

Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

Mid-term Evaluation

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List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCCI	Biodiversity Corridor Conservation Initiative
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDAC	Centre for the Study and Development of Agriculture Cambodia
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEPA	Culture and Environment Preservation Association (Cambodia)
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of flora and fauna
CNMC	Cambodia National Mekong Committee
COP9	Conference of the Parties (The 9 th COP of the Ramsar Convention was held in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2005)
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DARD	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (in Vietnam)
DG	Director General
DNCP	Department of Nature Conservation and Protection (Cambodia)
DoE	Department of Environment (Cambodia)
DOST	Department of Science & Technology (in Vietnam)
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EP	Environmental Programme (of MRC)
FCZ	Fish Conservation Zone
FIPI	Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (Vietnam)
FFI	Flora and Fauna International
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GoC	Government of Cambodia
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
iNGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
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MRCs	Mekong River Commission Secretariat
MSP	Medium-Sized Project (of GEF)
MTE	Mid Term Evaluation (-team)
MWBP	Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (Lao PDR)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (Lao PDR)
NMC	National Mekong Committee
NPO	National Programme Office
NSC	National Steering Committee
ONEP	Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (of MONRE; Thailand)
PD	Paris Declaration (on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability; March 2005)
PDF	Project Development Facility (of GEF); PDF-A, PDF-B and PDF-Cs are recognised ¹
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PPC	Provincial People's Committee (Vietnam)
PPO	Provincial Programme Office
PSTEO	Provincial Science, Technology and Environment Office (Lao PDR)
RAF	Resource Allocation Framework (of GEF)
SCAP	Species Conservation Action Plan
SMT	Senior Management Team
STEA	Science, Technology and Environment Agency (Lao PDR)
TCNP	Tram Chim National Park
TNMC	Thailand National Mekong Committee
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRAC	Target for Resource Assignment from the Core (a UNDP fund)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VEPA	Vietnam Environment Protection Agency
VNMC	Vietnam National Mekong Committee
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WANI	Water and Nature Initiative (of IUCN)
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World-wide Fund for Nature

¹ A PDF Block A grant (maximum of \$25,000) is intended to support the earliest stages of programme or project identification. PDF As are approved through UNDP-GEF, or the other GEF implementing agencies. A PDF A is used in preparation for work on a medium sized project or a full project. A PDF Block B grant (maximum of \$350,000 for single

Executive summary

1. The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) aims at wetland conservation and sustainable resource management in four countries in the lower Mekong region: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. The programme has had a very long gestation period, as it was first initiated in 1995 and subject to a PDF-B² in the late 1990s. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project Brief was completed in 2001, but due to delays in GEF support, 'pre-implementation' activities during 2002-2004 were low key, funded (among others) by the International Union for the Conservation and Nature and Natural Resources³ (IUCN) and Wetlands International. In June 2002, IUCN secured interim funding (\$600,000) from the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok, through UNDP, for the development of a programme document, to start recruitment processes and to facilitate negotiation on agreements between the four governments, UNDP, MRC and IUCN. MWBP began officially in July 2004, but the start-up has been slow, with project offices, staff recruitment and management systems taking 6-12 months to be fully in place.

2. This has also been the case at the demonstration sites, where activities have been ongoing for only a year (or even less, in Vietnam). In spite of the slow start, significant progress has now been made at all of the demonstration sites. Provincial

12. Greater country ownership is required for MWBP. At present, all management and the main reporting lines are via the PMU, and NPOs and national host agencies generally feel little involved in shaping activities at the demonstration site level. This is not surprising, since they have a limited role in both financial management and the setting of priorities. In what remains of Phase A, management and financial responsibilities should be transferred to the NPOs as much as possible and there will be opportunities to take this process further during Phase B.
13. Phase A funding has mainly been by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRC and the IUCN Water and Nature Initiative (WANI), along with minor contributions by other donors (e.g. Danida contribution to livelihoods component executed by CARE on the Vietnam Component).
14. Funding options for continuation of the country programmes after MWBP Phase A vary from country to country. Funding as GEF Medium Sized Projects (MSPs) as recently suggested by IUCN and UNDP seems a viable option only in the case of Cambodia. In the other countries there is either too much competition for scarce GEF resources, or there are other priorities or lack of support for this option by local agencies. In Thailand, global significance of biodiversity at Songkhram is not well articulated, but funds appear available at provincial and national level for continuation of the livelihoods and sustainable development activities underway. In Vietnam, funding is available to protected areas management boards from the Vietnam Conservation Fund and will be available from the forthcoming National Wetland Support Programme, while in Lao PDR bilateral donor support could be obtained for the livelihoods programme.
15. Funding of the Regional Component will remain an issue. It has been suggested that this could be funded out of GEF Adaptation to Climate Change funds, but there is little national government support for this approach. Also, while such funds seem highly appropriate for funding continuation of MWBP activities carried out by the MRC (e.g. using e-flows and wetland mapping as tools for better understanding possible consequence of climate change), they do not seem entirely appropriate for other regional activities.
16. Financing options and opportunities vary for the four country programmes, as do their points of departure in terms of achieved capacities. Country programmes are likely to move forward at different starting dates, and be supported by different funding sources. This will be a constraint for developing a coherent Phase B for the four country programmes, and certainly form a challenge to an eventual regional component.
17. The MTE report lists a number of short and medium term recommendations designed to maintain and develop key aspects of MWBP Phase A, which are identified as being in the interest of biodiversity conservation in the Lower Mekong Basin in the longer term. These include a revision of the current management structure of the programme, developing the approach to biodiversity conservation when seen in terms of livelihoods, and nurturing greater national ownership of the programme. A number of useful lessons can be drawn from the MWBP thus far – e.g. phasing of programmes, national ownership, and managing regional programmes – which are emphasised in the text.

Acknowledgements

The MTE team would like to express their sincere thanks to the partner organisations – UNDP, IUCN and MRC – and the MWBP's national host agencies for organising this Mid-term Evaluation so efficiently. We would also like to thank everyone we met and interviewed during the mission for making their time available and for providing comments and suggestions that made an invaluable contribution to the evaluation.

The team would also like to thank, in particular, UNDP Lao, the PMU, the four NPOs and the four PPOs for making arrangements for meetings, preparing background materials and CD-ROMs, and organising the logistics of the field visits; their meticulous attention to detail enabled this complex mission to run very smoothly. Lastly, we would like to thank all those who provided comments on the first draft of this report, which was circulated on 28 June 2006 • the

1 Introduction

The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – executed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by IUCN – The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with four participating governments and other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRC, the IUCN Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) and other donors, the programme tries to address the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands.

MWBP has been designed to be funded in two phases: Phase A Creating the enabling environment, and Phase B Full implementation. Funding for Phase B was dependent upon a mid-term evaluation and a proposal for a Phase B programme document. However, recent changes within GEF have closed the option of funding Phase B as originally conceived (see below).

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

The main purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) is to assess whether MWBP has been successful during Phase A in creating an enabling environment, which can pave the way for an eventual Phase B. The MTE is also to assess effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in creating the enabling environment, to review the strategies that have been developed and to assess their continuing relevance to the changing conditions within the region and the four countries. Bearing in mind the overall objective of the MWBP – the conservation and sustainable use of Mekong wetland biodiversity – the MTE is also to assess if the strategies and approaches adopted

1.2 Key issues addressed

The MTE focuses on the following key questions:

- § Which results have been achieved on the four country programmes and the regional programme to date, and how do these relate to the overall objective of MWBP?
- § How cost-efficient and effective has the approach been on the four country programmes and the regional programme, and do they need to be adapted?
- § Have the four country programmes and the regional programme been successful in creating the enabling environment, i.e. developing the preconditions for a second phase? These preconditions include developing the capacity of key stakeholders, establishing programme management structures, developing partnerships, generating unde

1.4 Structure of the evaluation report

The MTE report is structured in the following way:

Chapters 1-3 are all introductory in nature, and include a general introduction (1), an overview of the MWBP and its development context (2), and a chapter on how the programme was formulated (3).

Chapters 4-7 assess the four country components, i.e. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, respectively, and focus on:

- § Programme design (institutional setting, demonstration project & national priorities, stakeholder participation);
- § Programme implementation (country-ownership, implementation approach, monitoring & evaluation, stakeholder participation, financial planning, execution & implementation modalities)
- § Programme results (creating the enabling environment, technical effectiveness, sustainability); and
- § Implications & recommendations (remainder of Phase-A, and a possible Phase-B approach)

Chapter 8 is similar to chapters 4-7, but assesses the regional programme in terms of design, implementation, results and implications for the future.

Chapters 9 and 10 draw conclusions from chapters 4-8 for Phase A and Phase B, respectively, while Chapter 11 provides recommendations.

A series of annexes provide the TOR (Annex 1), itinerary (2), list of persons interviewed (3), summary tables of field visits (4), list of documents reviewed (5), and comments by stakeholders summarised in meeting notes (6).

2 MWBP Programme & its development context

2.1 Programme start and its duration

The potential for a regional GEF project was first discussed in 1995 in a joint initiative between Wetlands International and IUCN. Funding was secured to develop a GEF PDF A proposal, which was subsequently prepared by the two organisations. Between 1999 and 2002 IUCN prepared the GEF PDF B project brief, which the GEF Council approved in March 2002. This approval was for the programme, now called the MWBP, to receive funding in two phases: Phase A Creating the enabling environment, and Phase B Full Implementation. Funding for Phase B was dependent upon a mid-term evaluation and a proposal for a Phase B programme document. In June 2002, IUCN secured interim funding (\$600,000) from the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok, through UNDP, for the development of a programme document, to start recruitment processes and to facilitate negotiation on agreements between the four governments, UNDP, MRC and IUCN. Only in May 2004 did the GEF CEO approve the project document, and this was followed by the formal completion of agreements by UNDP – as the programme executing agency, MRC and IUCN – as the implementing agencies, and the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand – as the recipient host countries. The preparatory process was completed in January 2005, when Vietnam gave final approval to the project document.

During the period July 2004 June 2005 there were a number of start-up set backs, which are referred to in this report; the countries also moved forward at different paces. However, June 2005 saw full recruitment and key procedures in place, and from this date MWBP moved rapidly forward. An underspend and reduced outputs in the first year of 52.4 Tm -0.0827Rad4 4e24 Tlssible in gathe CEOroval to theext and 188.4m -0.06 Tmyyea

2.2 Problems that the Programme seeks to address

MWBP identifies wetland loss and degradation in the Lower Mekong Basin as the root cause of biodiversity loss. The programme focuses on five issues and themes:

Root cause of wetland degradation and loss	MWBP theme
Lack of integration between sectors in development planning	Multi-sector planning at national and regional level
Lack of supportive policies and incentives for wetland conservation and sustainable use	Strengthened policy and economic framework
Lack of knowledge about wetland biodiversity and its use, and lack of awareness amongst decision makers and public	Increased awareness and information
Lack of capacity for wetland management and wise use at all levels	Enhanced human and technical resources
Lack of viable livelihood alternatives for local communities using wetland resources	Four sustainable resource-use demonstration projects

2.3 Immediate & development objectives of the Programme

MWBP firmly states as its guiding principle that “it is not possible to conserve the biodiversity of Mekong wetlands without addressing issues of sustainable use, livelihoods and poverty”. The Programme Document has a clear sustainable livelihoods strategy based on development thinking and best practice at the time the document was prepared. This underlying working principle that takes a people-centred ‘ecosystem approach’ has not been clear to all stakeholders, who may have been confused by a somewhat contradictory emphasis on the conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the Project Brief and by the complexity of the programme logframe (Results Framework), and its revisions. Together with an emphasis on ‘flagship’ species, the logframe appeared to promote species conservation *per se*, even if this was not its intent. ‘Conservation’ was seen as a threat to development.

However, the logframe has undergone significant changes since the Project Brief was accepted. The Logframe was first adapted as the M & E system was developed, and a further revision of the logframe is dated January 2006. This most recent revision is far more workable than its predecessors although its formal status is not clear; it reflects the reality of the wetland management interventions in the region and a realistic approach to the implementation of the MWBP.

2.4 Main stakeholders

In the original design, as specified in the GEF program brief, the main stakeholders were anticipated to be managers and users of wetlands throughout the Lower Mekong Basin. This included the Mekong River Commission at regional level, the four Governments at national level, and provincial and district authorities at the four demonstration sites. It was also anticipated that international environmental NGOs would be involved in the programme wherever possible, mostly in terms of providing technical advice and services and that local people would be involved in strategies to protect and conserve wetland biodiversity. There was no explicit stakeholder participation plan in the project design, but instead, participatory actions were integrated into various components and actions, particularly those at demonstration site level.

2.5 Results expected

Results anticipated in the GEF Project Brief (September, 2001), the Project Support Document (July 2004) and the revised logframe (January, 2006) are all rather different. The M&E system is based on the logframe presented in the Project Support Document and so it is not entirely clear how this will now apply to the revised logframe under application since January 2007 and presented to the MTE as the current basis of planning.

The regional nature of the programme design gave rise to a broad range of proposed outputs and results. There was a strong focus on achieving results relating to biodiversity conservation in the original design approved in the GEF Project Brief, particularly as part of the regional program. However, the logframe was revised extensively by PMU in January 2006 to place much more emphasis on livelihood aspects and

3 MWBP Programme formulation

3.1 Relevance

The programme is broadly supportive of global, national and local development policies. At the global level, the original design of the programme sought to address globally important biodiversity in a region that is coming under rapidly increasing demographic and development pressures. However, the recent revisions to the logframe reduce the relevance of the program to global biodiversity conservation priorities (see above). At national level, the program supports broad national development and environmental management priorities, as set out in various strategic policy documents and plans (for example, Vietnam's Socio-economic development strategy, nationalized MDGs) and specifically seeks to support national capacities to implement obligations under the Ramsar Convention, to which three of the four countries participating in the MWBP are signatories.

Implementation arrangements: MWBP's implementation arrangements are complex, which is to be expected for a programme that spans four countries and includes a regional component. The original arrangements included an overall Programme Steering Committee, a Regional Co-ordination Subcommittee and four National Steering Committees. This was modified to an overall Executive Regional Steering Committee, a Programme Management Committee (PMC), four National Steering Committees and four Provincial Management Boards. The latest revision proposes having a Regional Steering Committee and abolishing the PMC.

Phasing of MWBP: MWBP was designed for implementation in two phases: Phase A for developing an 'enabling environment' and Phase B implementation of activities and outputs. In hindsight, the merit of this approach was questionable given Tm -09c 604.56 Tm -0.062 Tc 0.06o8tar 1 249.36 604372 Tm -0.061 Tc 0.

4 Cambodia Component Assessment

4.1 Project design

4.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Cambodia

The National Program Office is hosted by the Ministry of Environment, with formal reporting to the MWBP PMU. Within MoE, the National Programme Director position is filled by one of two Director Generals of MOE. The DG also has responsibility for overall supervision over technical aspects of the ministry including the Department of Nature Conservation and Protection (DNCP) – the competent national authority for Ramsar. This arrangement has worked reasonably well, but DNCP expressed strongly the need for considerable improvement, perhaps because internal reporting and information sharing within MoE has not functioned as well as planned. For whatever reason, DNCP do not feel they are sufficiently engaged or informed of the progress of the programme.

Reporting responsibilities of both NPOs and PPOs are to the PMU. This has two important implications. Firstly, the NPO has no direct responsibility for management of provincial activities – this is the role of the regional PMU. Secondly, reports to MoE come from the regional level, not the provincial or national level, so MoE are, in effect, simply informed of the programme performance as a whole through reports (described by MoE as unclear and confusing) and through discussions at the National (Program) Steering Committee. However, the NPC also reports on a regular basis to the NPD, both on the national and regional component. If a possible Phase B initiative is to focus more at the Stung Treng Ramsar site level, then consideration should be given to better integration of the PPO within DNCP.

The National (Programme) Steering Committee has been established and meets regularly. However, it has not been possible to reach agreement between line ministries on the establishment of a National Wetlands Committee – a feature of the original design, but no longer present in the revised logframe. The Ramsar steering committee has yet to be established. CNMC – an active participant in the National Steering Committee, expressed the hope that a National Wetlands Committee might eventually evolve out of the National (Programme) Steering Committee, but first there must be stronger engagement of senior line ministries in the NSC, especially the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). These ministries have been asked to co-chair the NSC with this aim in mind.

IUCN no longer has a representative office in Cambodia, and so all technical support from IUCN is delivered from the regional

At provincial level, the PPO is hosted by the Department of Environment, Stung Treng Province. Due to capacity and funding constraints, there are no staff assigned from DNCP to the DoE in this province, so DoE is responsible for DNCP functions at provincial level (responsibility for PAs and Ramsar sites is directly under DNCP), including responsibility for the Ramsar site and reporting on progress to DNCP at national level. Due to space constraints, the PPO has moved to an adjacent building, and so is no longer housed within the DoE. Institutional capacity of DoE is extremely low and realistically, this constrains the extent to which the PPO can engage with DoE on technical work.

The PPO reports to the regional PMU, so reporting procedures and formats are more complicated and very different from those of the DoE. This also introduces formidable language barriers (as communications and reporting to PMU is in English). This works against active DoE engagement since DoE staff do not read or speak English. An added complication is that the revised logframe shifts the focus of work away from areas where DoE have institutional responsibility, the effect of which will be to further marginalize their role in the programme implementation. The DoE and PPO co-managers meet regularly, and there is strong commitment from PPO to engage with the DoE. Despite this, DoE expressed strongly the view that they do not feel part of the programme, have not been involved in work plan or logframe revision and therefore feel they have very little role in planning and decision-making.

The issues outlined above reflect significant programme design problems that will need to be rectified for the remainder of Phase A, to ensure that new arrangements are 'bedded-in' by the start of any possible Phase B. The overall assessment of design is that the institutional structure operates more or less in parallel with government systems, both at national and provincial level, and reduces substantially the role that government can play in the programme.

4.1.2 Demonstration project & Cambodian national priorities

The demonstration project inherently seeks to support Cambodia's efforts to fulfil its obligations under the Ramsar Convention, by providing lessons and experience on integrating livelihood and biodiversity conservation objectives at site level. On paper, both the national and demonstration site components are supportive and compatible with national priorities.

Poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation, particularly a shift towards community management of fisheries resources, are among many priorities addressed in government policy. Thus the overall approach at the demonstration site - addressing livelihood and protection of flagship species, does respond well to the national interest. However, from the host agency's perspective, the strong focus on livelihoods does not support sufficiently the Ministry's efforts and mandate to ensure that all aspects of biodiversity conservation are addressed – not just fish diversity, but also threatened habitats and species.

4.1.3 Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation during the prolonged design phase was not assessed in depth by the MTE team although a number of international partners referred to their contributions to early design parameters. The rather weak role for government host agencies in project implementation, at both the national and provincial levels, might indicate that the design process took place largely outside government structures, and perhaps that government did not play a strong role in the design process. The scale and sheer complexity of the original design would also have worked against active engagement of many stakeholders.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation in design – Cambodia			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Weak government roles suggest insufficient participation during the design phase.			

4.2 Programme Implementation

4.2.1 Ownership/Country drivenness

The overall picture for ownership is mixed, with most ownership issues tracing back to the institutional set-up discussed above. In general, ownership does not appear to be high – a conclusion supported by M&E reporting for 2005 which rates ownership as ‘low-medium’.

The project design process was exceptionally prolonged, during which numerous consultations and workshops were held at national and regional level. It was not possible to assess the extent to which the programme design took on board the key issues raised during these consultations, but it is assumed that this was assessed by UNDP prior to programme approval.

At national level, there is a reasonable level of support amongst MoE - and strong commitment to make progress on the wetland agenda was expressed by the Secretary of State, informed by his MWBP-supported participation in Ramsar COP9 in Uganda and a strong endorsement from the CNMC.

Discussions with DNCP indicate somewhat low ownership, something of a concern given their status as the competent authority for Ramsar). Concerns were cited over (perceived) likely outcomes of sector policy work (at national level) and the slow progress on the Ramsar agenda at site level (demarcation, and management planning). They appear to be adopting a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude, rather than one of active engagement. As a whole, the host agency made clear that they do not feel they were consulted sufficiently on logframe development and revision and they perceive their inputs do not influence MWBP planning and decision-making.

It was not possible to assess ownership of other line ministries as requests made by the NPO for meetings were either not confirmed or were attended by junior and/uninformed staff. Whether this can be construed as an indicator of low levels of engagement and ownership or because of understandable ‘mission fatigue’, could not be established.

Ownership amongst external, non-government partners is generally rather low. Appreciation was expressed by Health Unlimited (at provincial level); and constructive engagement and support from the World Fish Centre was evident. However, several iNGO partners referred to the MWBP’s efforts in Cambodia as ‘regionally-driven’, ‘lacking focus on key priorities’, and several partners referred to ‘non-delivery’ on expectations raised earlier in the programme cycle.

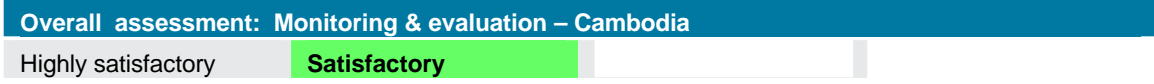
4.2.2 Implementation approach

The PMU guides the development and drafting of work plans – these are then discussed and agreed with the NPO and presented to the NSC for endorsement. This is also the case for staff contracts of both the NPO and the PPO. The NPO provides support to the NSC, but also has to backstop communications etc between the PPO and PMU, since language issues sometimes constrain clear communication. The NPO also manages relationships with GoC partners in MoE and other ministries, and with external partners for work on other national activities, such as the sector policy review work. Feedback from partners was that the NPO performs this role effectively, despite limited resources and tight timeframes. In the absence of an IUCN country representative office in Cambodia, there is no in-country backstopping support from IUCN.

The logi

Most communications on work planning and budgeting are conducted in English, either between PMU and NPO, or between the PMU and PPO. In some cases, the PPO has had to work through the NPO, or seek their detailed support, in order to deal with language-based communication problems. This becomes more

In terms of external monitoring and supervision, the UNDP Cambodia office has yet to visit the demonstration site, and does not play an active role in supervision of the national programme. This may change following the approval earlier this year of UNDP TRAC funds for sector policy analysis.



4.2.5 Financial planning

Budget allocation. The PMU is responsible for most aspects of financial planning, and inputs are sought from the NPO and PPO. Work plans and budgets are then approved by the NSC (although CNMC pointed-out that documents are circulated at short notice prior to meetings so the role for line ministries to comment and contribute to the budget planning process is very limited).

The MTE reviewed briefly the consolidated budget/expenditure report for 2005 and the budget for 2006. These show that spending is scheduled to increase substantively for 2006, with most of the increase on spending on activities, reflecting the work being undertaken on sector policy review, fisheries, sustainable agriculture and health during 2006. There will also be a modest increase in staffing costs, office operations and cost for travel and meetings.

The national programme budget for 2005 accounted for 13% of total MWBP expenditure, or around 32% of the annual budget of the PMU. For 2006, spending will comprise around 15% of overall MWBP expenditure, or around 36% of PMU expenditure. Spending on activities accounted for 35% of in-country expenditure in 2005, but will increase to around 61% in 2006.

Sixty percent (\$288,655) of national programme spending (\$471,592) will be on activities at national and PPO level, and the remaining one third on operating expenses at national or provincial level. Around 44%

4.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

MWBP has made impressive progress in recruiting staff, mobilizing consultants, initiating partnerships with local and national partners and establishing national and provincial offices.

Financial management systems have been put in place and appear to be working well, despite complex reporting requirements for multiple donor sources and for UNDP GEF funds in particular. Reporting systems are operational and thorough. Minor adjustments are required to reporting formats to make quarterly reports more accessible to national host agency. However, the complexity of reporting procedures and formats has created problems, especially for the PPO, and has required high levels of inputs from PPO staff.

NPO and PPO staff are committed, competent and respected by government and external partners. At provincial level, the PPO is supported by an international adviser provided through VSO. The VSO has been effective, has helped underpin the work of the PPO on technical and communications aspects and has the respect and support of provincial staff. The VSO will complete his assignment in September, and there will be a likely minimum two month gap before a replacement VSO is in place. The NPO office appears to have competent and strong management, and should be capable of assuming greater management responsibilities for the remainder of Phase A.

Execution arrangements are largely in parallel to existing government systems and staffing structures (see above) and so a clear exit strategy is needed that will ensure stronger ownership and integration of management responsibilities into existing structures.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

Overall, the enabling environment is not yet in place, and rated as marginally satisfactory, but this rating could improve given that time remains before closure of Phase A, provided a concerted effort is made for the remainder of Phase A.

There is now a functioning National (Programme) Steering Committee but initial plans/indicators included in the project brief for a National Wetlands Committee have now been withdrawn and the National Ramsar Committee has yet to be established. The review of the National Wetlands Action Plan has yet to start and the sector study is ongoing, scheduled for completion in 2006. The support of CNMC for the National (Programme) Steering Committee and a stronger role for MOWRAM and MAFF as co-chairs offers some prospects that this mechanism might be sustained under a future Phase B and could perhaps

management aspects are undertaken by the PMU, are clearly working against development of ownership at both national and provincial levels. This needs to be addressed with some urgency.

The MTE recommends the Cambodia National Project Office is given a much stronger role in national and provincial programme management, including principle responsibility for budget and work planning, provincial project office supervision and support and requesting inputs from PMU technical staff, partners and consultants. This change should be implemented as soon as technically possible. The MTE recognizes that careful thought will be needed to ensure existing contractual arrangements are respected, and it can be foreseen that the PMU will need to continue to play a key role in consolidating financial information and reporting to donors.

Staffing at the NPO will need to be adjusted to ensure there is sufficient management capacity at the NPO to fulfil this function. For the remainder of Phase A, the PMU will provide support to the NPO to enable this transition to proceed as smoothly as possible.

At provincial level, the relationship between the PPO and host agency – the DoE need to be strengthened to ensure that the demonstration project provides greater support for DoE's official responsibilities for the Ramsar site. This will require joint revision of the workplan and budget to ensure that DoE priorities are addressed to the extent possible, and may also require adjustments to reporting arrangements at provincial level. One option for consideration might be for the PPO to report through DoE to national level – this would have the support in principle of the NPO and national host agency. The PMU should assist NPO and PPO to elaborate options and ensure these are implemented as soon as possible.

Focus of activities and outputs

By end of 2006, clear baseline survey data in place, based on which, clear strategies for ensuring that urgent biodiversity conservation priorities are addressed as part of demonstration site functions (e.g. for the urgent priorities identified by Timmins 2006⁷) in the preliminary survey report).

5 Lao PDR Component Assessment

5.1 Project design

5.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Lao PDR

The long formulation phase of MWBP that led to its endorsement by the Lao PDR (GoL) Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) in 2004 spanned a period during which most of the government's current policies on environment, water resources, biodiversity conservation, fisheries and poverty reduction and related planning were formulated or reformulated. The responsibility for MWBP implementation was given to the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), which passed the implementing authority to its sub-department, the Living Aquatic Resources Research Centre (LARReC). LARReC was established in 1999 and its current mandate focuses on adaptive and applied research, but not on policy formulation, which, with regard to MWBP, lies with NAFRI. LARReC is also tasked to summarise and provide the relevant information/results and data obtained from the research for national policy formulation and decision making process. Changes in the responsibilities of ministers and senior officials have not encouraged ownership among those now responsible for the implementation of MWBP.

During the implementation phase, July 2004 – present, there has been a further structural change in government and decentralisation of authority, which has been of significance to the present positioning of the project. One of the core priorities of the government continues to be the eradication of poverty through the provision of an enabling environment for growth and development, which includes private sector development. The government is guided in its attempts by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) 2004 sets the goal of halving poverty by 2015 and eradicating it by 2020. In conjunction with the priority NGPES, GoL sets a great deal of weight on the Paris Declaration and its emphasis on nationally led development initiatives.

Although the management of wetland areas, especially lowland wetlands, might play a considerable role in supporting the goal of the NGPES, 'wetland' is a new word in the Lao language, and there is a struggle to understand the values of wetland benefits and services. GoL has been considering its possible accession to the Ramsar Convention for two years, but has not yet concluded where the focal point for Ramsar would be placed. It has not yet agreed to a site for inclusion on the list of wetlands of international importance, nor how a National Wetland Committee would be formed and a National Wetlands Action Plan developed. MWBP and its partner IUCN-Lao have been able to help GoL in formulating an understanding of and mechanisms for accession to the Convention in the near future.

Decentralisation has devolved considerable and increasing power to the provinces. The MWBP-PPO and demonstration project are sited in one of Lao's poorest and least densely populated provinces – Attapeu. However, Attapeu's rich resource base and location with respect to expanding markets and planned trade routes between Vietnam and Thailand (the highway linking Attapeu to Ho Chi Minh City opened in 2006) means that it is facing enormous pressure and rapid economic growth, which will continue to intensify. GoL is concerned that economic development in Attapeu – one of the few remaining frontier provinces – is adequately planned and regulated. The province already faces numerous proposals for development, including mining, forestry and agro-tech. By its own admission, the province is not adequately prepared to

deal with such a development scenario and at the same time stimulate appropriate economic activity to reduce poverty. Although both central and provincial governments are equally committed to the national priority of poverty reduction, there are different emphases of approach from a more holistic need for national spatial planning from central government to a more service-delivery emphasis in the province.

In its formal constitution, MWBP has established a National Steering Committee chaired by Dr. Phouang Parisak Pravongviengkham, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), made up of members from the Lao National Mekong Committee (LNMC); Environment Unit at the Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA); Department of Planning, MAF; Irrigation Department, MAF; National Agricultural and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI); Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department, Attapeu; Department of Livestock and Fishery, MAF; and a Provincial Management Board chaired by the Vice Governor and including cross-sectoral interests in its membership.

5.1.2 Demonstration project & Lao PDR national priorities

Given the above scenario, the Attapeu demonstration project has to show that it complies with both provincial and central demands. At the onset of the project, and in the process of its establishment, the MWBP had created a perception that biodiversity conservation necessitated site protection and would inhibit development. Much of this was a problem of presentation and interpretation; for example, the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) and work plan placed a strong emphasis on biodiversity conservation actions rather than actions to support sustainable livelihoods. Only when the office reached its full complement of trained staff, and the National Steering Committee and senior officials from IUCN and UNDP visited the PPO in June 2005, were these problems of perception addressed, and the province recognised the potential of MWBP to support poverty reduction through a sustainable livelihoods approach.

There has been a rapid change in the relationship. The PPO in Attapeu is now a model for project and governmental partnership. The project and provincial co-management arrangements function in such a way that the project is institutionalised within the provincial government (not strictly as in the organisational structure flow chart). The project formally reports and plans through the Provincial Co-manager to the Provincial Office, and the Vice Governor is well informed of project activities. Furthermore, the other provincial departments, notably the Provincial Science Technology and Environment Office (PSTEO) and the Provincial Health Department, are active supporters of the programme and members of the Provincial Management Board. The four target villages, which may not have been ideal as demonstration sites from the project's perspective, were selected by the province on the basis that they received no other development support. Two of the villages are very remote and impoverished.

Development planning for the NPGES is being undertaken through an area-based planning system that recognises local administrative units (commonly coinciding with watershed boundaries), village clusters and land-use zones for protection and production, and these define development and poverty reduction activities and budgets for these areas. This system provides a common language for either work planning or communication purposes, which has not yet been taken up by MWBP. The extent to which the project can realistically contribute to this planning approach through the lessons learned at the demonstration site has to be assessed and acted upon. It is possible that much could be done by building on existing data held and being gathered by GoL, the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) and other agencies.

demonstration projects, but in the present structure and during the development phase the PM also has a significant management responsibility.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach – Lao PDR

Highly satisfactory **Satisfactory** Marginally satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Rationale: Having overcome initial difficulties the project has made good progress in terms of its overall approach, but concerns have been identified. It suffers because it is very wide ranging, both in its programme and its link to regional interests, and few people can grasp its holistic design.

5.2.3 Monitoring & evaluation

The project document provides ambitious impact indicators for the satisfactory completion of Phase A, which, it states, are to be used in the MTE. These include significant progress towards:

- 'Institutional arrangements are in place to allow local people to use and manage wetland resources in a sustainable manner.
- Government accepts community management arrangements in wetlands.
- MRC has recognised the need to take full cognisance of ecosystem functions and values in its core programmes.
- Commitment exists to the need for regional wetlands policy.'

These overly ambitious indicators have not been met in Lao, and this raises the question of whether the stakeholders named were fully involved in the setting the indicators. However, MWBP Lao has made commendable progress towards realising these 'objectives', and a way should be found to continue the momentum of these efforts.

As a tool for M&E, the *2005 Annual Progress Report MWBP – NPO* is a model document. It provides a self-critical analysis of progress in 2005 and sets a work plan (in Lao) with a budget for 2006. This plan identifies gaps in the overall programme for Phase A and shows the underspend in the 2005 programme and how the 2006 budget v activities will complete progress towards the creation of an 'enabling environment' by 2007. There is an honest acknowledgement of areas of difficulty, for example in the area of national wetlands policy, and the reasons for these difficulties are identified realistically. The report concludes that overall the programme is 65% satisfactory, with eight areas described as 'unsatisfactory with some positive elements'; the most important of these is a response to the question 'given the objectives of the programme, are the appropriate institutions being assisted?' and a note that 'most counterparts know the MWBP as the IUCN project'.

The quarterly reports coordinated by the PMU also give narrative summaries of output v work plan and have been completed in timely way. These are quite complicated documents for the majority of the Lao staff, who have a limited command of English. What is lacking in these reports is financial reporting against activity, as stated in the work plan, and an overview of how the country programme fits onto the regional strategy - although such reporting may be available.

Reports from the Steering Committees – Provincial, Regional and National – also serve as significant checks and directional guidance. Measures put in place to strengthen the NSC and rotate the chairperson will further assist programme monitoring. Of particular help was a review by the NSC and a delegation from the IUCN ARO that took place in June 2005 at a time when the provincial programme was struggling for recognition. Because this was a reflection by senior objective reviewers with a stake in ensuring the success of the project the guidance given at that time was helpful to all parties and has been acted upon.

The observations and recommendations made at that time also serve as milestones, and the project has demonstrated significant progress in the intervening year.

Setting biodiversity/poverty indicators is an exceedingly difficult task, and such indicators may be in the experimental stage. However, since the programme has taken the initiative to approach biodiversity conservation through a basic needs-livelihoods-nutrition-health improvement-poverty reduction approach, it would be well worth attempting to set measurable indicators of success. Conservation projects that start as development programmes and aim to transition into biodiversity conservation are rarely if ever successful. Government will need this evidence that poverty reduction through good wetland management is possible if this approach is to be included in wetland management planning.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & evaluation – Lao PDR

Highly satisfactory

Ensuring the benefits of collaborative participation and avoiding potential conflicts of interest should be a priority for both parties.

The UNDP-Lao office has taken a close interest in the MWBP Lao component and visited its demonstration site. Because the UNDP executing office and the PMU are both located in Vientiane, there is naturally a greater overview of the Lao country component and its relationship with the MWBP regional programme.

The above points to a somewhat *ad hoc* arrangement for engagement with MWBP stakeholders, bearing in mind that most stakeholders are not formal MWBP partners.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation – Lao PDR			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Good at the local and provincial level, but strong criticisms from central GoL reduce the rating.			

5.2.5 Financial planning

Information provided on financial management by the PPO and NPO showed a high degree of accountability and accuracy. An audit had just been completed. Financial planning and budgeting are different issues.

The total budget allocation per country rests with the PMU. Budgets are largely set by the PMU and presented to NPO and PPO for discussion, after which there may be some modification. NPO (together with PPO?) develops detailed work plans against the prescribed budgets. In Lao, this has been done effectively and in some detail. Whilst central control and distribution of funds is one way of maintaining overall control the programmatic content of the MWBP, it is not in line with more contemporary practice that encourages project managers to set their own budgets, recognising the constraints and realities of the programmes for which they are responsible. Further, to encourage transparency, ownership and capacity strengthening in GoL, giving direct responsibility to unit managers might be helpful. These managers feel this would be a better approach.

The operational cost of the Lao Component for 2005 was \$217,482, while the cost of activities was \$124,221, for the same period. Revised targets had been set in July 2005. Total country expenditure was 18% over budget. The main difficulty in compiling this information was that the PPO and NPO report separately to the PMU, whereas it is the NPO's responsibility to report to GoL on total country expenditure.

Documentation on the source of funds do not specify the distribution of Lao-specific funds for 2005 to different operations and activities but states that the total available from GEF for Phase A was \$678,000 with an under spend as at December 31 2005 of \$553,000. Dutch funds for livelihood support in Phase A total \$125,000 of which only \$24,000 was spent up to 31 December 2005. This means that the

are for ongoing technical support (wetland inventory, biodiversity surveys, economic studies, livelihoods guidance), and assistance to the regional programme (including catfish and dolphin work).

The financial position would seem to place MWBP Lao in a good position to make considerable progress towards achieving a solid national platform from which to launch a national wetlands programme and simultaneously undertake a number of related projects.

5.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

All parties agree that difficulties with recruitment have been a major, perhaps the major, factor in the slow start to the project. This is not necessarily a reflection on management since the capacity of nationals in the specialist areas demanded by the project is limited and the recruitment pool is small. It is also difficult to recruit staff who will be located in remote Attapeu. At the start, there was probably the pressure of urgency which led to unsuitable appointments. However, at the start of the second year excellent senior appointments were made that have accelerated project development and given it a stable base. High MWBP salaries and employment conditions encouraged applicants for the appointments.

However, of greatest importance has been the successful secondment of a member of GoL staff to the position of Co-provincial Manager despite the disparity in remuneration between IUCN and GoL staff. The co-management of the PPO, which could potentially be difficult, is extremely strong; it sets an example for the whole team and contributes to the evident, high level of motivation. In both the NPO and PPO there are other staff of a high calibre and competence, many of whom have interests in the project beyond their specific responsibilities⁸.

In effect, the Lao component of the project started in July 2005. Staff has very quickly learned to take (In effect, the Lao in wor 4

Given that there are other actors specialising on globally threatened species, MWBP in Lao might provide a greater contribution to GoL and biodiversity conservation through its livelihood approach.

Achieving success in Lao relies on good relationships and, for external organisations, clearly shared concepts and support to the GoL to deliver the commitments it has made to the Lao people. Taking this into account, and addressing any constraints that are holding back full ownership of MWBP by GoL, it would be timely to ensure the extension of Phase A – and build on its current momentum.

The establishment of an enabling environment at the field level is referred in 5.2.3.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness: the enabling environment – Lao PDR			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Rationale: GoL is not yet convinced of the value of MWBP in building its capacity to address wetland

5.4 Implications & recommendations for Lao PDR

5.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Although not considered ideal by some, the institutional arrangements for the programme are soundly in place with good personnel in key posts. Any major change in the overall structure of the Lao component would set back the momentum of the work in progress. Where weaknesses have been identified (mostly by the team itself) that are holding back some deliverables, it is better to strengthen these weaknesses rather than make change. LARReC should remain the host agency during the remainder of Phase A and should use TRAC funds to strengthen its influence with higher government.

As part of the strengthening of LARReC, which should also be seen as strengthening of GoL ownership, the NPO and PPO should consider the appropriateness of streamlining planning, reporting and budgeting systems and the option of their forming a 'seamless team' headed by the National Programme Director. Other countries are considering a similar format, in which a single head of the country programme would represent the national interest in a Senior Management Team (SMT) that would have executive control and responsibility over the planning, budgeting and expenditure of MWBP as a whole and be delegated responsibility for the Lao programme. The PMU would provide financial and administrative services, but the Lao programme team would determine programme direction, work plans and budget setting, and be responsible for contracting supporting expertise, making partnership arrangements and especially forming linkages with other MAF and other ministry departments and institutions.

Focus of activities and outputs

The 2006 work plan is achievable; it needs a mid-year review but otherwise remains the plan for the year. However, it would be worth making a draft plan through to July 2007 (as funding to this date has been agreed). There could be a shift of approach by the team to support the establishment of the enabling environment and facilitate delivery of key outputs; it could, for example:

- Strengthen support for high-level wetland planning and management. Devise a methodology to bring together lessons learned in the demonstration site, the spatial information produced by MRC, and the traditional knowledge and scientific data gathered in the programme to contribute to national wetland planning.
- Review the internal structural changes proposed above and see if these would meet the need for stronger national ownership and strengthened vertical linkages. In particular, the proposal should streamline the administrative and financial reporting by establishing a 'one-door' process. If the structure proposed above is not viable, suggest and agree something more suitable.
- Complete the TRAC funding proposal and ensure that it supports a shift towards stronger national ownership.
- Devise a set of indicators to demonstrate progress towards poverty reduction through biodiversity conservation.
- Finalise the biodiversity assessment and make it relevant to national government needs.

Work on a continuation of and/or exit strategy for the Lao programme as a whole and the component parts individually. In particular, prepare a written strategy for future engagement with villagers at the demonstration site.

Funding opportunities

The first priority is to complete the agreement for the use of TRAC funds for the satisfactory completion of

6 Thailand Component Assessment

6.1 Project design

6.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Thailand

The NPO of the Thailand Component is housed in Bangkok within the premises of Thailand's Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE). This office was created on 3 October 2003, when the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning was transferred from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment to MONRE and renamed as ONEP. The responsibilities of ONEP, as specified in Ministerial Regulation "Ministerial Subordinates of the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in B.E. 2545 (2002), include:

- To formulate policy and plans for natural resources and environment conservation and administrative management.
- To coordinate the formulation of natural resources and environmental management plans in accordance with the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act of 1992 and other related laws, as well as coordinating practical implementation.
- To study, analyze, coordinate and formulate measures for the assurance of ministerial regulation for environmentally protected areas.

ONEP is probably the correct host agency for MWBP's Thailand Component, given its mandate for natural resources management and conservation, and given that it also houses both the Ramsar and GEF focal points, who play a key role in wetland biodiversity management in Thailand.

The PPO of the Thailand Component is located in Sri Songkhram (rather than in the provincial capital Nakhon Phanom, as proposed in the Project Brief), where MWBP has a small office within the District Authority headquarters, and a separate, larger project office located in a separate (non-government) building near the centre of the town. This setting has allowed MWBP to be close to activities on the ground in the various sub-districts (tambon; see below), while maintaining a good relationship with local authorities at district level. Relationships at provincial level (Nakhon Phanom Province) are also good, and MWBP has excellent rapport with the Provincial Co-Manager, who heads the Provincial Agricultural and Cooperative Office, and the Provincial Wetland Committee (PWC) chaired by the Provincial Governor, which was established after several officials attended Ramsar COP9 laTc oTj 6urces and environmMsw () Tj o(chalatr M) 212

a general natural resources and environment unit, but they would first like to recruit several specialists, including one for wetlands and one for data management.

The lower Songkhram River basin straddles three other provinces as well, namely Udon Thani, Nong Khai and Sakhon Nakhon. However, given the size of the basin, the MWBP has made a wise choice by opting to start in one Province first, and Sri Songkhram – which includes the mouth of the river – is logical as it includes most of the lowland wetland habitats and faces the usual spectrum of issues. Up-scaling can always take place in Phase B, or even at a later stage, once positive lessons learned are replicated.

6.1.2 Demonstration project & Thai national priorities

The National Inventory of Natural Wetlands (prepared 1996-1999, funded by DANCED) identified wetlands of international, national and local importance for Thailand. A total of 61 sites were listed as wetlands of international importance, including the Songkhram River¹⁰, listed as site No. 17. The Songkhram has also been identified by OEPP (in 1999; now ONEP) as one of 12 national wetland systems of “internationally recognised importance”, and may soon (2006) be proposed as Ramsar Site by ONEP. While a full baseline study has yet to be completed, initial studies indicate that the most important biodiversity is likely to be that of fish, and at least 183 species have been identified during past Department of Fisheries surveys, including giant Mekong catfish (*Panagasianodon gigas*), the world’s second smallest fish species (*Boraras micros*), and perhaps as many as 12 rare and endangered species.

Until recently, the Songkhram River was the only major tributary of the Mekong in Thailand that had not yet been dammed – since then, a dam has been constructed in the upper reaches, but it still remains largely a natural river system. Like many major river systems in Thailand, it has been affected by logging, expansion of irrigation, mega-project development, rubber and eucalyptus plantations and decline of fishery production (although still highly important). In spite of development, there is still a high dependence on wetland resources among local communities. The Lower Songkhram River basin is the last remaining example of a functioning floodplain ecosystem, with extensive seasonally flooded freshwater swamp forest in north-eastern Thailand.

One may conclude that the demonstration site meets Thai national priorities, both in terms of wetland biodiversity and conservation priorities, and in terms of economic priority of a natural ecosystem that is under threat and requires support for sustainable management of natural resources. Looming over both priorities, however, is the threat of dam construction on the lower Songkhram River that may significantly affect livelihoods and natural systems if ever implemented.

6.1.3 Stakeholder participation

It is difficult to assess the level of stakeholder consultation and participation in the Songkhram area during

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation in design - Thailand

This good sense of national ownership is a fairly recent development that has occurred since the active engagement of the NPC. Reportedly, national ownership as a hot issue raised in many PMC meetings, and prior to the (late) establishment of the NPO, a communication gap existed, especially between the Songkhram demonstration site, PPO and the national host agency. PMC members such as MONRE, ONEP, MRC and TNMC had little information about what was happening on the ground, and how they could actively support or make use of the good work at the demonstration sites. Thanks to the good efforts by the NPC this information gap has been resolved, and good national ownership has been effectuated.

6.2.2 Implementation approach

The approach taken by the Thailand Component of MWBP to implementation has been flexible and responsive to opportunities. The result is a comprehensive programme of good, community-based livelihood activities, packaged together with training, awareness, baseline resource studies (biodiversity studies by researchers and Thai Baan studies), fisheries conservation, alien invasive plant eradication, and habitat restoration activities. The mission was impressed by the sheer number of activities undertaken field visits confirmed that, through partnerships and cooperative action, much was being achieved. It must be noted that the Thai Baan approach was initiated elsewhere (in the Mun catchment), but has been successfully built upon and expanded by MWBP in the Songkhram area.

The logical framework – either that of the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) or the recently drafted revised logframe (Jan. 2006) – is not actively being used in the context of the Thailand Component, other than at the PMU level. The NSC, NPO, PPO and host agency are aware of these documents and have seen them, but have generally not actively contributed directly to their production, and do not use them as a tool in project planning or implementation. The recent changes made to the logframe (Jan. 2006) reflect the realities on the ground and feedback from M&E, and this version is certainly an improvement on earlier logframes.

The NPO and PPO use the Thailand Component work plan as a management tool to guide their planning purpose, and this adequately serves the purpose. As mentioned above, the Thailand work plan reflects an adaptive management approach. Budgets and targets set for 2006 seem realistic, even given the reductions forced upon the programme due to a lack of a confirmed budget for Phase B.

MWBP has developed an excellent M&E system that consists of a digital database (Access-based), and is used to monitor country programmes and the entire MWBP. It has also developed an excellent programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org) that is highly professional, and apart from general pages on MWBP, includes pages on the country programmes, including the Thailand Component.

Relationships with most institutions are good to excellent. NPO and PPO staff are widely regarded as effective, and they are valued both by partners at national level and by external partners. Management of the Thailand Component (NPO and PPO) are assessed as effective and efficient. The only blot on the institutional landscape is the relationship with TNMC, which can be regarded as very poor, in spite of many efforts by the National Project Coordinator to rectify this. TNMC regards MWBP as an 'IUCN project' that 'by-passes' TNMC, bringing few benefits for Thailand and mainly benefiting IUCN. TNMC was also sceptical about transparency in the recruitment process and considered that IUCN was simply introducing favoured experts into the Steering Committee. However, the MTE is satisfied that the NPO and especially the NPC has made strong efforts to engage with TNMC and improve this relationship (including organising a study tour for TNMC participants in 2004).

6.2.4 Stakeholder participation

The provincial programme demonstrates high levels of participation; the closer the programme is to the grass roots, the greater the participation. Not surprisingly, this close participation focuses on immediate livelihood issues and food security rather than on developing ideas for community wetland resource management. The Thai Baan methodology has been readily adopted in the demonstration sites but the data gathered have not yet been resulted in communities planning for the use of their natural resources. The designated fish conservation areas and fishing regulations have followed traditional knowledge rather than through analyses of species and habitats. 65% of Thai Baan researchers are women, yet most key decision makers are men. The original Thai Baan movement was a voluntary process that empowered villagers to respond to a threat rather than the MWBP process where the threat of livelihood loss is more covert. The schools water monitoring programme was particularly admired especially as, more generally, youth participation is very limited.¹¹

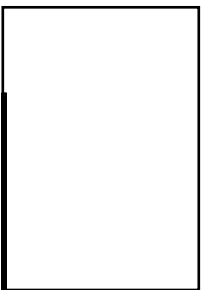
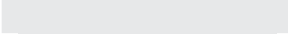
The close alignment of government and project staff has fostered the participation of district and provincial officers. However, the great number of infrastructure development proposals in the Songkhram basin stretches the capacity of government officials to participate in the site specific intervention. MWBP is generally seen as 'anti-dam' (though this is not its policy) and the high local and national interest to control the natural, annual flood in the basin make it difficult for them to engage with MWBP. MWBP has therefore to maintain a neutral position and focus on filling gaps in knowledge of the value of the livelihood services that wetlands provide. The establishment of a Provincial Wetlands Committee, directly encouraged by the project, is an indication of a strong willingness to adopt participatory processes.

Participation by ONEP is reserved but active. With the GoT priority of poverty reduction in accordance with the MDGs, ONEP has shown a strong interest in the role of wetland management in poverty reduction (as presented in the Ramsar resolution on wetlands and poverty reduction) and the values of traditional knowledge. There is a commitment to form the National Wetland Committee by the end of 2006, which, especially if linked to the Provincial Wetlands Committee (s) should consolidate the opportunities for the vertical integration of participatory processes. There has been no active participation in MWBP Thailand by the Thai National Mekong Committee (TNMC) other than taking part in a study tour in 2004 and, since the MRC is an implementing partner it will be important to continue to seek areas of cooperation. As stated earlier, this lack of cooperation is not because MWBP has not offered opportunities – it reflects a reluctance by TNMC.

Several commentators remarked that technical expertise within Thai institutions was not being sufficiently taken up in the MWBP project. Thailand, unlike the other MWBP countries, also has a wealth of formal and informal NGO knowledge and strength on which it can draw and with which it can network. However, the MTE has observed that in many instances MWBP does seem to be using local technical expertise, so this may simply be an issue of perception. The challenge of participation in Thailand is for MWBP to support both GoT and civil society participation when the two may be at odds.

¹¹ Participation of youths (10 schools in the Lower Songkhram Basin) in water quality monitoring is very active, but should be formally integrated into the local curriculum of the targeted schools (this is planned). In this way, the youths will not work only on a voluntary basis, but this activity will form part of their studies, and the information on water quality can be used to build up awareness of aquatic resources management in children, women, families and communities in the basin, for longterm sustainability.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation - Thailand



quarter. Particularly the recruitment of the NPC proved difficult, with promising candidates being interviewed, but accepting other positions at the last minute. While the process was time consuming, the result is that both PPO and NPO teams consist of qualified, motivated and committed staff, and the mission was duly impressed. Tasks and responsibilities on the Thailand Component have been adequately defined and are considered appropriate. Sufficient guidance has been provided regarding M&E reporting and financial procedures, and where necessary, training has been either provided or facilitated by the PMU.

6.3 Results

6.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

MWBP has operated in Thailand at the right time for its support to be commensurate with the GoT's own commitment to implement wetland policies and planning and management procedures. To a large extent, the ambitious baselines set in the Programme Document have been met; institutional arrangements are in place to allow local people to use and manage wetland resources in a sustainable manner, the government accepts community management arrangements in wetlands and commitment exists to the need for national (though not yet regional) wetlands policy. A caution is that the GoT's development priorities in line with the National Poverty Reduction Strategy is for poverty reduction with growth, and that growth is seen raising the macro economy by increased trade (including the opening of Mekong navigation options), power (though hydropower) and water for irrigation (though water transfer and water storage). National food security is also a priority and so an emphasis on the importance of livelihoods derived from wetlands could also be a priority. The slow response to MWBP from the TNMC, may be an indication of conflicting priority interests and that TNMC is not strongly committed to regional wetland planning.

The final trigger may be the establishment of the National Wetland Committee later in 2006. MWBP Thailand has good internal operating procedures and a good relationship with its host agency ONEP. UNDP TRAC funds are in place and ONEP has been given overall responsibility to manage these funds. This core funding by UNDP Thailand will be used to bridge between phase A and the uncertain phase B, and for establishing linkages between local and national level, including the upscaling of achievements at the Songkhram demonstration site.

The devolution processes put in place by GoT have opened up opportunities for both civil society and the private sector to take support from MWBP as each use their relative autonomy to realise their separate objectives.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness – the enabling environment - Thailand

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: This would rank higher but for a lack of commitment by TNMC.

6.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

In general, it is still too early to assess effectiveness and impacts. Most tangible progress appears to have been made at the demonstration site level, where the support for Thai Baan and with local schools provides some obvious signs of local ownership. These activities are generating information of real value to local stewardship of resources and are now beginning to be integrated into local (formalised) planning approaches. There are also interesting innovative approaches that could offer useful insights of broader

identified by her Royal Highness, the Queen of Thailand, and is locally known as 'the Queen's project'. The PPO should support the host agency where it can in formulating this model (which is required on sort notice), as this also provides an opportunity for up-scaling approaches that have proved to be viable¹³.

Deliverables

- Deliverables by the end of Phase A should be carried out as presented in the Detailed Work Plan for the Thailand Component 2006, as these deliverables are relevant and there are few that could be considered redundant given the change in prospects for Phase B funding.
- Working linkages between provincial and national wetland committees, as these have no contact at present and need to coordinate and cooperate where possible.
- An effective design for the Queen's development project in the lower Songkhram area.
- Baseline information available on wetland inventory, socio-economics, wetland valuation and biodiversity.
- A coherent funding strategy for Phase B, focussing on national support (e.g. via Provincial IDP funds).

6.4.2 Phase-B approach for Thailand

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Institutional arrangements during Phase B are to largely be as outlined for the remainder of Phase A, with a greater role for the NPO, with direct responsibility for the PPO. During Phase B, technical expertise at the national level (NPO) should be expanded with a national wetland biodiversity expert. In Phase B, there will not be a fully centralised management located within a PMU – instead, a centralised unit will be small, and have no direct management responsibilities for national programmes and demonstration sites. Instead, it will provide technical support at national levels as required, coordinate regional activities, especially for exchange of information and lessons learned between countries.

Funding opportunities

Opportunities for GEF funding of the Thailand Component are considered slim. Firstly, under the current RAF allocation for Thailand there is a ceiling of \$3 million¹⁴ for the entire country for three years, which is very little given the number of areas and biodiversity concerns. Secondly, many proposals for biodiversity funding are already in the pipeline, and funding proposals for Phase B of MWBP will have to compete with these for scarce resources. Lastly, the Thailand Component has not made a significant case for the lower Songkhram basin being of global significance for biodiversity, as baseline biodiversity studies have yet to produce results.

On the other hand, work carried out so far at the demonstration site provides a firm basis for sustainable livelihood development and sustainable NRM. If these approaches can be incorporated into tambon, district and provincial Integrated Development Plans, there is ample opportunity for funding at least some of these activities in Phase B. The Royal Netherlands Embassy could be approached to provide some co-funding of these sustainable livelihood and poverty alleviation activities, in continuation of their funding for Phase A.

¹³ Related to the Queen's project: usually all provincial government organisations have to involve in the programme, and a budget will be allocated for all activities. If the programme success and MWBP is involved, MWBP will be recognised by other organizations and that model can possibly be expanded to others area.

¹⁴ This may be increased to the next level, but even then this will only be \$5-10 million for 3 years.

7.1.2 Demonstration project & Vietnamese national priorities

Both Vietnamese demonstration sites are located in the Plain of Reeds, which formerly extended over 700,000 hectares. Only a handful of small reserves – including TCNP and LSWR – remain of the natural grassland and sedgeland habitat, and occur isolated like islands of biodiversity in a ‘sea of rice’. Both Tram Chim and Lang Sen have been planted to some extent with *Melaleuca* forest, but grasses and sedges remain important features. Although small and somewhat impoverished, these small reserves are all that remain and are therefore highly important for maintaining biodiversity in the region. Species of global significance are found at both demonstration sites, the most notable of which is the Eastern Sarus Crane, one of MWBP’s flagship species.

Natural wetlands of the Plain of Reeds are of national priority for conservation and are acknowledged as such by VEPA (e.g. the Ramsar focal point) and MONRE (e.g. the GEF focal point). The two demonstration sites are therefore well chosen and appropriate. The focus of the demonstration project on ‘fire and water’ and ‘livelihoods and co-management’ is highly appropriate. The fire and water strategy aims at achieving an ecosystem approach to wetland management, rather than a more typical forestry approach taken by DARD that has led to degradation of *Eleocharis* sedgelands at TCNP. Until recently, co-management was not considered an option in Vietnamese protected areas, but the revision of the Forest Protection and Development Law in 2004 has created more opportunities for exploring these approaches. The potential role that co-management could play is recognised by VEPA, MONRE and MARD at national level, and by the Southern Sub-Institute of the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (Sub-FIPI) located in Ho Chi Minh City.

7.1.3 Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder consultation and participation in the project design phase has been good, but MWBP has had to revisit this during project inception due to significant changes in institutional setting since the production of the Project Brief in 2001. The main stakeholders have been consulted and have participated in project design. MWBP has tried to involve local commune members, albeit at a modest level, but that is the maximum that could be achieved under the given circumstances. There has been a long history of both development and conservation agencies working with the communities living around TCNP. This may be significant as relationships between the authorities, NGOs and local people were already established before MWBP started work there.

There is good rapport with the programme at Di

MWBP also has an excellent programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org) that is highly professional, and apart from general pages on MWBP, it also includes pages for the country programmes, including the Vietnam Component. The latter is both in Vietnamese and English, and includes articles, information on activities and events, and media releases. The aim of the website is to function as a portal for informing the general public, and not for supporting programme implementation. There is no programme intranet, but extensive use is made of internet and email, except with the Lang Sen site, which is poorly linked with the national communications grid.

The relationship with the national host agency is good, as VEPA sees MWBP as being part of VEPA, and many staff are closely involved on an almost daily basis on various issues. VEPA are generally positive about managerial and technical aspects of the programme, but would like to see communication enhanced, as they are not always fully informed about all aspects (e.g. issues with CARE). VEPA are aware of importance of links with MARD, MONRE and MOFI for implementation of MWBP, but there is no close cooperation in this field. Nevertheless, the relationship between MWBP's NPO and (partner) organisations such as VNMC, MARD, MONRE, MOFI and IUCN Vietnam are generally good. At PPO level, communications and relationships with agencies are good to excellent, be it at site level (with TCNP & LSWR management), district level (district administration), provincial level (PPC) and regional level (e.g. DARD, DOST, Sub-FIPI). These positive relationships have undoubtedly contributed to the progress made by the programme over the past year.

An exception to the above is perhaps the livelihoods component, carried out by the local partner, CARE Vietnam. This has been weakened by staff changes, with three consecutive CARE programme managers being replaced over the course of 12 months. While MWBP does not appear to be at fault, it may be advisable to change the implementation arrangements and revisit the contract with CARE. Relationships at national level are non-existent (contacts and contracts are via the PMU), while at PPO level they have been variable.

At PPO level, technical capacities are adequate to good, and certainly at managerial level there is good technical expertise and knowledge. The Project Co-Manager in the PPO holds an MSc degree in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development and a Bachelor degree in Water Work Engineering from Can Tho University, while the Co-Managers have a major in Irrigation and Water Works Engineering, or are the Head of DOST. Other regional experts have also been involved on a needs basis, including resource economists from Can Tho University, a Mimosa control expert from Can Tho University, and forestry experts from Sub-FIPI in Ho Chi Minh City. Technical expertise has on occasion been brought in from outside Vietnam, for example, the fire management programme recruited a North American fire management expert who had previously been involved in the region, and a hydrologist from the Netherlands (based in Vientiane) contributed significantly to the water management strategy. Technical capacity at the NPO level is quite strong, as the NPC has a Water Resources Engineering degree from AIT, and the NPO is further strengthened with a National Communications and Training Coordinator with a strong background in computer science and communications.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach - Vietnam

Highly satisfactory

Satisfactory

Marginally satisfactory

Unsatisfactory

7.2.3 Monitoring & evaluation

The MWBP Quarterly Reports and the highly sophisticated M&E system provide an adequate oversight mechanism for monitoring progress and flagging potential difficulties. The Quarterly Reports list milestones and progress per activity for the Vietnam Component, and provides summary reports under progress headings. In addition, MWBP also produces periodic milestone updates that serve to illustrate which milestones are on target, delayed, rescheduled or have been retired because they have been achieved or are no longer valid. Unusually, the (much delayed) involvement of CARE on the livelihoods component is not listed under either 5.08 or 5.09.

A Mid-year Review was held in 2005, coordinated by the PMU. This document has proved useful for determining what is on schedule relative to the work plan, and what needs strengthening. It also provides recommendations for what needs to be done to improve performance.

Although required by GEF for all biodiversity projects funded out of GEF-3, the GEF-biodiversity tracking tool has not been used on the Vietnam Component. It would be highly advisable for MWBP to support the management boards to undertake these exercises, not only because they provide extremely useful baseline information on management effectiveness, but also because these are required if these sites are to seek funding available from the Vietnam Conservation Fund (see below). MWBP M&E reports are timely, and relatively easy to follow, provided one knows the project structure and setup. However, for outsiders this may be more difficult. Key programme staff (e.g. NPC, PCM) spend 1-2 days per quarter in providing inputs to these quarterly reports. Although this is not very time consuming, it is regarded as tedious, as they also need to provide reports to host agencies in Vietnamese.

In terms of external monitoring and supervision, the UNDP Vietnam office has yet to visit the demonstration site, and does not play an active role in supervision of the national programme. This may change following approval of UNDP TRAC funds. A proposal for UNDP TRAC funds was submitted by MWBP to UNDP Vietnam early in June 2006, but this has yet to be approved.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & Evaluation - Vietnam

Highly satisfactory **Satisfactory** Marginally satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Rationale: The M&E and reporting system that has been put in place is highly sophisticated and certainly adequate to provide oversight on what is being achieved on the programme. Shortfalls are soon detected – at least within a quarter – and dealt with.

7.2.4 Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation of the Top supervision and public relations activities in the project is not satisfactory. The project has not been able to establish a good working relationship with the local communities. The project has not been able to establish a good working relationship with the local communities. The project has not been able to establish a good working relationship with the local communities.

Few partner organisations appear to be involved on the Vietnam Component, other than CARE, but as part of Output 5.01, a first meeting of wetland experts in the network (94 identified in all in Vietnam) was held in Hanoi on 10 March 2006. There is a relatively good partnership with Can Tho University, and with Sub-FIPI in Ho Chi Minh City. Local resource users are being actively involved on the programme, as part of Outputs 5.08 and 5.10, albeit on a modest scale at present, and certainly not at a decision making level. Various media are used by MWBP for information dissemination, including mass media, website, World Wetland Day events, quarterly and annual reports, and oral reports during meetings. The overall communications strategy of the programme is strong and well developed, also in Vietnamese. A Stakeholder Participation Plan was not produced as part of the Project Brief or Project Support Document, and this may have lead to *ad hoc* decisions in the past.

Overall assessment%vely goon0h 1 4rticipatio.

Co-financing has been leveraged on the Vietnam Component, most notably IUCN-WANI funds for flow/hydrology studies, and Royal Netherlands Embassy and Danida funds, mainly contributing to the livelihoods component. In 2005, GEF funds totalled about \$241,000 (75%), while the Dutch contribution to the Vietnam Component totalled about \$82,000 (25%). Danida funds are very modest (<\$10,000), and have only recently been brought in via CARE Vietnam. The Vietnam programme is on the verge of leveraging additional funds – notably government funds from the poverty alleviation programme that will contribute to MWBP's livelihood activities in the buffer zones of TCNP and LSWR.

7.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

Overall, M

have obtained written approval from MARD to carry out trial burning at Tram Chim, which would be a one of the first examples of this in Vietnam¹⁶. Recognised poor members of the local community that are fully dependent on Tram Chim for their livelihood have, on a trial basis with 100 families, been organised into user groups who will be issued with forest protection contracts (known as ‘green books’) that will essentially legalise their use of PA resources. Part of the process involves identifying restrictions on resource use and establishing self-regulatory resource management systems.

These changes need to be consolidated during the time that remains for Phase A, as the co-management trials need to be implemented, as do the actual trial burns (delayed due to prolonged rains). At an institutional level, MWBP has been successful in establishing good cooperation and generally good communications with the host agency, being firmly embedded in the VEPA structure, and good cooperation at the local/field level. Overall, one may conclude that MWBP, with the strong support of the host agency - VEPA, has been quite successful in establishing an ‘enabling environment’ in Phase A and certainly rates ‘satisfactory’.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness – the enabling environment - Vietnam			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Major changes in approach to wetland management and co-management have been initiated, but need to be consolidated during the remainder of Phase A.			

7.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

As mentioned in 8.3.1, progress on the Vietnam Component of MWBP has been satisfactory and looks promising, in spite of a very slow start. This progress is well balanced between technical and social aspects in terms of planning, but is not as balanced geographically (Tram Chim being well ahead of Lang Sen) or by rate of delivery (cocalcal

MWBP has met a large number of indicators listed in the revised logframe of January 2006¹⁷, and is on track for meeting most of those that remain for 2006, such as Outcome L.1 *Management Plans and Investment plans endorsed by province authorities*, Outcome L.2, *Number of households that are a member of an operational interest <i.e. resource user> group*, and Output 5.7 *Ecotourism plans developed*. Targets that are unlikely to be met are:

- Outcomes:
 - VNMC agreement on flow regime that maintains important wetland habitats. (N.1)
 - Indicators and systems for monitoring of ecological health, biodiversity and wetland dependent livelihoods identified by institutions. (N.2)
- Outputs:
 - Tools for implementing the existing NWAP completely reviewed and solutions recommended (5.4)

It needs to be pointed out, however, that many of the output and outcome indicators listed do not have an 'achieved by' date or are to be achieved by a later date, and there are no intermediate targets. (20 indicators are to be achieved by 2006, 3 by the end of Phase A, 3 by 2009, and 43 are undated, presumably meaning by the end of Phase B). In a number of cases, indicators are vague and need to be specified further, with clear targets established (e.g. 'capacity for improving the national wetlands action plan improved', 'infrastructure for ecotourism improved', or 'gender balance on training courses'). Intermediate targets should be set for the end of Phase A for those indicators where this is possible (e.g. number of issues prioritised by civil society, number of NRMGs established).

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However, opportunities are being explored at present, such as:

- tapping into funds made available for development of ecotourism;
- national funds for poverty alleviation that are being distributed via the provinces and can be used in the MWBP livelihoods programme; and
- developing proposals for the World Bank-GEF-Netherlands Government funded Vietnam Conservation Fund.

7.4 Implications & recommendations for Vietnam

7.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

The relationship between PPO and NPO needs to change. At present, the PPO reports directly to, and is managed by the PMU, while the NPO is only kept informed of the PPO's activities and receives reports. During the remainder of Phase A, PPO and NPO should establish closer links, with PPO reporting directly to the NPO, and by the end of Phase A the NPO should also manage the activities of the PPO. This process will take time and require capacity building, and so it should be initiated by the PMU as soon as possible. The PPO also needs to strengthen its links with LSWR and improve communications with management of this protected area. It should also improve communications with district authorities. Once the National Wetland Office is established within VEPA, the NPO should be housed within this unit. As outlined in the general recommendations, the PNC should become a member of the Senior Management Team, which will assume management responsibility for MWBP in the course of the remaining Phase A period.

Focus of activities and outputs

Emphasis during the remainder of Phase A should be on:

- Achieving as much as possible on the ground, with concrete activities and outputs, and less emphasis on studies and analysis.
- Paving the way for incorporation of key outcomes into

and management plan for TCNP and LSWR during the remainder of Phase A. This should follow the format required for the Vietnam Conservation Fund, so that both PAs can tap into these resources, for example, in the transition to an eventual Phase B. In order to achieve the above, funds will need to be reallocated from other budget lines, also to enable the drafting of a proposal(s) for Phase B.

Deliverables by the end of Phase A

Key deliverables that should be completed by the end of Phase A are:

- A successful and well-documented co-management strategy, implemented and tested on a trial basis at both TCNP and LSWR.
- A clear and well-documented fire and water strategy that has been tested at TCNP.
- National workshops held on the fire and water strategy, and on co-management of protected area resources. These are to be well documented, and used to promote these concepts at the highest levels of government.
- The livelihood programme should be up-scaled so that it will have assisted at least 200+ of the poorest families and all poor families living in the enclave at LSWR.
- Draft should be available of the Eco-tourism Master Plan, Investment and Management Plans, baseline biodiversity surveys, along with an identification of conservation priorities based on the biodiversity baseline studies.

7.4.2 Phase-B approach for Vietnam

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Institutional arrangements during Phase B are to largely be as outlined for the remainder of Phase A, with a greater role for the NPO, perhaps operating out of a National Wetlands Office in VEPA if this has been established. During Phase B, technical expertise at the national level (NPO) should be expanded with a national wetland biodiversity expert. In Phase B, there will not be a fully centralised management unit located within a PMU – instead, a centralised unit will be small, and have no national management responsibilities. Instead, it will provide technical support at national levels as required, coordinate regional activities, especially for exchange of information and lessons learned between countries.

Focus of activities and outputs

In Phase B, there should be clear biodiversity and co-management goals, for example along the following lines:

- Biodiversity goals, such as:
 - Lower numbers of birds, mammals and reptiles being hunted (with a reduction percentage given).
 - Recovery of XXX ha of *Eleocharis* sedgelands (by a certain date).
 - Impacts of draft species conservation plans (still to be identified).
- Co-management and livelihood goals, such as:
 - 30% of poor families actively engaged in co-management,
 - 50% of poor families targeted by livelihood programme,

It is recognised that the two PAs are two small islands of biodiversity located in a vast sea of rice, and for the programme to have a greater impact it should seek to broaden its scope. There are two avenues for this that should be explored in Phase B, namely an integrated environment and health programme in the buffer zone, and creating corridors between biodiversity 'islands'.

For the buffer zones, an IBA-type approach involving integrated pest management (IPM), awareness, training and trial programmes could bring significant effect. This could combine well with the current move away from three consecutive annual rice crops being promoted by local government, based on human health and economic studies carried out by Can Tho University, with support from MWBP. This has significant potential for up-scaling to well beyond the programme's system boundaries, and well beyond Phase B.

During the past decade, various programmes and projects in the Mekong Delta promoted integrated *Melaleuca*-based production systems that produced fuel wood, poles, essential oils, honey, fish and reeds, requiring low inputs and giving good returns. However, for various reasons these have not been highly successful, and lessons learned could provide a basis for further development in this area, as such systems would provide productive systems with an added biodiversity value, which could serve to link up existing PAs and provide a corridor. These systems should be promoted under Phase B, starting in the area between TCNP and LSWR – not aimed at establishing a contiguous forest link, but rather creating more stepping stones.

Funding opportunities

Funding a Phase B of MWBP out of GEF Medium Sized Project (MSP) funds is unlikely to be a successful strategy. Firstly, while the Plain of Reeds wetlands are of great national (and international) biodiversity significance, there are many more competing biodiversity priorities in Vietnam, and as the total allocation under the current RAF for GEF4 is limited to \$5-10 million for the next three years, the chances are slim. Also, UNDP Vietnam Country Office does not support the MWBP, and is unlikely to be supportive of proposals.

However, there are ample opportunities other than the GEF. The forthcoming National Wetlands Support Programme (to be Netherlands government funded) and the ongoing Vietnam Conservation Fund (funded by World Bank-GEF and the Netherlands Government) will provide more than adequate funding opportunities for the Vietnam Component of MWBP in an eventual Phase B. These are to be delivered through government channels.

8 Regional Component Assessment

8.1 Project design

8.1.1 Institutional setting of PMU

The PMU was established and designed to provide technical services to MWBP and to elevate its national initiatives into a regional framework. The PMU is not institutionally embedded within existing regional or national institutional structures. The PMU is located in Vientiane, Lao PDR, in an office shared with IUCN Lao's Country Office. The PMU and the programme are commonly regarded throughout the region, by government and non governmental partners, as an 'IUCN programme', despite concerted communication efforts to establish the MWBP in its own right. Initially, MRC was also considered an option for the institutional setting of the PMU, but this was rejected during the programme's inception phase and not pursued further.

The MWBP

Basin”, but regional activities are not guided by a formulated strategy. As a result, the various outputs appear to be *ad hoc* arrangements, rather than a coherent package.

The logical framework – either that of the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) or the recently drafted revised logframe (Jan. 2006) – is being used at the PMU level, but only to a limited extent (e.g. for cross-checking indicators). For M&E purposes, the monitoring database developed by MWBP is used, while the ‘Detailed Work Plan for the Regional Component’ is used for planning purposes. Significant changes have been made to the original logframe, which demonstrates that the PMU actively responds to M&E feedback. One of the main responses has been the development of a fully revised logframe, and the production of a project document on project indicators.

MWBP has developed an excellent M&E system that consists of a digital database (Access-based), and is used to monitor country programmes and the entire MWBP. It has also developed an excellent programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org) that is highly professional, and apart from general pages on MWBP, includes pages on the country programmes, but nothing specifically on the Regional Component.

Relationships between Regional Programme/PMU and other institutions involved on MWBP are variable. The relationship with country host agencies is generally good, but the relationship with UNDP and MRC/NMCs is at times strained. It would seem that the obvious primary vehicle through which MWBP could develop and deliver its regional objectives is through the MWBP co-partner the MRC – and with some specific outputs, this is happening. However, in general terms, the MRC does not demonstrate a commitment to MWBP; the CEO of the MRCS has never visited the PMU office, although these offices are within close proximity, and both LNMC and TNMC are very negative about the programme. The MRC MWBP point person does not regularly attend PMU meetings. Access to MRC data is often difficult as access is constrained by formalized information sharing protocols, agreed amongst MRC riparian states. The UNDP Country Office in Vietnam is also very negative towards MWBP, which has made cooperation difficult at times (e.g. submittal of proposals for UNDP TRAC funding). The relationship with ‘partner’ organisations (e.g. NGOs) at the regional level is variable and often associated with expectations created (e.g. regarding possible funding for cooperation), and disappointment experienced when these have not been met – which has been the experience of at least several partners. There is also a risk of either duplication or unproductive competition.

Technical capacities within the PMU are good, and this has been the strength of the unit and of the Regional Programme. However, PMU

Overall assessment: Implementation approach - Regional Component			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Rationale: The implementation approach taken is marginally satisfactory, given the constraints of staffing, budget, institutional setting, and the way in which the programme was designed. The programme has been adaptive, made use of logframe, work plans and new technologies, while technical capacities are also good. However, relationships are at times poor, and this has hampered at least some of the progress, and may be an issue in the future.

8.2.2 Monitoring & evaluation

MWBP Quarterly Reports and the highly sophisticated MWBP M&E system provide an adequate oversight mechanism for monitoring progress and signalling potential difficulties. Quarterly Reports list milestones and progress per activity for the Regional Component, and provides summary reports under progress headings. In addition, MWBP also produces periodic milestone overviews that illustrate which milestones are on target, delayed, rescheduled or have been retired because they have been achieved or are no longer valid. A Mid-year Review was held in 2005, and this has proved useful for determining what is on schedule relative to the work plan, and what needs strengthening. It also provides recommendations for what needs to be done to improve performance. The use of the 'five stories' approach to make the findings of M&E easier to comprehend has been innovative and is commendable.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & Evaluation - Regional Component			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Rationale: The M&E and reporting system that has been put in place is highly sophisticated and adequate for providing oversight on what is (not) being achieved on the programme.

8.2.3 Financial planning

The budget of the Regional Component is combined with that of the PMU, which also includes support to national programmes, and hence the general perception is that PMU costs (and programme overheads) are very high. According to the budgets in the Detailed Work Plan for the Regional Component for 2006, the budget for Output 1.01 Regional and national support structures for all programme activities established and operational is a staggering 84% of the overall budget for the Regional Component. In addition to direct PMU costs, this also includes (PMU) support to national programmes and aspects such as programme systems, regional meetings and M&E, which are all operated by, and out of the PMU, and justifiably also part of PMU costs. As a result, only 14% of the 2006 budget for the Regional Component (1.01-1.10) actually goes towards achieving Regional Outputs.

The actual cost of the Regional Component is not very high, but since this requires an expensive PMU – the investment is not particularly cost-effective. Given that all of the 'Regional Component' costs that are not associated with country programmes are associated with the regional programme, this means that MWBP spends twice the amount running the regional programme as is spent on actual regional activities (\$681,500 versus \$308,585).

Most of the budget for Regional Outputs in 2006 has been allocated for 1.06 Tools developed and used to integrate wetland biodiversity considerations into regional development planning. This has a total budget of \$226,300 or 73% of the Regional Outputs budget. Much smaller amounts are reserved for networks,

workshops, and training sessions. Most of these activities are for coordinating and implementing biodiversity surveys and drafting of Species Conservation Action Plans. Most of these SCAPs and surveys are carried out by external agencies (e.g. FFI, WCS), and it is unusual that MWBP spends significantly larger amounts on coordination than on actual implementation.

While the overall programme has been successful at leveraging co-financing (almost \$900,000 from the Netherlands government, \$264,000 from UNDP-RBAP in 2006), and some of the country programmes may end up b

8.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

The MWBP Regional Component has carried out the following activities during the period 2004-mid-2006:

- Convening and sharing activities, such as the ministerial round table meeting on Mekong water resource issues organized at World Conservation Congress in November 2004, a Mekong Regional Ramsar Initiative meeting organized at Ramsar COP9.
- Establishing partnerships with a wide variety of organisations working with wetlands and livelihoods in the region, and networking with regional partners and collaborating organisations.
- Regional training on a variety of different wetland aspects, participation of all four countries in the Boston IAIA conference, and training on biodiversity and EIA, and organisation of exchange visits and study tours between communities.
- A study tour to Uganda (linked to Ramsar COP9), linkage with IUCN Commissions and species specialist groups, and spread of methodologies for local knowledge development and use in planning (e.g. Thai Baan studies).
- World Commission on Dams translation and dialogue meetings in all countries, influence upon decisions concerning the Upper Mekong navigation agreements.
- Transboundary meetings on dolphin management between Cambodia and Lao PDR, Giant Mekong Catfish agreement facilitated in Thailand and in progress in Lao PDR, and regional working groups for flagship species established and facilitated.
- Provision of technical advice at all levels, bringing in regional and global perspectives to national and local work.
- Proposal preparation and leveraging of funds.

In spite of the achievements listed above, progress on the Regional Component of MWBP has not been very satisfactory overall, as it does not seem likely that this component will be able to create an enabling environment by the end of Phase A (see 9.3.1). In terms of achieving indicator -0.0611.ao.061 0 1 68.16 393.6 Tm -0.053 Tc 0

8.3.3 Sustainability

The Regional Component of MWBP has not achieved sufficient progress in creating an enabling environment for Phase B, which would be a prerequisite for continuity and sustainability. Most networks established, such as the Regional Steering Committee and the Regional Wetland Coordination Forum, are unlikely to survive beyond the life of the project, and outputs such as SCAPs are not embedded in a lasting regional structure or in national programmes or plans. Exceptions are the Giant Mekong Catfish conservation group, which has wide support and will continue in some form or other, and work carried out by MRC on e-flows, which will be taken further by the agency's Environmental Programme.

MWBP has not developed a sustainability strategy (only a 4-page discussion paper on such a strategy; see 3.3), something that has been missing from the design phase of the programme, as this was missing in both the Project Brief (2001) and Project Support Document (2004).

The MTE notes that there is a strong view from the PMU and IUCN ARO that a regional programme should continue, but there is no clear proposed strategy for a future regional programme, and therefore the MTE was not in a position to comment on the viability of future plans. But in terms of the establishment of an enabling environment for a future regional programme, the MTE concludes that this is not in place, and is unlikely to be by the end of Phase A.

8.4 Implications & recommendations for Regional Component

8.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

There is broad recognition amongst national partners that the PMU has been successful in training coordination and delivery, communications, and in establishing management structures – including M&E, reporting and financial procedures. The tasks of the PMU on these aspects are now mostly complete. There is a consensus that the PMU now needs to be streamlined, to ensure that a) national programmes

9 Consequences for Phase-A

9.1 Institutional & organisational

Cambodia: The key institutional changes required in Cambodia will seek to strengthen national management responsibilities, with the objective of strengthening national management capacity and ownership in preparation for possible Phase B support. This will require a shifting in the focus of activities – more towards supporting the National Programme Committee and providing management support to the demonstration site, and scaling back (perhaps through sub-contracting) responsibilities for day-to-day management of activities (e.g. the sector policy review, and the rapid wetlands inventory). At provincial level, management arrangements for the demonstration site need to be re-visited to build a stronger role for the DOE, and a stronger role for the provincial government and private sector, and a stronger role for the community.

Vietnam: During the remainder of Phase A, PPO and NPO should establish closer links, with PPO reporting directly to the NPO, and by the end of Phase A the NPO should also manage the activities of the PPO. This process will take time and require capacity building, so it should be initiated by the PMU as soon as possible. The PPO also needs to strengthen its links with LSWR and improve communications with management of this protected area. While communications at provincial level are good, this needs to be improved at district level. Once the National Wetland Office is established within VEPA – which is expected soon – the NPO should be housed within this unit. The relationship with the UNDP Vietnam Country Office needs to be improved – a process that can be initiated by providing an overview of what has been achieved to date under the Vietnam Component, and inviting key staff to visit the demonstration project. The working relationship with CARE Vietnam needs to be vastly improved, so that more progress is achieved on the livelihoods programme.

Regional: The PMU needs to be streamlined, to ensure that a) national programmes have an opportunity to develop their own capabilities for managing MWBP operations and engaging in regional discussions, and b), to ensure that remaining resources are used efficiently. PMU's role should be reduced to a coordinating task to facilitate proposal development and endorsement of support for the four Country Components. Downsizing of the PMU should commence during the third quarter of 2006, with a revised staffing structure fully-in place by January 2007. This reduced PMU – with a facilitating and coordinating role – should consist of the Programme Manager, assisted by the M&E officer, financial officer, secretarial support and driver. To complement this process, and develop a stronger role for national programmes in work planning and budget allocation, a Senior Management Team (SMT) – comprising coordinators of NPOs, and chaired by the UNDP Program Manager, should be established. Support to the SMT should be provided by UNDP, IUCN and MRC, which will include technical guidance on national component work plan content and monitoring to ensure a suitable balance of livelihood and biodiversity conservation outcomes is achieved in each national work plan. If possible, the SMT should be constituted as an interim measure as soon as possible to propose national budget allocations, and then be established formally following endorsement at the next Regional Steering Committee meeting.

9.2 Financial & reporting

Cambodia: The changes outlined in the section above will mean that primary reporting from the provincial level will be to the national level, and from there to the regional level for financial and progress reports. The role of the PMU will change to providing support to the NPO and host agency for financial management and to assist in development of a possible Phase B proposal, starting with preparation of a PDF A application. PMU and NPO should explore with the host agency the opportunities for harmonizing reporting to the extent possible through existing government systems and procedures such that reporting lines are shifted, to the extent possible, from the Stung Treng DOE to MoE in Phnom Penh (if necessary, via the province) and then to the PMU. The NPOs will need to work closely with the PMU to simplify existing reporting procedures.

Lao PDR: In Lao, the narrative and financial reporting concerns made apparent during the MTE must be addressed. Apart from obvious efficiencies, flowing line-reporting procedures that correspond to government formats and in Lao language will strengthen understanding of the value of MWBP for all stakeholders. The PPO and NPO should review the MTE proposals for overall and country structural changes and devise the most appropriate way for similar streamlining to be applied in Lao – as soon as possible. While the PPO should retain its decision making autonomy, the principle proposed in the Lao country report is that the PPO (in addition to its provincial reporting procedure, which is working effectively) should

report to the NPO headed by the National Director, who also represents Lao in a Senior Management Team. This 'seamless team' would have the authority to set budgets and work plans, to bring in the technical assistance that it identifies as needed, and report through one channel.

Thailand & Vietnam: Changes in institutional arrangements advocated in 9.1 will automatically result in changes in financial and reporting requirements. Closer cooperation between PPO and NPO, with the NPO eventually managing the PPO will mean that reporting lines become simplified, and can be in Thai or Vietnamese (at least the reporting from PPO to NPO). This will also simplify communications with (sub-) district and local level authorities, as there will no longer be a need for dual reporting. Based on allocations proposed by the SMT and approved by the RSC, the NPO is to establish a budget for the national

separate, and lack of daily exchanges and communication has led to a relatively poor working relationship which needs to be addressed in Phase B. In Attapeu, Lao PDR, the PPO is now a model for project and governmental partnership and should be continued. The project and provision of MW

SMT: A Senior Management Team is to be established that consists of the four National Programme Coordinators (which head the NPOs) and the PMU's UNDP Programme Manager. The SMT will serve as a platform for coordination between the country programmes. A TOR is required for the SMT, which includes: a) drafting proposed country budget allocations prior to the next Progr

ownership of the Stung Treng, Tram Chim and Lang Sen sites has been strengthened and MWBP should withdraw. The use of TRAC funds can help ensure a smooth handover.

However, what has not yet been widely recognised is that poverty reduction and even the survival of millions of wetland dwellers will also depend on wise-use management of wetlands and their biodiversity assets. By being responsive to the context in which they were developed, the demonstration projects in Songkhram and Attapeu have effectively become pilot development projects (as opposed to demonstration projects), and local and provincial expectations for the expansion of the present initiatives are high. MWBP not only has a responsibility not to exit from these programmes but could also add value to this site-based work by demonstrating the importance of biodiversity conservation for nutrition, health, human well being and poverty reduction.

10.5 Regional programme

For the remainder of Phase A and for Phase B, the view of the MTE is that regional programme needs to change its focus substantively to ensure that national host agencies and provincial agencies have greater capacity to manage possible Phase B support and have a greater sense of ownership for the program activities, at both national and regional level.

To achieve this, the PMU will need to shift its focus from 'implementation' to 'facilitation' and coordination. For the remainder of Phase A, the focus of the regional program will need to be confined to completing ongoing tasks, delegating responsibilities and resources where possible and feasible, and providing support to national host agencies and NPOs for Phase B planning, on request of the host agencies, through the NPOs. The PMU should, by the end of 2006 latest, relinquish direct management control over demonstration sites and should have re-oriented its relationship with NPOs accordingly. PMU responsibilities for financial and progress reporting to the regional steering committee, program management committee and to donors will continue. Conversely, national host agencies will need to be willing to adopt a stronger role in planning, management and decision-making. This will include a much stronger role in budget planning, albeit for remaining resources only.

For Phase B, the first priority of the PMU is to develop a clear strategy for regional wetlands support, in close consultation with national and regional partners. In the absence of such a strategy, the MTE was not able to provide an in depth assessment. However, the MTE remains convinced of the need to retain a strong institutional link with MRC for Phase B, with some elements of Phase B work under strong MRC operational management (e.g. on environmental flows, wetland mapping, database management). MWBP should assist MRC to leverage funds to continue with this work during the remainder of Phase A (see below). This work could be very relevant to the GEF Adaptation to Climate Change operational programme.

The MTE also sees a niche for coordination and facilitation of better linkages between the plethora of different regional and national wetlands-related linkages (see section above on relevance). This role would

11 Recommendations

The MTE mission recommends the following for urgent consideration by UNDP and the partner implementing agencies IUCN and MRC.

11.1 Remainder of Phase A

§ **Recommendation 1: Building stronger national ownership of MWBP planning and priority-setting:** Strong national ownership will be the key constituent of an environment that will enable the development and implementation of a subsequent phase of MWBP Phase A. Many of the recommendations below are designed to support that end. As a guiding principle for all countries, institutional realignment should seek to advance harmonization with government structures and reporting systems.

The MTE reached a broad consensus that provincial project offices (PPOs) demonstration sites should, by the end of Phase A, be managed by NPOs, and report to agencies at provincial and national level embedded within government structures. This would build greater understanding of demonstration site activities at national level, improve communications (by reducing language barriers) and would provide better alignment with national systems for management and reporting, including financial management and reporting. The transition to this re-arrangement should start as soon as possible. For Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, it would be possible to complete this transition relatively soon, but it is acknowledged that this process may take longer in Lao PDR. Some

programmes have an opportunity to develop their own capabilities for managing MWBP operations and engaging in regional discussions, and b) to ensure that remaining resources are used efficiently.

Timing: So as to maximise the benefits of this arrangement, the MTE recommends that these structural changes commence as soon as possible and preferable during the third quarter of 2006, with a revised staffing structure fully-in place by January 2007.

Overall management responsibility: Devolution of most day-to-day responsibilities for demonstration sites and national country budgets to the NPOs provides opportunities for strengthening local capacities and involvement, and re-organizing the delivery of technical support. The MTE recommends that the **UNDP Programme Manager** be re-positioned into either UNDP Thailand or UNDP Lao PDR (– a decision that needs to be taken by UNDP based on regional management considerations). This position should be supported by the services of the **M&E officer, the financial officer and secretarial support**, until the end of Phase A.

Detailed review: The above MTE' recommendations are formulated with only limited financial information and limited information on contractual obligations. A more detailed review of the financial and legal position of MWBP would determine the extent to which these recommendations can be implemented and the budget flexibility for NPOs and the extent to which they would be able to contract specialist support in the revised structure. Most importantly a detailed review would determine the potential for further extension beyond December 31 2006. To determine these facts, the MTE recommends that an independent business review is conducted as soon as possible.

Streamlining and simplification of the M&E system would need to be undertaken with a view to future use by national agencies in a possible Phase B. Responsibility and budgets for **training, communications, biodiversity, community development and economics support** would be devolved to NPOs to enable these funds to be targeted better to national needs. For work on flagship species, funds should be earmarked to ensure they are used to support achievement of clear species conservation objectives.

Terms of reference for the SMT are required, and should include: a) drafting proposed country budget allocations prior to the next Programme Steering Committee meeting (see recommendation below); b) coordinating and guiding the development of revised national work plans and budgets, and c) sharing

§ **Recommendation 3: Increase and clarify country budget allocations to enable clear budget planning:** Concerns were expressed from a number of NPOs, PPOs and MWBP partners concerning the dominant role of the PMU in funds management, a general lack of involvement in allocating budgets and frequent changes to budget allocations coming 'top-down' from the PMU. Frequent changes to budgets have imposed high transaction costs on NPOs, PPOs and partners alike, and this has served to undermine both performance and external confidence in MWBP. To address this issue, the MTE proposes giving a stronger role to NPOs, host agencies and partners in budget allocation, and ensuring that budgets are set and respected at the beginning of the annual planning process.

budget.

- § **Recommendation 7: Strengthen the biodiversity focus of work across the programme:** The enabling environment established by MWBP must be capable of delivering positive biodiversity

§ **Recommendation 10: Refocusing the Regional Component: F**

The programme, a partnership between governments, aid agencies, international organisations and NGOs, provides a framework for complementary work for wetland conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the Lower Mekong Basin.

Programme purpose

The programme purpose is to strengthen capacity at regional, national and local level for wetland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the Lower Mekong Basin. More in particular it aims to:

- § Improve coordination for wetland planning from regional to local levels
- § Strengthen policy and economic environments for wetland conservation
- § Generate and share information
- § Train and build capacity for the wise use of wetlands
- § Create alternative options for sustainable natural resource use and improve livelihoods

In developing its M & E system, the MWBP has used the concept of “stories” to describe its work and progress towards the outcomes of the programme. There are five stories:

- § “Let the river flow” which covers the work on environmental flows, environmental impacts upon wetlands of broad scale infrastructure changes in the river
- § “Flagships for biodiversity” covering the biodiversity aspects, wetland mapping and inventory, species conservation action plans etc.
- § “People using wetlands” covering the livelihoods and sustainable use of wetland resources aspects, economic valuation and incentive mechanisms
- § “Towards wise use of wetlands” covering wetland policies and guiding principles, support for Ramsar Convention
- § “Programme implementation and cross cutting issues” covering overall programme management, training and communications and capacity building

Defining the Enabling Environment for MWBP

The MWBP started in July 2004 and Phase A was scheduled to run for 2 years until July 2006. Since then it was agreed that Phase A should be extended to the end of December 2006. During this time the principal aim was to establish what was called the “enabling environment”, so that full implementation in Phase B could be undertaken for 3 years from July 2006 to July 2009 (now January 2007 to end December 2009). After a year and half of implementing Phase A, the mid-term evaluation presents an opportunity to look ahead towards what will be required for moving into Phase B, both in terms of the strategic directions, approaches used and the developed capacity to deliver.

What is the enabling environment? Little real guidance was provided on how one defines the meaning of the term “enabling environment in the context of such a regional programme as the MWBP. During the implementation of Phase A, a greater understanding of what is meant has developed.

A briefing note was presented at the PMC meeting in October 2005 in Bangkok to enable a discussion on the way forward towards Phase B. This provides the basic areas of assessment for the enabling environment.

Setting up structures for implementation – setting up and equipping offices and staffing

Training – Developing and implementing of Phase A training strategy focusing on providing training for MWBP staff and government partners.

Establishing programme management mechanisms – This aspect includes the various steering committees and management boards at different levels. Developing clearer and more transparent operational and financial management guidelines.

Attitudes and Understanding - The MWBP is a complex programme and it requires continuing efforts to raise awareness and understanding of what it is trying to do and the ways in which it is working, particularly amongst the government agencies involved. This needs to happen at all levels at which we are working – regional, national, provincial, district and community.

Developing partnerships – The effectiveness of the programme depends upon the partnerships that can be developed. A great deal of this depends upon the mutual understanding of the roles that each partner plays in this and the development of trust between the partners. In a complex programme like this, there are often initial misunderstandings and uncertainties about how the programme is meant to run, the operational mechanisms as well as the objectives and activities. Regular communications and briefings and the development of joint workplans are a key to this, as are transparency of operations. The different partnerships include:

- UNDP, IUCN and MRCS,
- Government partners – host agencies, other associated line agencies,
- UNDP country offices
- National Mekong Committees
- IUCN Country offices
- other organizations – both international, regional and national

Government ownership and Sustainability – Government ownership is another key to success and its sustainability. Initially the programme was developed by IUCN, and to a large extent driven from the regional perspective. In the countries, it has been seen as an IUCN project because implementation is largely carried out through IUCN. But there is a recognised shift taking place as the understanding of the MWBP grows, as workplans are developed that are in line with government plans, and as experience of the work done is shared.

Raising Co-finance for MWBP – At the outset the MWBP was not fully funded and efforts have been geared towards raising co-finance and parallel finance through partnerships with other organizations.

2. EVALUATION AUDIENCE

This mid-term evaluation is initiated by the UNDP Lao PDR as the GEF Executing agency. The TOR has been drafted by the Programme Team, circulated to partner organisations – IUCN – The World Conservation Union and the Mekong River Commission, and to host agencies in the four governments of the Lower Mekong, the GEF Regional Unit based in Bangkok, and the Embassy of the Royal Netherlands Government in Thailand. The evaluation team will be selected by UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Embassy and the GEF Regional Office.

This evaluation is commissioned by GEF, UNDP and the Royal Dutch Government and managed by UNDP Lao PDR.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION

This evaluation is being undertaken mid-way between implementing Phase A and moving on to Phase B of the MWBP. The principal objective of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the Programme has

been able to establish the “enabling environment”, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in doing so.

In the words of the Project Brief: “The independent evaluation will utilize a combination of impact and process indicators to establish whether the enabling environment is suitable for implementation of Phase B. The combination of impact and process indicators is necessary because assessing impact after a relatively short period of national activities will be difficult.”

However, the mid-term evaluation is also an opportunity to review the strategies that have been developed and to assess their continuing relevance to the changing conditions within the region and the four countries. Bearing in mind the overall objective of the programme – the conservation and sustainable use of Mekong wetland biodiversity – do the strategies and approaches adopted, continue to address this primary objective, and how should they be changed in Phase B.

There will thus be a secondary objective to the evaluation, which will be to look ahead and advise on future implementation of Phase B, through an assessment of the relevance of the project content and design to the current situation. This is especially necessary in the light of the need to develop different funding mechanisms, including GEF with its revised Resource Allocation Frameworks, and the proposed strategy of developing four national medium-sized projects (MSPs) and one umbrella regional MSP in the GEF’s Adaptation to Climate Change window.

4. PRODUCTS EXPECTED FROM THE EVALUATION

There will be three main products:

- § Mid-term evaluation report fulfilling the evaluation requirements of UNDP, GEF and Royal Netherlands Government, including an executive summary.
- § Expanded recommendations for use by the programme team in the design of Phase B Programme Document
- § A power-point presentation of the findings of the evaluation so that this can be used in discussions for developing Phase B programme documents with partners and with potential donors for sourcing additional funds.

The Mid-term evaluation report will clearly indicate to the GEF Council, the extent to which the enabling environment has been established and the continuing relevance of the strategies and approaches used. In addition it will identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme so that the report can also be used for developing Phase B proposals and assessment of these proposals by donors.

The report will also contribute towards the design of Phase B and thus assist the MWBP executing and implementing agencies in securing additional finance. The recommendations section should be expanded in a stand alone report for the use by the Programme, to advise on suggested improvements in the design and implementation of the programme, so that these can be used in the development of the Phase-B Programme Documents.

A summary evaluation report should also be produced that can be used in marketing the achievements of the MWBP. In this sense, the evaluation report will provide a “marketing” product that will help the three executing and implementing agencies (UNDP, IUCN and MRC) in raising additional finance.

Indicative outline of the evaluation report

1. Executive summary

§ Brief description of project

§

5. SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The scope of the evaluation will cover

- § the entire GEF-funded programme components of the MWBP, including those undertaken by UNDP Lao PDR, IUCN and the MRC.
- § the co-financed components such as The Royal Netherlands Government funds, UNDP Regional Bureau funds, the UNDP TRAC funds in each of the four countries, the in-kind contributions for the National Governments, IUCN Water and Nature Initiative and the Mekong River Commission, including the direct funding by the Royal Netherlands Embassy to the MRC that have been included in the programme workplan.

The programme will be assessed using the criteria outlined below. In addition to a descriptive assessment, all the criteria marked with (R) should be rated using the following divisions: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Marginally Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory.

5.1 Project Formulation

Relevance. The degree to which the project responds to global, national and local environmental and development priorities, especially in view of the directions the programme should take in Phase B. This should include an assessment of the continuing relevance of the programme to changing conditions within the region.

Conceptualization/Design (R). This should assess the approach used in design and an appreciation of the appropriateness of problem conceptualization and whether the selected intervention strategy addressed the root causes and principal threats in the project area. It should also include an assessment of the logical framework and whether the different project components and activities proposed to achieve the objective were appropriate, viable and responded to contextual institutional, legal and regulatory settings of the project. It should also assess the indicators defined for guiding implementation and measurement of achievement and whether lessons from other relevant projects (e.g., same focal area) were incorporated into project design.

Stakeholder participation (R) Assess information dissemination, consultation, and “stakeholder” participation in design stages.

Replication approach. Determine the ways in which lessons and experiences coming out of the project were/are to be replicated or scaled up in the design and implementation of other projects (this also related to actual practices undertaken during implementation).

Other aspects to assess in the review of Project formulation approaches would be UNDP comparative advantage as executing agency for this project; the consideration of linkages between projects and other interventions within the sector and the definition of clear and appropriate management arrangements at the design stage.

5.2. Project Implementation

Implementation Approach (R). This should include assessments of the following aspects:

- (i) The use of the logical framework as a management tool during implementation and any changes made to this as a response to changing conditions and/or feedback from M&E activities if required.
- (ii) Other elements that indicate adaptive management such as comprehensive and realistic work plans routinely developed that reflect adaptive management and/or; changes in management arrangements to enhance implementation.

- (iii) The project's use/establishment of electronic information technologies to support implementation, participation and monitoring, as well as other project activities.
- (iv) The general operational relationships between the institutions involved and others and how these relationships have contributed to effective implementation and achievement of project objectives.
- (v) Technical capacities associated with the project and their role in project development, management and achievements.

Monitoring and evaluation (R). Including an assessment as to whether there has been adequate periodic oversight of activities during implementation to establish the extent to which inputs, work schedules, other required actions and outputs are proceeding according to plan; whether formal evaluations have been held and whether action has been taken on the results of this monitoring oversight and evaluation reports.

Country-ownership / Drivenness. Recipient country commitment and ownership and/or interest. Assess the extent to which the project idea/conceptualization had its origin within national, sectoral and development plans and focuses on national environment and development interests.

Stakeholder participation (R). This should include assessments of the extent of stakeholder participation in programme implementation and the mechanisms for information dissemination in project implementation, emphasizing the following:

- (i) Involvement of governmental institutions in project implementation and decision making, the extent of governmental support of the project.
- (ii) The establishment of partnerships and collaborative relationships developed by the project with local, national and international entities and the effects they have had on project implementation.
- (iii) Local resource users and NGOs participation in project implementation and decision making and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the project in this arena.
- (iv) The production and dissemination of information generated by the project.

Financial Planning: Including an assessment of:

- (i) The actual project cost by objectives, outputs, activities
- (ii) The cost-effectiveness and efficiency of implementation and achievements
- (iii) Financial management (including disbursement issues)
- (iv) Co-financing – to what extent has the MWBP been able to leverage co-financing for Phase A.

Execution and implementation modalities. This should consider the effectiveness of the recruitment, assignment of experts, consultants and national counterpart staff members and in the definition of tasks and responsibilities; quantity, quality and timeliness of inputs for the project with respect to execution responsibilities, enactment of necessary legislation and budgetary provisions and extent to which these may have affected implementation and sustainability of the Project.

5.3. Results

Effectiveness (R) – the enabling environment: Evaluation of effectiveness will provide a description and rating of the extent to which the “enabling environment” for Phase A of the programme was achieved. The programme document and various internal M&E reports provide a selection of indicators and baselines that can be considered.

Effectiveness / Impact - technical: The technical and socio-economic results that the programme has achieved during Phase A will be assessed in a descriptive manner as a contribution to the outcomes and impacts anticipated, and for the effectiveness in which the results have been achieved. The M & E

operational guidelines will provide guidance for indicators and baselines for assessing the different technical and social aspects of the programme. Impact considers both the positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, changes to and effects on society and the environment caused by the programme. However, it should be borne in mind that given the relatively short time period for implementation of the programme, it will often not be possible to see effects on the ground. The emphasis of the evaluation will be upon the strategies, approaches and processes established for addressing these aspects, the methods being used and the likely effectiveness and impact of these processes.

In those areas, where the MWBP did not establish a baseline (initial conditions), the evaluators should seek to determine it through the use of special methodologies so that achievements, results and impacts can be properly established.

Sustainability. Extent to which the benefits of the project will continue, within or outside the project domain, after it has come to an end. Relevant factors include for example: development of a sustainability strategy, establishment of financial and economic instruments and mechanisms, mainstreaming project objectives into the economy or community production activities. Since the programme has only been in operation for less than two years, the assessment of sustainability will focus on the sustainability strategy of the programme.

5.4: Lessons learnt and recommendations for Phase B

The recommendations for developing Phase B should be developed both from an assessment of the institutional structures and practices and the range of activities that have been implemented to date, and from the changes in these that are being developed for the future. Any changes to the strategies and approaches to be used in the future should be highlighted, especially in light of the new regional focus of adaptation to climate change of conservation and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Mekong.

Strength and weaknesses: What are the strengths on which the programme can build, and what weaknesses need to be addressed for Phase B?

Lessons learnt: Knowledge generated by reflecting on the experience of phase A and its

Interviews will be held with the following organizations and persons as a minimum

UNDP Lao PDR, Vientiane – Resident Representative, DRR, Head of Environment Unit.

Other UNDP offices in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam

GEF Regional Office in Bangkok

Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok

IUCN – Asia Regional Office, Bangkok – Regional Director, Head of ELG1, Regional Water and Nature Initiative Coordinator, also IUCN offices in Lao PDR, and Vietnam

Mekong River Commission Secretariat, Vientiane – CEO, Environment Programme Director, Environment Programme Coordinator, other associated programmes, e.g. BDP, WUP, Fisheries, Watershed Management,

Programme Management Unit, Vientiane – UNDP Team Leader, IUCN Programme Manager, MRC Programme Manager (based in MRC). Technical and administrative team

National Programme Offices in each of the four countries – National Programme Director, National Programme Coordinator and staff

Provincial Project Offices in each of the four demonstration areas – Provincial Co-Manager, Project Co-Manager and staff

Key staff ministries/departments in each of the four countries

- § Cambodia – Ministry of Environment, Cambodia National Mekong Committee, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, Stung Treng Province
- § Lao PDR – Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, NAFRI, LARReC, STEA, Lao National Mekong Committee, Attapeu Province
- § Thailand – Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, ONEP, Thai National Mekong Committee, Department of Fisheries, Nakhon Phanom and Sakhon Nakhon Province
- § Vietnam - Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, VEPA, Vietnam National Mekong Committee, MARD, Ministry of Fisheries, Dong Thap Province, Long An Province

Other organizations – WWF, WCS, CARE in Vietnam, Health Unlimited, Wetlands Alliance (AIT, Wetlands International, World Fish, WWF), RECOFTC

Steering Committee – the Programme Steering and management committee meetings will not hold meetings during the evaluation. However, there will be opportunities to meet and have discussions with a number of individual members of these committees during visits to relevant agencies.

Field visits should be made to the following demonstration sites and provincial offices

- § Stung Treng Ramsar site in Cambodia
- § Attapeu Province in Lao PDR
- § Lower Songkhram river basin in Thailand
- § Plain of Reeds, Vietnam -Lang Sen Nature Reserve and Tram Chim National Park

Semi-structured interviews – the team should develop a process for semi-structured interviews with the different interviewees to ensure that the different aspects are covered. Focus group discussions with programme beneficiaries will be held as deemed necessary by the evaluation team.

7. EVALUATION TEAM

There should be a team of international and national evaluators for this mission. The Team leader should be a specialist in institutional and operational structures, skilled in assessing capacities to implement a complex programme such as the MWBP at all levels. The other two international specialists should cover:

- § Technical aspects of Wetlands Biodiversity issues
- § Local Community use of wetlands, livelihoods and poverty issues¹⁸

There should be four national consultants, one each for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam to facilitate the evaluation process in each country. It is recommended that these should have expertise in institutional and operational aspects, rather than technical or social aspects, although experience or expertise in wetlands and natural resource management would be an advantage.

Roles and responsibilities

The Team Leader is responsible for:

- § Overall design, approach and methodology of the evaluation
- § Leading the evaluation team and directing the evaluation
- § Collation of the different contributions and editing of draft and final reports
- § Covering institutional issues, including partnership development, national ownership, operational systems established and capacity for implementation
- § Networking and communication aspects
- §

Profiles

The profiles of the specialists are as follows:

The Team Leader

- § Institutional and operational specialist with appropriate higher degree qualifications and at least 13 years relevant experience, and at least 5 years in Asia
- § Proven experience in the implementation and evaluation of GEF projects
- § Familiarity with donor policy and strategies – particularly the GEF and Dutch
- § Proven experience in leading evaluation and other assessment teams
- § Experience in natural resource management projects, preferably of wetlands
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

The Wetland Biodiversity specialist:

- § Wetland biodiversity specialist – with appropriate higher degree qualifications and at least 8 years experience in wetland assessment and management, preferably in Asia
- § Proven experience of implementation and/or evaluation of wetland projects
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

The Wetland Community-use and Livelihoods specialist:

- § Social and community development specialist with appropriate higher degree qualifications and at least 8 years experience in community development, preferably in Asia
- § Proven experience of implementation and/or evaluation of community development and livelihoods projects
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

The four national specialists:

- § Institutional and management specialist with appropriate higher degree qualifications
- § Experience in the implementation and/or evaluation of natural resource management projects in their country
- § Ability to facilitate meetings and discussions for the rest of the international team
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

8. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Management arrangements

The principal responsibility for managing this evaluation lies with UNDP Lao PDR, assisted where necessary by the UNDP country offices in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The UNDP Lao PDR Country Office is the main operational point for the evaluation responsible for liaising with the project team to set up the stakeholder interviews, arrange the field visits, co-ordinate with the Government the hiring of national consultants and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the

Itinerary	Number of international	Number of national	Mode of transport
First visit to Vientiane	3	3	Flight
First visit to Vientiane (return)		2	
Vientiane to Songkhram	3	1	Overland
Songkhram to Bangkok	1	1	Flight
Bangkok to Plain of Reeds	1		Flight
Hanoi to Plain of Reeds		1	Flight
Plain of Reeds to Hanoi	1	1	Flight
Hanoi to Vientiane			

Date	Itinerary	Notes
Jun 06	discussion at District Office. Meet village leaders and Thai Baan researchers at Don Phu Ta Sacred Forest, Ban Yang Ngoi for discussions. Boat trip on Songkhram, lunch at Ban Tha Bor. School children water quality testing programme. Discussions at Ban Don Daeng village (mat weaving), boat trip to Nong Chaiwan wetland. Bai-Sri Soo Khwan local ceremony.	impressive, as was the water quality monitoring programme, which is carried out with much enthusiasm by local school children. Nong Chaiwan is a flooded forest that is now permanently inundated; as a result, the trees (<i>Nauclea?</i>) appear highly stressed.
Tue 06 Jun 06	Morning: round table discussion with key project partners from government institutions, universities, NGOs and civil society about MWBP. Late morning & early afternoon: sub-group discussions (biodiversity, institutional, livelihoods groups). Late afternoon exit meeting with PPO staff and IUCN Programme Manager.	Meeting room at River View Hotel, Nakhon Phanom.
Wed 07 Jun 06	ALL: Flight from Nakhon Phanom to Bangkok. WG & Phairat: Travel to TNMC for meeting with Director (Pakawan Chufamane); Meeting with DoF Dr. Chumnarn Pongsri at Kasetsart Univ.; meeting at RECOFTC with Ronnakorn. MO and RH: presentation by NPC and Mahdu, meeting with ONEP (Ms. Nirawan Pipitsombut) Dr. Sansanee Choowaew, Programme Director – Mahidol University, Salaya Campus; Meeting with Mr Barry Hall, Danida project; RH: meeting at WFT (Wildlife Fund of Thailand) with Hamnarong Yaowalart. RH, WG & Phairat: Meeting with Mr Peter Keulers, councillor – Dutch Embassy.	Meet at NPO office at ONEP; after a brief meeting with the NPC and introduction to the NPO team, the MTE team splits up for further meetings with various agencies in Bangkok. Stay at Windsor Suites Hotel, Bangkok.
Thu 08 Jun 06	Meeting at UNDP country office, meet with Hakan Bjorkman, Deputy Resident Representative, Ms. Phansiri Winichagoon. Lunch meeting with Dept. of NPWP Dr. Kasemsun Chinnavaso, and Dr. Nawarat Krairapanond. Afternoon meeting at IUCN ARO with Andrew Inglis and John Dore.	WG: evening meeting with Masakazu Kashio, Forest Resources Officer FAO – RAP.
Fri 09 Jun 06	Morning: meeting with Nick Innes-Taylor, Wetlands Alliance. Exit meeting with NPC (Tawachai) & UNDP Programme Manager (PJM).	After the exit meeting, the team splits up, with each international team member visiting another country.
Cambodia Country Component		
Fri 09 Jun 06	Afternoon: travel to Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Ross Hughes)	Together with Mam Kosal, entry meeting with NPO, including presentations by Sok Vong & Mao Kosal.
Sat 10 Jun 06	Travel to Stung Treng, en route, brief meeting and field visit to dolphin pool with MDCP staff. Entry meeting at PPO office in Stung Treng.	Brief presentation and field visit to discuss MDCP issues in Kratie, followed by entry presentations at PPO Stung Treng. En route, discussions with Alvin Lopez, MWBP Biodiversity Specialist.

Date	Itinerary	Notes
		<p>and maternity leave - though both were met later). Informal discussion with other staff. Discussed fish conservation and farming activities. Fish/rice production. EIA and gold mining issues. Also met with village children gathering aquatic invertebrates from paddy fields. They do this every evening for family consumption.</p>
Sun 11 Jun 06	Travel to and overnight in Hat Oudomxay (District Sanamxay)	<p>This was a large group accompanied by Head of Provincial Department, Head of PSTEO, and District Governor. On river shown fish conservation activities, now dysfunctional gold mining dredgers. Discuss issues. Discuss project with villagers. Shown water pumps, drug store, livestock management new crops and much more. Observe an important village meeting in the evening. Very well attended. This trip provided an excellent opportunity to discuss all aspects of the project with villagers and officials.</p>
Mon 12 Jun 06	Return to Attapeu. Visit Nong Lom near Ban Somanouk and Ban Sisomphone Villages	Significant conflict resolution intervention by PPO at the request of the District Governor.
Tue 13 Jun 06	Meetings with: Kenthong Sisouvong, Head of Provincial Steering Committee (Deputy Provincial Governor), Soukchay Sinlapa, Deputy Head of National Steering Committee (Deputy Head of Provincial Governor Office), Dr. Pounpen, Member of Provincial Steering Committee (Head of Provincial Health Department), Nawarath Nouanethong, Member of Provincial Steering Committee (Head of PSTEO), Health Unlimited, Thavone Sangavong WB IDA, Khampheng Sixaya WB IDA, PPO Finance Officer, Secretary, Attend evaluation of village researchers training, Exit meeting with Provincial team.	Notes recorded for all meetings.
Wed 14 Jun 06	Travel to Pakse Via Ban Kasom (District Samakysay) and return to Vientiane Briefing from NPO at LARReC Debriefing Katihanna Ilomaki, UNDP Unit Manager (Environment)	
Thu 15 Jun 06	Meeting with: Somphanh Chanphengxay, Dep Dir General Dept Livestock and Fisheries Khamphet Roger, Dep Dir LARReC Mark Bezuijen, Coordinator Species WWF Marc Goichot, Coordinator IRBM WWF Michael Hedemark, Program Coordinator WCS	
Fri 16 Jun 06	Meeting with: Andy Inglis, Country Coordinator IUCN Lao, Kate Lazarus, WANI Lao, Chanthavong Saygnasith, Head of LNMC,	

Date	Itinerary	Notes
	Lonkham Atsanavong, LNMC, Sourasay Phoumavong, LNMC, Somsanouk Dep Plan of STEA (formerly Ramsar FP), Monemany Nhoibouakong, Act Dri Gen ERI, Dr. Phouang Parisack Pravongviengkham, Perm Sec MAFF, Chair of LNSC, Soulivanthong Kingkeo, Dep Dir Gen NAFRI.	
Sat 17 Jun 06	Telephone interview with: Latsamay, Country Director of IUCN Lao. Saygnalat Chomphonpakdy, Director of PAF in Attapeu province.	Meeting with PJM.
Sun 18 Jun 06	Meetings with: Jonathan Cornford, Oxfam Australia, Advocacy Coordinator, Khunkeoka Khamlouang, Country Director Oxfam Australia, Alvin Lopez, MWBP Ecologist	Useful outsider perspective Oxfam has a very similar community fisheries programme in Attapeu with 14 villages.
Mon 19 Jun 06	Exit meeting NPO at LARReC	
Tue 20 Jun 06	Meeting with Souksavanh Sisouvong, Co-Manager PPO	Important meeting as had not met before due to Souksavanh's ill health.
Sat 1 Jul 06	Meeting Mark Dubois TA	In the UK.
Vietnam Country Component		
Fri 09 Jun 06	Later afternoon travel to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (Wim Giesen).	Vuon Sai Gon Hotel.
Sat 10 Jun 06	Meet up with Tran Phuong Dong and Martin van der Schans (PMU), travel to Cao Lanh; at PPO, briefing by Project Co-Manager Nguyen Huu Thien, Outreach Officer Vu Thi Bich, and CARE project manager Vo Van Phong.	Stay at Dong Thap Guesthouse in Cao Lanh
Sun 11 Jun 06	Travel to Tram Chin National Park, for field visit and discussion with Provincial Co-Manager Huynh The Phien; visit Lang Sen Wetland Reserve – field visit and discussion with LSWR manager. Travel back to Cao Lanh.	Visitor's Centre at TCNP; burnt area at TCNP; sites for spillways; goat control of <i>Mimosa</i> ; members of LSWR user group. Accompanied by Thien, Dr. Ni (Can Tho University), and Martin van der Schans (PMU).
Mon 12 Jun 06	Mr. Le Van Be, Vice Chair of Tam Nong District People Committee, Tam Nong office. Work at Cao Lanh PPO; meetings with CARE and PPO staff, and presentations by PPO staff.	
Tue 13 Jun 06	Meeting with Le Minh Hoan, Deputy head of Dong Thap PC, chair of Dong Thap PMB; travel to Long An; meeting and lunch with Le Phat Quoi (Provincial Co-manager) & Truong Phuc Thuan (head of Long An Department of Science and Technology) and Huynh Thi Phep (member of Provincial Management Board Long An and deputy director of Long An's Department of Environment). Travel to Ho Chi Minh City; late afternoon meeting with Nguyen Chi Thanh (Head	Stay at De Syloia Hotel in Hanoi.

Date	Itinerary	Notes
	of MWBP Technical Advisory Group & director of the regional Sub-FIPI; fly to Hanoi in evening.	

Date	Person	Position	Relation
4 June	Sansonthi Boonyothayan	Provincial Co-Manager	PPC
5 June	Head of Sri Songkhram District	Head of the Sri Songkhram District Office	
5 June	Village leaders and Thai Baan researchers	Ban Yang Ngoi village	
5 June	Village leaders and Thai Baan researchers	Ban Don Daeng vi'	
6 June	Manusak Khumpongpun	Head of N-	

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
7 June	Peter Keulers	Counsellor, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Bangkok	Donor to Thai Component of MWBP
7 June	Nirawan Pipitsombut	ONEP	National Host Agency
7 June	Harnnarong Yaowalert	Head of Wildlife Fund of Thailand	

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
12 June	Chea Kim Sien	Head, Dept of Environment, Stung Treng Province and Demonstration	Demonstration site co-manager - DOE is the host agency at provincial level.
12 June	Hak Vimean	Deputy head, Dept. of Environment, Sung Treng Province	DOE is the host agency at provincial level
12 June	Tum Nyro	Head, Fisheries Dept. Stung Treng Province	Partner. DoF hopes to engage more in future
12 June	Yen Run	Provincial Co-manager, Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA)	CEPA facilitate community fisheries and Sala Phoum work.
12 June	Chim Saren	Provincial coordinator, UNDP/RGOC SEILA programme	SEILA supports decentralization process in province
12 June	Long Phal	First Deputy Governor, Stung Treng Provincial Government	Responsible for 16 re 0.902su n r MWBed mor352.56 566.4

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
15 June	Blake Ratner	Regional Director, Greater Mekong Sub Region, World Fish Centre	iNGO partner
15 June	Boyd Simpson	Crocodile Program Officer, Fauna and Flora International Cambodia	iNGO partner
23 June	Mr. Ken Serey Rotha	Director of CBNRM Learning Institute	NGO partner
26 June	HE, Dr. Lonh Heal	Director General, MOE	National Programme Director
LAO PDR Country Component			
10 June	Dr Richard Friend	(part of PPN Programme Manager	Partner team)
10 June	Vongthong Gnodleusay	Co-Manager PPO	PPO
10 June	Phutavong Ladouanglero	Outreach Officer	PPO
10 June	Vanhnee Souvanxay	Finance and Administration Officer	PPO
10 June	Phongchanh Pongtaychak	HU Health & Nutrition Communicator (part of team)	Partner
10 June	Boukong Inthilath	Health & Nutrition Communicator (part of team)	Partner
10 June	Viengxay Saydara	Admin- Assistant (part of PPO team)	PPO

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
14 June	Singha Ounniyom	IUCN NP Coordinator	MWBP
14 June			

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
20 June	Souksavanh Sisouvong	Co-manager PPO	PPO
1 July	Mark Dubois	TA to the PPO	PPO

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
15 June	Doan Thi Nga	Finance Officer, IUCN Viet Nam	Partner organisation
		Water Resources, IUCN Viet Nam	

Annex 4 Summary of field visits

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Stung Treng, Cambodia

<p>Assessment by:</p>	<p>Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)</p>	<p>Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)</p>	<p>Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, speci24 425.52odpe)</p>
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<p>Assessment by:</p>	<p>Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)</p>	<p>Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)</p>	<p>Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)</p>
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Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
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this gap is not yet clear.

- Impact of regionally-deployed biodiversity funding at national level has been mixed – support for Giant crocodiles, and to a lesser extent, dolphins, impacts have been mixed.,

<p>Assessment by:</p>	<p>Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)</p>	<p>Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)</p>
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Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
National Host Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong commitment and support was shown from the Secretary of State, MoE, and he has engaged actively when appropriate. • DNPC concerned at poor relationship between the project and host agency, perhaps attributable to institutional arrangements within DNCP that constrain effective engagement. DNPC also requested improvements to the clarity of reporting formats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provincial host agency (DoE) feels excluded from planning and key decision-making and does not feel it has benefited sufficiently from support from MWBP vv hands-on capacity building and addressing needs for essential field and office equipment. • The PPO has tried hard to ensure close cooperation. These efforts have been constrained by a work program agreed and fixed nearly 3 years ago; frequently changing budget allocations; physical separation of the PPO from the office of the host agency, and the use of English as the primary means of communication to PMU line management – DOE is unable to communicate directly with visiting PMU staff because of language barriers. The PPO and DoE have resolved to try to improve relations. • DOE stated that PMU staff has yet to visit their offices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DNCP would like a stronger focus on conservation priorities, and wants to ensure that the demonstration site work provides real guidance for MoE on balancing conservation with development goals within the context of Ramsar. DNCP are concerned that ongoing work may not do this – with too little to show in terms of progress on Ramsar delineation, management planning and conservation. • DNCP would like to see more delivery of tangible outputs and progress on this aspect. They do not seem convinced that work on the sectoral policy review will deliver results that will influence policy.

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
NMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNMC are supportive of MWBP, and seek to play a role in facilitating better engagement from line ministries, e.g. MAFF & MOWRAM • CNMC sees a weakness of the MWBP as being too concerned with 'high level' meetings, and insufficiently focussed on promoting working level dialogue –there are only 2 SC meetings per year at senior level, but no regular meetings at working level. • CNMC cite a weakness of MWBP as poor preparation for steering committee meetings – most line ministries have, until recently, received key papers, such as budgets and work plans far too late for internal discussion prior to steering committee meetings. This was better for the last meeting. • CNMC wonders what MWBP plans are to turn the steering committee into a nationally-owned and managed mechanism? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNMC made little comment on the demonstration site work but would like to see a better balance achieved between conservation and development 	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>UNDP Country office</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRAC funds for sector policy analysis have required UNDP to engage in the process. • They have not seen programme reports since June last year, although this seems likely to be a reflection of weak information flows within UNDP – reports to the UNDP country offices should be sent from UNDP Lao. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP generally not well informed of demonstration activities and have not fielded supervision missions, nor visited the demonstration site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From what they understand of the project, they would like to see a stronger focus on action, and question role and competence of MWBP on national policy analysis.
<p>Other implementation partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General support for the aspirations that MWBP seeks to achieve, and respect for the work of staff at NPO and PPO. • A common feature of these reservations relate to frequent changes to budget frames for particular activities leading to a loss of confidence amongst several MWBP partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The local community would like the 	

<p>Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)</p> <p>Assessment by:</p>	<p>Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)</p>	<p>Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)</p>
	<p>rarer and harder to find. However, there is a belief that community work on fisheries management would help them to respond to outsiders coming to their fishing grounds, using nylon nets that are now much more commonly available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramsar rangers at site level have not been paid for nearly two years and would like the project to bring this to the attention of provincial and national authorities (i.e. DOE and MOE). • Ramsar rangers have no boats, fuel or equipment, and had received very little training, so they are unable to do their work effectively. They feel the programme should provide these basic requirements. • Villagers would like to see more tangible development work, ('fewer researchers and more development') 	

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Lao PDR

<p>Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)</p> <p>Assessment by:</p>		<p>Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)</p>	<p>Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)</p>
<p>MT Evaluation Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally a blur between PMU and Lao specific component. There are some advantages in this but generally there issues of perception. • Ditto with MRC. MRC EP linkage rather weak and needs improvement. • Strong MWBP teams in PPO and NPO. Concerns that LARReC may not be the best governmental department to present policy change issues. But LARReC is fully engaged with the programme and there are some advantages of its hands on approach. • Excellent progress in province in implementing a development programme with some novel ideas on biodiversity in relation to health 		

<p>Assessment by:</p>	<p>Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)</p>	<p>Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)</p>	<p>Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)</p>
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Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
National Host Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No exit defined strategy. Potential for conflicting interests with IUCN Lao. The level of understanding by government officials of wetland management is very basic. LARReC outside NPO: Sees this as an IUCN project. Much criticism of IUCN (in relation to MWBP). Feels ownership is in IUCN/PMU (not IUCN Lao). Strong criticism about PMU expenditure and control. Could be strengthened by being hosted by NAFRI or non-research department? Or MAF Dep Plan. Programme Dir works 60% MRC. NPO do not feel that LARReC is the right agency to host MWBP Tr2re 	0.902 g f* host M	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
NMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPO: Responsibility for the Lao project should be with the NPO. Province should report to NPO both technical and financial.(Cannot actually pull up financial reports for Lao component which government requires). • Well managed in office. • Not well enough integrated into government. NSC still weak. • LARReC not really set up for influencing policy. LARReC good on fishery law not wider wetland implications. • Provides a bigger breath of thinking – health, nutrition, livelihoods etc. • LARReC has various related projects and options. Sida (report due), GoL funds, FAO proposal. • Concern about dual reporting procedures (MWBP and GoL). • Negative. • Did not feel that MWBP was helpful. • Seen as anti development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No apparent connection. • NMC deals with trans-boundary issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative

Assessment of: MWBP

Assessment by:

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>Others</p> <p>IUCN-Lao</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of important issues identified: concern that IUCN-Lao programme can be negatively impacted by poor image of MWBP in Lao, when it should boost and provide openings for IUCN-Lao. • Potential duplication of activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local people: active participation and engagement. No opposition seen. • Development benefits apparent and appreciated. Villagers thinking more about future needs and plans. • Local researchers trained. • Concerns as with overall MWBP. 	

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Songkhram, Thailand

Assessment of:

Assessment by:

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
[Redacted]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully leveraged UNDP TRAC funds and there is considerable future potential from provincial funding, UNDP GEF and SIDA funds through Wetlands Alliance • Seen as effective by host agency (ONFP) and has made efforts to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP TRAC funds need to be used to strengthen and structure local-national linkages 	
[Redacted]	<p>work plan. Communications with national programme is very good, but with regional programme is lacking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too early for policy implications. • Generally positive about institutional alignment, although not positive 		

Assessment of:

Assessment by:

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationale for funding regional component from OP Adaptation to Climate Change not convincing, although funds may be available • Project has leveraged \$125,000 UNDP TRAC funds to improve local-national learning linkages and in future, UTAP funds available for leveraging further GEF support if deemed GoT priority • UNDP does not think existing CTA should be seconded from IUCN to UNDP • UNDP Lao should be institutional home for regional component 		

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Plain of Reeds, Vietnam

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>MT Evaluation Team</p>	<p>Evaluation of PMU & NPO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a good sense of ownership at the beneficiary level (PA management), but less so at the district level. • Technically, MWBP is doing well, and inputs provided are generally of good quality and appropriate. Exceptions are the reports on ecotourism (too general) and co-management (inappropriate), which will be redone. • Changes in staffing and the slow response by CARE to problems on the livelihoods programme has affected the delivery time. Response by the PMO has been appropriate, but delays are evident and 		

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
National Host Agency	<p>involved on the project. There is a need for an increase in direct communications with district level administration. Reporting according to the PMU's format is a burden to the project, and does not have any added value at the provincial or local level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the demonstration site level there is definitely an added value of MWBP. The programme not only has an important local effect (on livelihoods and ecosystem management), but if successful, they are likely to significant affect national policy. 	<p>in other protected areas and wetlands throughout the country.</p>	

National Host Agency

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Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
NMC	<p>aspects of the programme (e.g. CARE). Financial procedures between NPO and IUCN Vietnam are cumbersome. VEPA are aware of important links between MARD, MONRE and MOFI for implementation of MWBP, but there is no close cooperation in this field. VEPA is actively seeking additional NL funds for the programme, but are also strongly considering GEF MSP funds. Strongly supportive of MWBP. National ownership needs to be enhanced in Phase-B, and IUCN should provide TA only. Role of VNMC should perhaps also be more active in next phase; they would like to link MWBP more with the Water Resources Management Programme of MRC, for example. Exchanges between countries should be strengthened under Phase-B, to ensure that lessons learned are shared. Regarding funding options for Phase-B, MWBP needs to identify activities first before seeking (bridging or other) funds.</p>	<p>Tools to improve livelihood for the local people should focus on training and awareness. MWBP has had a slow start, but we now have real achievements, such as the fire and water strategy. Because of the brief time available for implementation we need to take care that the quality of the outputs remains high. The up-scaling of activities</p>	<p>0.180 f* .44 -13.92 re 0.902 g f* 0 g n BT 1 0 0 1 402.24 189.6 F</p>

Assessment of: MWBP
(ownership, technical, managerial,
communication, policy implications,

Assessment by:

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
Project beneficiaries	<p>aspects and communications are performing less adequately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional alignment is appropriate, as programme works with TCNP and LSWR, which both report to district authorities. • Positive response to added value aspect, but remarked that the project is still at a very early stage. • District funds are available for poverty alleviation programme, linked with MWBP livelihood activities (e.g. business plans). The district is able to mobilise funds for investment in eco-tourism, pending the production of an eco-tourism master plan. • Management of both PAs have a good sense of ownership of the project, and are much involved. • Communications with TCNP is close and good, while that with LSWR is reasonable, but more difficult because of more difficult access (e.g. poor telecommunications, lack 	<p>alleviation programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation benefits are already apparent, mainly because of increased awareness. • Approaches are suitable and appropriate, and there is scope for replication and up-scaling. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community benefits look very promising, but have yet to become tangible, mainly due to delays caused by CARE issues. • Conservation benefits are evident from increased awareness, but also from changes in management (e.g. increase in <i>Eleocharis</i> due to 	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	of road). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MWBP is important to both PAs, and has a significant added value in terms of changing management approaches, accessing funds, and improving local livelihoods and 		

Annex 5 List of documents reviewed

- § Project Brief and Annexes approved by GEF Council in December 2001
- § Programme Support Document signed by four countries and three implementing partners in July 2004
- § M & E Operational Guidelines
- § Financial and Administration guidelines for MWBP
- § Training Strategy and assessment of first year training implementation
- § Communications and Networking Strategy
- § Quarterly Progress Report summaries and detailed activity progress reports
- § Minutes of Executive Steering Committee and Programme Management Committee meetings
- § Facts sheets that provide a two page synopsis of key aspects
- § Strategy documents, concepts and sub-project proposals
- § Situation analysis of the four demonstration sites (4 documents)
- § UNDP TRAC funding proposals for MWBP
- § Partnership Strategy
- § Programme Sustainability Strategy
- § Species Conservation Action Planning process and reports
- § Wetland maps for the demonstration sites
- § Tales of Water project documentation (video)
- § Fire Management Plan for Tram Chim NP
- § Fire and Water Strategy for Tram Chim NP
- § Sustainable Livelihoods Strategy
- § Thai Baan Research in the Lower Songhram River Basin
- § Participatory Poverty Assessments for the four countries demonstration sites
- § Cambodian Mekong Dolphin Conservation Strategy
- § Development and Implementation of a SCAP for the Giant Catfish.
- § Mekong Giant Catfish observation and commenys on handling.
- § Website – www.mekongwetlands.org

Annex 6 Comments by stakeholders

Comments from the following are attached below (and in this order):

- UNDP Cambodia
- UNDP Thailand, on the chapter on the Thailand Component
- Response to UNDP Thailand by the NPC and Project Co-Manager
- IUCN Asia Regional Office, Bangkok
- MWBP team

- § UNDP <would> prefer to go for PDF-B for Phase B <of MWBP> in Cambodia. The scope of Phase B for Cambodia should focus on stabilizing the Mekong Fishery Production through the establishment of Mekong fishery conservation areas from Stung Treng Ramsar site down to Kratie and Kampong Cham. The effort to make a Transboundary Ramsar site between the Lao PDR and Cambodia should be proceeded if this would not be achieved during the Phase A. The Phase B will need to be in line with the Fishery Action Plan and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP).

Significant weakness of MWBP was the linkages of good work at demo sites and the recognition of the policy level in order to help solving the big policy issue that harm the local good efforts (e.g. dam construction) and mobilize more resources to maintain the ecosystem and livelihoods.

MTE team response: Agreed, this has been added to 6.2.2.

6.2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

UNDP did not testify suggestion to improve the reporting format. But I agreed with what had been stated. Actually, I am more interested in evaluation of scientific/technical assessment done by MWBP. How far the studies could serve the project stakeholders. How well MWBP could verify the tangible outputs both at demo sites, provincial and national level.

6.2.4 Stakeholders Participation (in implementation)

While the report stated that the provincial programme demonstrates high level of participation, in fact, there was still a gap in drawing support from provincial level to help Songkram people in community planning. Participation should not be defined merely showing up in meetings with promise of support but no real actions. The contradicting fact was the dam construction which reflected least understanding of the officials on wetland ecosystem and Songkram livelihoods. Should this be MWBP niche? with plenty of technical experts and studies, to convince the policy level and advocacy network both at national and regional level. There are various strategies to make the “neutral position” more meaningful, not just providing a plain studies and being out of troubles.

6.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

It is not fair to state that “the slow response to MWBP from TNMC, may be an indication of conflicting priority interests and that Thailand is not strongly committed to regional wetland planning”. In fact, TNMC have various regional projects also, ONEP has been highly committed to the regional wetland planning.

In the last paragraph of page 46 I would like to clarify that TRAC funds is UNDP Thailand core funding committed to the Thailand component. It is unfortunate that the evaluation team did not recognize this at all. UNDP Thailand core funding is timely used to bridge between phase A and the uncertain phase B. If the evaluation team got through the project document I provided, you will find the strategy of this bridging project to fill the gap of linkages between local and national level, including the upscaling of Songkram good work in terms of networking. To solve the complicated modality in project execution, ONEP (not MWBP, please correct) has been given overall responsibility to manage these funds of 125,000 USD. Upon good results of this bridging project it will form a good justification for the national MWBP phase B to be submitted for GEF support. We will work closely with MONRE, the national GEF operational focal point, which GEF strategic priority the national project will fit in. This is considered an exit strategy if the regional MWBP phase B is unlikely.

MTE team response: The MTE team is aware that TRAC funds are UNDP core funding, but agree that this could have been formulated better in 6.3.1 – the text has been adjusted accordingly.

6.3.2 Effectiveness/ impact - technical

I agree with paragraph 2, please see my comment on 6.2.4 above. It's true that MWBP can not be expected to resolve all issues in a sub basin like Songkram. However, considering the project geographical coverage, it's about the size which a regional programme like MWBP could make more significant results.

6.3.3 Sustainability

It seems sustainability of Songkram efforts is threatened by the lack of policy advocacy. However, the ending sentence makes us so desperate since “there is not much that MWBP can (or should) do about such threats other than take note. I still have hope that the policy agencies are rationale enough if we can provide convincing evidence-based information, given that we can also draw alliances with non-offensive actions.

MTE team response: Agreed, a more pro-active stance should be taken, and this is now reflected in the wording.

6.4.1 Remainder of phase A

UNDP TRAC fund is proposed for what should be done in the remainder of phase A. Actions in second and third paragraph of page 49 are identified as UNDP TRAC project activities.

Regarding the system boundary, I wonder if the “FLOW” studies can help defining the areas.

Response to UNDP Thailand's comments by Tawatchai Rattanasorn, NPC & Khun Rattaphon, the Project Co-Manager of Thailand Component of MWBP.

Thai Baan research work at Songkram

- First, I agreed with you that “Songkram people were special... and ...a good foundation for whatever activities created.” There are, some details regarding the history of participatory wetland management that are easily overlooked in this case. There is occasionally some confusion about the Songkram people's movement from the earlier PER, TERRA programme working here between 1996 and 2001, therefore I will provide you with my best understanding of the history at Songkram:
- Between 1990 and 2001 a network of local people in Ban Dongsarn, Ban Tha Rae and a few other villages, was created to protect their natural resources and livelihoods since the incursions of the Suntech company planting eucalyptus on public lands and opposition to the Songkram Dam project from 1990-2001. But that people's network was different from the Songkram Tai Baan Research Network which was started in a process by IUCN – MWBP during the preparation phase (in four villages) since 2003.
- Songkram Tai Baan Research was initiated by IUCN-MWBP, with SEARIN acting as consultants and partnership with the Nakhon Phanom Environmental Conservation Club (NECC), given the interest of key local people to visit the earlier Tai Baan Research process at Rasi Salai. This was followed by a series of Training workshops with Research Assistants and local Tai Baan researchers. The process involved building on and adapting earlier lessons on the Mun River. Furthermore, I feel strongly that the Tai Baan methodology initiative by local people may not have taken place without the strong support and facilitation by IUCN-MWBP over three years of implementation.

Weakness in policy level work:

- Thai Baan research is boosting the understanding of communities and local government officials of the links between rivers, wetlands, lands, forests, and rural livelihoods. Thai Baan research has rapidly gained credibility by ‘bringing in’ and respecting the knowledge of local fishers and farmers, and effectively communicating their knowledge to other actors through photo exhibitions, posters, Thai and English booklets, and videos etc. As well as providing a wealth of information and local knowledge, Thai Baan research has become a vehicle for developing networks of local people to share experiences, as it provides a forum for analysis and dialogue, which can then attempt to deal with immediate management issues as well as large scale infrastructure.
- Thai Baan research has earned respect and recognition for the reasons I mention above. And the continuation of the UNDP TRAC project on “Support to Thailand Wetlands Management Policy and Implementation” .These qualities are precursors to influencing policy; therefore I hope you can agree that good progress has been made towards bridging the gap between the work at the demonstration sites and changes at the policy level. The communities also have greater influence in presenting a case in policy processes as they are able to present local knowledge in a systematic way, based on empirical knowledge. I believe that a Highly Satisfactory assessment of the implementation approach signifies the MTE recognition that this is a step-by-step process.

Additional comments:

- TNMC and DWR representatives visited Songkram in late 2004 and were given a tour of flooded forest and wetlands at Ban Tha Bor, plus a description of TB Research by local people. Hence, they should understand the Songkhram situation and history well by now.
- The Queen's Royal Project was not initiated until late 2005, and Army personnel came to MWBP for advice on how they might proceed with project implementation and details about the TB Research. This was provided to them by MWBP Songkram Demonstration Site, and the Project Co-Manager (Rattaphon) was invited to be a Committee member, along with Khun Sansonthi (govt. sector MWBP Co-Manager) as Secretary. Hence, this came well after Thai Baan Research had proved successful.

Comments by IUCN Asia Regional Office, Bangkok

by Andrew W. Ingles
Regional Group Head
Ecosystems & Livelihoods, Bangkok

1. IUCN seeks further clarification from the MTE team regarding the use of the term "country ownership". Let me explain why this is sought. IUCN has learnt about and responded to concerns about "country ownership" of the MWBP as expressed by the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) only. This related to the work of MWBP in Attapeu Province. In this case, the "ownership" issues were explored in some depth, understood and handled successfully. No other Governments have expressed "country ownership" concerns directly to IUCN, rather we are hearing about them as an over-riding concern indirectly through the UNDP country offices and the MTE review team. For this reason, IUCN would appreciate more information about the specific issues being alluded to and clarity about where they have originated from? Wherever "country ownership" is used in the report, can the MTE team please explain exactly what is being said, by which part of Government?

MTE team response: This has been added. In Cambodia, the conclusion that ownership does not appear to be high is actually supported by MWBP's M&E reporting for 2005, which rates ownership as 'low-medium'. In Thailand, this was the view of most members of the NSC until recently (see 6.2.1), while in Lao PDR a repeated concern mentioned at central level during this MTE was that this was an IUCN project not a GoL project.

2. It is pleasing to see that the good work of the PMU, NPOs, PPOs, and field teams has been recognised by the MTE team. However, this recognition is then put aside and a negative picture presented via the MTE assessments about progress in establishing an "enabling environment". These MTE assessments are presented without the necessary context about what the MWBP was supposed to do in the first 2 years, what sort of funding was available for what in the period, how MWBP performed in regard to the original standards and how the MTE has changed the definition of the required "enabling environment" and applied new standards retro-actively in its evaluation.

MTE team response: What MWBP was to achieve during Phase A is unclear, not only to the MTE but also to government and NGO partners. This is partly due to an unclear original design of the programme, which, for example, lacked a clear definition of the 'enabling environment'. It is also due to changes made to the logframe by the PMU – while the MTE finds that these changes make the logframe clearer, the development of this revised logframe by the PMU has clearly not involved the main stakeholders. The MTE does not find that it has changed the definition of the enabling environment. As indicated in the TOR for the MTE, the enabling environment involves both the establishment of structures and capacity for programme implementation (offices, staffing, training, management mechanisms, partnerships), and creating attitudes, understanding, national capacity and ownership that lead to sustainability. PMU achievements to date have largely been administrative and 'technical', and these successes are about putting systems in place that are related to the establishment of a project. The more difficult but more important part of establishing an enabling environment is creating an environment in which governments feel confident and have the tools to engage with wetland/biodiversity issues. The lack of achievement on the latter is partly understandable, given that the programme has been effectively operating only one year due to a slow start-up, and the MTE acknowledges that more progress may be mad

MTE team response: The MTE observes that there is no regional strategy. For one, it is not documented in the Project Brief, Programme Support Document, or in subsequent strategy documents – nor has PM

Comments by the MWBP team (PMU + National and Provincial offices)

The following comments are a synthesis of the comments provided to the UNDP Team Leader by various members of the MWBP team at regional, national and provincial levels.

The MTE team appreciates the detailed comments from the MWBP team, but as these arrived after the date of submittal of the final report (which was due 15 July), only obvious factual errors could be corrected. The rest of the MWBP team's comments are i

requests for clarification of the methodology. The result of this lack of transparency was that the MWBP staff were often unclear of the point and direction of questions, and so were less able to provide all the relevant documentation and clarification.

- Whilst staff members from the PMU and national and provincial offices attended the entry and exit meetings and were able to respond to issues and questions raised at these meetings, the general feeling from staff is that the team rarely came back to them to check the validity of statements discussed with other stakeholders, particularly when these were critical. Various key members of the PMU in particular have expressed a feeling that the team did not really interview them on their work, achievements and challenges.
- At the final exit workshop, the recommendations were presented, admittedly as ideas that had not been fully thought through. Some of these raised significant areas of discussion and questioning of appropriateness and time frame. These discussion points do not seem to have been taken on board. In retrospect, it would probably have been better to have presented the analysis of the issues found, with some of the options that could be considered, rather than as a prescriptive recommendation. This would have been a more constructive and inclusive way of developing the ideas for the continuation of the programme rather than presenting premature and seemingly prejudged recommendations.

3. Clarifications

Running through all of the report there are several themes often based upon misunderstandings, which need to be clarified more generally rather than in the specific comments on the country components.

These relate to:

1. Logframe
2. Workplanning and Budgeting
3. Balance of expenditures between Regional and national components

3.1 Logframe

The logframe in the original programme brief was changed in the programme document to show a regional and four national components, with very similar structures and outputs. This logframe was developed in consultation in each of the four countries and agreed by them. The budget allocations from the GEF were allocated to some, but not all, of the outputs. These outputs have remained the same throughout the implementation and the workplans have been derived from them.

When the programme started in 2004, the logframe was revised by refining and clarifying the indicators and assumptions, especially at the outcome level. This process was undertaken by the M&E JPO (co-finance from IUCN Headquarters) and the Programme Administrator, with assistance from an international consultant (based in Lao PDR) and national consultants in Lao PDR and Cambodia. Through a consultative process in both Lao and Cambodia, involving national and provincial offices, and host agencies, the revised logframe was produced, presented and approved by the 2nd Executive Regional Steering Committee. Subsequently during 2005, after an M & E training workshop attended by all country offices and with representation from host agencies, which

4. Comments on Recommendations

Many of the recommendations have been discussed in the context of the national and regional components, but one or two points should be made:

- Recommendation 1: Building national ownership undoubtedly is an aim and there are a number of different routes to this. The practicality of an immediate change over of reporting lines from PPO to NPO is questioned. Whilst it is recognized that this will happen as national Phase B projects are developed, a more realistic timetable will be the end of Phase A, whenever this is. In the meantime steps can and will be taken to strengthen the coordination linkages between the NPO and PPO.