extensive experience at both regional and global levels through the Regional Water and Wetlands Programme and the global Water and Nature Initiative (WANI). Regional links will also be reinforced with the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), all of which have intricate stakes in the way water resources are managed and used in the Mekong sub-region.

8. Emerging issues

With a commitment to being responsive, the Strategic Framework for 2007–2011 recognises the high probability that other issues and opportunities will arise as priorities for future work. With that in mind, IUCN Lao PDR is gathering information and ideas for potential work on:

8.1 Climate change

Global climate change is one of the most pressing concerns of the 21st century. Warming temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and increased extreme weather events will have serious implications for economies, society and the environment.

Globally, the two central challenges are reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit future climate change and improving the capacity of the world's biodiversity and poorest communities to adapt to its inevitable impacts. In Lao PDR, the latter is of primary concern because the majority of people are directly reliant on fragile natural resources, live in highly susceptible areas, and are without the means or access to facilities or services that will help them cope with increasing threats to their livelihoods.

IUCN Lao PDR has assisted the GoL in meeting international obligations under the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and the *Kyoto Protocol*, most recently through the 2004 CIDA-supported project entitled *Supporting the Implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Lao PDR*. This project helped increase the level of awareness among Lao PDR authorities and civil society concerning climate change issues. It also increased the amount of information available and helped enhance the capacity of relevant GoL authorities to implement the climate change convention.

During 2007–2011, IUCN Lao PDR is committed to exploring its potential role in assisting the Government of Lao PDR in addressing this increasingly complex issue. An emphasis will be placed on adaptation to climate change, and options for support will be identified across the four key themes of *Governance*, *Protected Areas*, *Agrobiodiversity* and *Nam*.

8.2 Urban environmental issues

The *2001 Lao PDR State of the Environment Report* (STEA 2001) highlighted the steady growth rates (5%) of the country's urban areas such as Vientiane and Savannakhet. The report also outlined the increased pressure this growth is placing on the natural environment, including demand for services such as water supply, sanitation, drainage, solid waste treatment, industrial pollution, transport and energy use, and the reduced capacity of the natural environment to provide important ecosystem services such as natural waste water treatment and clean air.

Recent experiences have highlighted some of these key urban environmental challenges. In 2005 IUCN Lao PDR has supported the National Environment Committee (NEC) and Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA) on urban wetlands work, and over the past year observed the rising urban impacts of tourism through its participation in the LNTA's Core Ecotourism Taskforce. These experiences have indicated that urban environmental management is becoming increasingly important in the wider context of conserving the country's natural resources for sustainable use and development, and as a result is moving up on the agenda of key decision makers.

During 2007–2011, IUCN Lao PDR will continue to support work carried out in this area. IUCN sees immediate opportunities to extend its existing work under the *Governance* and *Nam* programme and support government agencies such as urban water authorities and the recently established Land Allocation Authority. The programme is also interested in building links with

organizations like the Community Environment and Development Association, which is currently carrying out activities in this area.

8.3 Other issues

Other opportunities that may occur will be considered within the overall objectives of this IUCN Lao PDR 5-year Strategic Framework as well the potential for synergies within the four programme themes introduced above.

Supporting material

Annex 1: The World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Lao PDR, background and context

In 1969, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of the Government of the Laos became a state member of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and in 1992 the IUCN Lao PDR Country Office was established. Since its beginnings, the office has been offering key technical and knowledge-based support to the GoL on conservation and livelihood issues. Initially, IUCN's activities focused on the establishment of Lao PDR's national protected area (NPA) system, one of the most extensive NPA systems in Asia, covering more than 21% of the country's land area (IUCN 2002).

The programme is currently supported through a framework agreement with the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and has a much wider focus encompassing *Governance, Protected Areas, Agrobiodiversity and Nam: water, wetlands and watersheds*.

The IUCN Lao PDR Country Office is also supported by the wider IUCN network. **The IUCN Asia Regional Office** is one of 10 regional offices worldwide, supporting members in 19 countries in the region and the operations of 10 country programmes in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Thailand, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and China. The IUCN Asia Regional Office is headed by a Regional Director and guided by an Asia Regional Directorate consisting of IUCN representatives from countries across the region. In 2006, new management units named **Country Groups** (CG) were formed to support country programmes. These units, led by a Country Group Head, help facilitate synergies between country programmes, assist with programme development, donor and external relations, provide greater flexibility in the use of financial and human resources and are the legal representatives of IUCN within the country. The **Asia Ecosystems and Livelihoods Groups** (ELGs), formed in 2003, bring expertise in ecosystems and livelihoods issues, these being addressed in a comprehensive and holistic manner across country programmes. These two technical groups are based in Bangkok and Colombo and composed of the eight regional thematic programmes, biodiversity and species conservation, environmental economics, environmental law, forests, marine and coastal resources, mountains, protected areas and water and wetlands.

Additional support and expertise is provided by **IUCN Headquarters** in Gland, Switzerland and by IUCN's global network of six **specialist commissions**, including the Species Survival Commission (SSC); the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA); the Commission on Environmental Law (CEL); the Commission on Education and Communication (CEC); the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) and the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM).

IUCN Lao PDR draws on the technical and institutional resources from its global network in order to provide the most complete and extensive services to its members and partners. Using this support, its strength lies in three main strategic roles:

IUCN Lao PDR, a *convener*

In convening multi-sectoral dialogues, working groups and partnerships, IUCN Lao PDR works to improve cooperation and institutionalised understanding among all relevant stakeholders in specific issues. IUCN Lao PDR uses its access to a global network of scientists paired with its involvement in the creation and monitoring of international policies, multilateral environment agreements and local legislation around the world, and convenes key stakeholders for institutional capacity building and for improved research, environmental assessments and policy development and implementation.

IUCN Lao PDR, a *house of scientific and technical experts*

IUCN Lao PDR draws on the vast IUCN network of over 1000 members, 10 000 experts within six specialist Commissions and a global Secretariat, in order to actively respond to emerging environmental issues and provide technical and scientific advice when requested.

IUCN Lao PDR, a *centre of information*

IUCN maintains an international library of printed and digital publications, easy to access, in order to:

- Host and disseminate up-to-date research on relevant environmental issues;
- Test innovative practices and approaches from across the globe, demonstrate linkages between conservation and livelihoods and promote field-based learning; and
- Disseminate amongst decision makers at various levels of the society the knowledge gathered from these experiences in order to promote policy changes.

Annex 2: The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Asia Region

Vision

A just world that values and conserves nature

Mission

To influence, encourage, and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

Created in 1948 in Fontainebleau (France), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) is the world's leading environmental organization. Its role is to convene, mobilize, and empower organizations and people to better integrate conservation into economic and social development. The organisation is an observer at the UN General Assembly, with Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. IUCN's membership stands at a total of 1,043 Members from 147 countries spread across eight statutory regions, with 83 States, 110 Government Agencies, 736 National NGOs, 82 International NGOs and 32 Affiliates.

As a science-based environmental organization, IUCN generates neutral, premium knowledge and benchmark products such as the Red List of Endangered Species and a classification system for protected areas.

From the Himalayas to the Pacific Ocean, Asia hosts the largest regional programme of the World Conservation Union and approximately 12 percent of the global membership. The Secretariat operates nine seven Country offices and the Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand, implementing more than 100 projects with about 500 staff. The Union has 129 member agencies (government and non-government) in 19 of the 23 countries from South to East Asia and National Committees in Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Japan, and South Korea. About 1 700 Asian voluntary experts are members of the six IUCN Commissions².

Asian ecosystems support more than half the world's population and biodiversity.

The human situation in Asia in terms of social and economic conditions is heterogeneous. Asia has seen unprecedented rates of economic growth over recent years, making it the fastest growing region in the world. However, the incidence of poverty remains high in most Asian countries, especially in countries like Nepal, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Lao PDR, India, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Indonesia. The Millennium Development Goals and the outcomes arising from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg and the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2004 in Bangkok, now form the basis for socio-economic development and conservation priorities of the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Whilst launching Mangroves for the Future, a 5-year coastal conservation initiative in ten of the tsunami affected countries in Asia and East Africa, the World Conservation Union is more than ever fulfilling its mission of managing knowledge to empower organizations and people to make better decisions to improve both ecosystems conditions and people's well-being.

² CEL= Commission on Environmental Law, CEM = Commission on Ecosystem Management, CEC = Commission on Education and Communication, SSC = Species Survival Commission, CEESP = Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, WCPA = World Commission on Protected Areas

Annex 3: The strategic planning process for 2007–2011

Throughout its strategic planning, IUCN Lao PDR has placed an emphasis on stakeholder analysis and involvement. One of the most interesting results of this process has been the identification of potential partners, emerging partners and the consolidation of the understanding with existing partners. This stakeholders' analysis was conducted in-house and later shared with IUCN key partners. A much clearer understanding of priority areas of cooperation has emerged, giving the direction in which to lead the Country Office's programme over the next five years.

Timeline

Nov 05	Draft comparative advantages / niches in Lao PDR
Dec 05	Priority programmatic themes identified
Jan–Mar 06	Each theme analysed to produce key topics of interest
Mar–Jul 06	Stakeholder analyses of key topics of interest
Aug–Nov 06	Initial one on one consultations with stakeholders
Nov 06	IUCN strategic planning retreat
Dec 06	First draft of new (five-year) strategy produced
Dec 06	Two-week follow up consultation with stakeholders
Jan 07	Final draft finalised and communication materials prepared
Feb 07	<i>IUCN Lao PDR Strategic Framework 2007–2011</i> launched

Review of previous Strategic Framework (IUCN Lao PDR 2001)

In 2001, IUCN Lao PDR conducted an extensive series of programming workshops with over 120 senior Government representatives from provincial and national levels. The workshops revealed a strong consensus about the critical importance of natural resource management in sustaining rural livelihoods and supporting national development efforts. The IUCN Lao PDR programme team reviewed the outcomes of this process in the initial planning stages for the Strategic Framework.

Internal planning

In order to identify the key stakeholders for each programme area, IUCN Lao PDR conducted an issues mapping exercise, based on a methodology of stakeholder analysis led by IUCN Asia Regional Communications (Hill & Knowlton, 2004). For each objective of the four core programme areas, IUCN identified stakeholders perceived as relevant to that area, and ranked each stakeholder by order of importance to the achievement of IUCN programme goals.

Stakeholders' consultations round 1

Next, individual consultation meetings were held with these key stakeholders. Individuals from each institution were asked to identify which of the core programme areas and areas of work/objectives they perceived as important to their cooperation with IUCN Lao PDR. Each stakeholder was also provided with IUCN's own ranking of key areas of collaboration and asked to comment on the importance of each area of work.

Information processing and analysis

After this initial round of consultations, IUCN Lao PDR conducted a thorough comparative analysis of its stakeholders' perceived roles. It showed that most stakeholders perceived key areas of cooperation in a very similar way as IUCN itself. However, some new areas of collaboration with existing stakeholders, changes in major areas of collaboration with partners

and increased clarification of desired areas of collaboration with emerging stakeholders did emerge from the analysis.

Stakeholder consultations round 2

The stakeholder analysis was compiled to develop a draft *Strategic Framework 2007–2011*, which was sent for comments to a wide audience both in Lao PDR and regionally. A broader stakeholder feedback exercise was then conducted over a two-week period through phone calls, email correspondence and one-on-one exchange.

Final draft preparation and launch

In February 2007 the *Strategic Framework 2007–2011* is finalised and launched.

Practical uses for the Strategic Framework 2007–2011

Understanding synergies and linkages: With a clarified organization of programme themes, the IUCN Lao PDR Strategic Framework better reflects the synergies and linkages within its work. The programme diagram can be used to identify these links and in doing so, strengthen the integrated delivery of the IUCN Lao PDR programme.

A communication tool: With all four programme areas sitting within the livelihoods thinking, IUCN Lao PDR believes that the clarification of its programme objectives better communicates a people-focused approach to conservation.

An investment tool: This strategy assists IUCN Lao PDR with making operational decisions and allocation of human and financial resources in the most effective manner.

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082/01 Fa Ngum Road
Ban Watt Chan
P.O.Box 4340
Vientiane, Lao PDR

Tel ++ 856-21 216401
Fax ++856-21 216127
info@iucnlao.org

www.iucn.org

IUCN Lao PDR Country Office