

Transboundary biodiversity conservation: The Pulong Tau National Park, Sarawak State (Malaysia)

Final Report

PD 224/03 Rev. 1 (F)

1.0 Background Information

This transboundary biodiversity conservation project involving the Pulong Tau National Park was a further effort to support ITTO's initiatives to promote biodiversity conservation in the humid tropics. The Chief Minister of Sarawak, Pehin Sri Hj. Abdul Taib Mahmud, expressed his support to the project in a letter to the Executive Director of ITTO in February 2002. Following this, the ITTO engaged an international consultant Dr. James Gasana to prepare the project document for Sarawak Forest Department (SFD) to submit to the ITTC to seek approval and funding. The two-year project started in January 2005. At the recommendation of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) in 2006, the project was extended for a further nine months from January to September 2007 with additional funding.

Apart from transboundary conservation the project was also designed to initiate a process of conservation management of the national park and to support local socio-economic development. The project was related to the national and state governments' policies on sustainable forest management (SFM) that was aimed at maintaining a balance in development and conservation and at meeting the ITTO 2000 Objective. At the local level, the project was to identify management problems associated with the national park and to develop strategies for successful management. In order to realize this, the project found that involving local communities as co-caretakers of the national park, addressing problems or issues associated with sustainable resource utilization were necessary. One such issue was traditional user rights of the local people on the resources and their continued dependence on the forest. Phase I was essentially a baseline data collecting and identification phase – the information to be used to elaborate a park management plan and to justify support for a second phase.

1.1 Key Problems

The key problems to be addressed concerned conservation of Sarawak's highland biodiversity at the landscape, ecosystem and habitat levels; protection of numerous species of animals that are endemic and long-term threats to their conservation; as well as the importance of PTNP and its roles in promoting transboundary cooperation with the Kayan Mentarang National Park in Indonesia.

1.2 Specific Objectives and Outputs

Specific Objective 1 was to initiate a process of sustainable conservation management of PTNP, while Specific Objective 2 was to improve cooperation between Sarawak and Indonesia for the conservation of transboundary ecosystems of PTNP and Kayan Mentarang National Park (KMNP).

There were altogether five outputs under Specific Objective 1, namely, (i) To strengthen the conservation and management capacity for PTNP; (ii) To carry out extensions to the park (the Project Steering Committee realized that this output could take time and modified it to read: "To initiate extensions to the Park"); (iii) To conduct baseline ecological and biodiversity studies and publish results; (iv) To carry out socio-economic studies; and (v) To prepare the park management plan.

Outputs under Specific Objective 2 were: (i) An agenda for cooperation in TBC between PTNP and KMNP ecosystems elaborated and adopted; (ii) A memorandum of understanding between the State of Sarawak and Indonesia for TBC relating to transboundary ecosystems between PTNP and KMNP concluded (at the recommendation of the PSC, this was modified to read: “Cooperation between the State of Sarawak and Indonesia initiated”) because the original output was thought to be too ambitious.

1.3 Project Strategy

The implementation process followed a number of key steps as given in the flow chart of the project document. These steps were: strengthening PTNP management, establishing baseline for conservation planning, preparation of the management plan, encouraging stakeholders’ participation, and extensions to the national park.

Interactions with different key stakeholders were initiated to build up consensus on project objectives and methods – through Stakeholder Consultative Committee meetings, local dialogues and workshops, field visits, and the Special Park Committee for PTNP. An understanding of the socio-economic issues of the local communities was essential to help in designing community-based activities to promote sustainable development and the people’s involvement in conservation efforts. Participatory approach in conservation management was also considered to be important. Biodiversity assessment was aimed at building up database for the park, and assessing the status of plant and animal species and their global conservation significance. Using the baseline collected, a strategic management plan for the park was to be prepared.

As PTNP was a transboundary initiative, it was necessary to initiate collaboration with KMNP and to identify issues of common interests, such as enforcement, cross-border visits, joint community participation in social-cultural and economic activities and research.

1.4 Planned Duration and Overall Costs

The project was originally planned for a period of 24 months, with a budget of US\$ 740,781 from ITTO and US\$ 805,782 from the Malaysian government. The project was later extended to 33 months up to 30 September 2007 with an additional funding of US\$120,000 from ITTO. This extension allowed for two additional activities to be implemented and all the technical reports to be published.

2. 0 Project Achievements

Before the commencement of the project, baseline data and information on PTNP was scanty and incomplete. For some of the local communities there was also incomplete knowledge pertaining to their social, economic and cultural needs, their relationships to the forests around them, and how their livelihoods might have been affected by the establishment of the national park. A park management plan was also not available. After 33 months of studies the project was able to produce 15 technical reports containing results of the studies and to develop a management plan. As a follow up, a project proposal for Phase II was prepared and approved.

2.1 Outputs achieved

There were five outputs under Specific Objective 1 and two outputs under Specific Objective 2, together with their respective sets of activities. Achievements under each output are summarized below:

(a) Specific Objective 1

Output 1.1 – Conservation and management capacity for PTNP strengthened. For this purpose, a project manager was engaged, and a field management unit created, and necessary basic equipment for surveys and communications acquired. The activity to design a programme to ensure sustainability of PTNP management was also completed.

Output 1.2 – The project studied and mapped out suitable forest areas and made recommendations to Sarawak Forest Department (SFD) for the areas to be included in the PTNP extensions. Progress had been slow in coming because the proposed areas were all under timber license until 2012. SFD had agreed to secure the extensions in stages, and two areas were identified for stage one. This effort will be continued under Phase II.

Output 1.3 – Baseline ecological and biodiversity surveys involving five major forest types and on numerous species of flora and fauna were completed. The faunal groups studied were birds, mammals, fish, reptiles and aquatic insects. A related study on the game animals and impact of hunting was also carried out.

Output 1.4 – Socio-economic study collected new and useful information on the local communities. In a separate study on the Penan, a survey on resource use was also undertaken. Another output was survey and mapping – for the first time - 88 cultural sites belonging to the Kelabit and Lun Bawang communities. This valuable heritage included over 40 stone megaliths estimated to be several centuries old.

A study tour (Activity 1.4.3) was successfully organized for 16 community leaders from the Kelabit, Lun Bawang and Penan communities to visit the Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary (LEWS), several national parks and agricultural projects - from 15 to 23 September 2006. The tour helped the participants to perceive and understand the Government's and ITTO's intentions and efforts in nature conservation and promoting community development.

Output 1.5 – A development plan for PTNP was elaborated and submitted to the Director of Forest for final approval. The plan was developed following the 5-S Framework of the IUCN by systematically identifying the types of resources, sources of stress, and appropriate strategies and actions for addressing stress.

(b) Specific Objective 2

Output 2.1 – A Joint Task Force (JTF) between PTNP and KMNP was formed to plan and implement activities pertaining to TBC cooperation. The JTF met twice to develop a common terms of reference (TOR). Proposed joint activities included cross visits by management staff and community representatives, socio-cultural exchange, training, joint patrol, and information exchange and joint research.

Output 2.2 – The PSC felt that development of an MOU between Sarawak and Indonesia on TBC as too ambitious and decided to modify this output to “initiating TBC cooperation”. The JTF recommended a joint official inauguration of this second TBCA to be hosted by Indonesia. Further initiative is awaited from Indonesia.

Phase II of the PTNP project has identified activities to enhance cross-border cooperation. Joint effort is necessary in implementing these activities, but inputs from Indonesia is uncertain as its project proposal to extend the KMNP project had been rejected by ITTO.

3.0 Target Beneficiaries Involvement

It was the initiative of the highland people, in particular the Kelabit community that led to the constitution of the Pulong Tau N.P. in 2005. The Lun Bawang and Penan are two other communities living in the vicinities. The national park helps to protect the highland's rich biodiversity, watersheds, cultural and eco-tourism assets, while generally helping to enrich the qualities of life of the highland populations. The Project conducted a survey to map over 80 highland cultural sites that included burial grounds and unique stone megaliths of several hundred years old. Stone cultures are very rare and found nowhere else in Sarawak or Malaysia.

The local people have been using Mt. Murud – the highest peak in the park – as a place for annual religious retreats long before Pulong Tau was constituted. The Lun Bawang community cooperated with the Project to take remedial measures to minimize impact on the vegetation and soil due to regular use, by agreeing not to cut anymore trees for construction and firewood and to the survey of a new trail to the summit (2,424 m a.s.l.) to replace badly damaged sections. The village religious committee also erected “no littering” signs along the trails. To the small Penan community the park still serves as a source of food and minor produce. This community is well aware of the importance of sustainable use and takes only what they need from the forest.

Selected members from the communities and timber companies were appointed to sit in the Stakeholders Consultative Committee and Special Park Committee, while many were engaged as field assistants, resource persons and guides during field work. The Project and SFD would like to see more active local participation in PTNP management activities, to be pursued under Phase II.

On education and awareness, the project helped to establish a school museum at the Bario Secondary School and provided photographs and other materials for display. The museum was jointly declared open by Dr. Jurgen Blaser and Miss Chiho Horiuchi when they made a site visit on 11 September 2007. Nature tours were conducted for students from both the primary and secondary schools. Tree seedlings were given to the secondary school for the students' tree planting activity.

Timber concessions Samling and Shin Yang and their timber camp staff generously provided transport for the Project's study teams during the entire project duration, thereby helping to save a lot of travel time and expenses. The local people similarly depend on them for transport and for maintaining road access to their settlements, as well as for building materials. They also cooperated with the Project to help protect the cultural sites in the license areas.

The Resident who is the administrative head of the Miri Division and responsible for planning and implementing the Government's highland development programs, had been very supportive of the project and gave useful advice. In return, baseline information on the park and the people was made available to him.

Sarawak Forest Department with Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) as its operating arm is the main beneficiary of the Project. Besides the baseline data obtained from two years of research and surveys, a management plan for the national park was also prepared. The Park Warden and his officers were directly involved in project implementation.

4.0 Lessons Learned

(a) Development Lessons

As the Project was multi-disciplinary in nature and involved many different departments or agencies, multi-stakeholders cooperation was essential. In particular, participation and contributions by the local communities, timber companies and several government agencies was instrumental throughout the implementation process. Still, the process had not been all smooth and without problems. As observed by Dr. Jurgen Blaser during the last PSC meeting on 5 September 2007, the project was a very complex one not only because of its very remote location but also the fact that it had to deal with communities of different ethnic origins, social and educational backgrounds and lifestyles, and having different needs and expectations.

Another essential element for development planning was knowledge on the park and its surrounding areas including the local populations. The Project Manager was able to provide much of this knowledge to enable him to plan and guide the project's specialists and local counterparts most of whom were unfamiliar with the area. The project had expected greater management presence and participation inputs from SFC but encountered difficulties at the early stage.

In developing strategies on sustainable resource management, active local participation and equal sharing of resources must be given due consideration as the people are still in need of the resources for their livelihoods. Besides meeting local needs, resource sharing will also help to resolve management conflicts.

On community-based development, some communities, groups or individuals tended to be more supportive than others. This was due to a number of factors such as differences in perceptions of the Project's benefits, lack of interest, self-interest, disunity among the people, reluctance to participate in communal or group activities, or lack of effective community leadership. Some communities were more ready to accept new challenges than others. One important lesson learned here is for Phase II to involve only interested and willing partners or participants in community-based activities.

Delays in initiating extensions to the PTNP had in some ways hampered efforts in long term development planning. When the project proposal was being prepared in the year 2002 much of the surrounding forests had already been under license for timber production. The situation could have been avoided if the EA had taken this into consideration when preparing the project proposal.

Evidence from socio-economic studies has strongly suggested the importance of involving the local communities in effective conservation management - through the process of collaborative management or co-management. To achieve this, the SFC needs to first strengthen its management on the ground.

(b) Operational Lessons

The main obstacles encountered in project implementation were remote location of the park, high elevations (peaking at 2,424 m) with steep and rolling terrain, lack of a proper road link, and often-unpredictable weather conditions. Logging roads provide the only link between the park and urban centres, often at distances of up to 100 km or more between them. This road network normally ends some distance away from the park boundary. Beyond this point, the only access is on foot through the dense forest. With support from timber companies Samling and Shin Yang the project was able to save a

lot of travel time and expenses. Surveys should not be carried out during the rainy season that occurs between November and March.

The project also relied on the local communities to provide accommodation, local information or knowledge, guides, porters and transport. Operation was somewhat hampered in 2006 when the highland populations were affected by irregular and high cost of rural air service and goods due to increasing fuel prices that also resulted in air charter service (for cargo) being cancelled. Survey activities in several locations were affected. Higher costs of local labour, longboats and engines hire were also somewhat unexpected, as the prices were determined locally. Getting two survey parties to the same study area to share labour and transport was one way to keep cost the low.

Having more field rangers' post in strategic locations manned by trained local employees will certainly help to facilitate operation, in particular in developing community-based activities. Thus on the ground management presence will be quite crucial during Phase II when the main activities will be biodiversity surveys and monitoring, and community development.

5.0 Recommendations

Recommendations from the project staff have largely been incorporated in the park's management plan in which strategies and actions for implementation have been outlined.

5.1 Project implementation

The importance of establishing a strong working partnership between project staff and local counterparts has been emphasized since the start of the Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary projects in the early 1990s. A recent initiative by SFD was creating a new Division on International Affairs to deal specifically with international projects and global forestry issues. This will be a great boost to Phase II the PTNP Project as the number of counterparts to the project will be increased.

To ensure smooth implementation to be continued under Phase II, the PSC in its meeting on 5 Sept. 2007 recommended that, as far as possible, the same team of project staff should be re-engaged.

5.2 Strengthening management presence

The Project has recommended to SFC to take the necessary steps by allocating more rangers to the Park, building more rangers' posts in strategic locations, and engaging and training more local staff in management.

5.3 Local communities as caretakers

Developing long-term partnerships with the local communities in co-management is crucial in attaining conservation objectives. The basis for these partnerships is through understanding and acknowledging the people's long associations with the forest, their needs and expectations as well as their traditional rights to an equitable share of the plant and animal resources.

5.4 Socio-economic and cultural aspects

Community cooperation is stressed in the development of community-based activities. More willing communities will be encouraged to participate. As many of the highlands' valuable cultural sites are located within the park's proposed extension areas, the EA together with the people must take appropriate actions to protect these sites.

Once nomadic, the Penan people have begun to settle and live in small-scattered villages outside of the Park. Being very poor and often also due to ignorance, most do not possess birth certificates and

identity cards. The PSC had recommended that assistance be provided to enable these people to obtain their birth certificates and identity cards during Phase II.

5.5 Special Park Committee

The EA and SFC should make full use of the Special Park Committee of PTNP to ensure its effectiveness as a co-management tool. The Committee also serves as an important linkage to the ITTO project. Members of the Committee include selected representatives from local key stakeholders.

5.6 PTNP extensions

Enlarging the Park is crucial for two reasons: To conserving the highlands' unique landscapes and biodiversity, and to ensure successful implementation of Phase II's project objectives. The EA must double its effort to secure stage one of the extensions as soon as possible.

5.7 Transboundary cooperation

The EA must take full advantage of Phase II of the project to enhance collaborative management partnership with KMNP in transboundary biodiversity conservation and bring socio-economic benefits to the people living across the common borders.