

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

Title: An Organisational Assessment of IUCN Lao PDR: March 2001

Evaluation team: Asia Regional Office (ARO) - internal

Mandate of the organizational unit: Represent IUCN in Lao PDR and manage the IUCN Lao PDR Programme

IUCN area of specialisation: Country Programme

Geographical area: Lao PDR

Established: 1992

Overall budget: US\$ 270,000

Donor(s): The Royal Netherlands Government, DANIDA

Objectives of the evaluation: To support IUCN-Lao PDR in developing its organisational efficiency, effectiveness and capacity to meet the emerging demands of the 2001-2004 planning period.

Type of evaluation: Organisational Assessment

Period covered by the evaluation: 2001-2004

Commissioned by: Regional Director IUCN Asia and CR *a.i.* IUCN Lao PDR

Audience: RD, CR *a.i.* and staff of IUCN Lao PDR, ARD

Methodology used:

1. Preparation
 - a) Identification of key issues with:-
 - RD, CR *a.i.*, Director F/HR, ARO,
 - SP (former CR *a.i.*)
 - Regional Heads familiar with IUCN-Lao PDR
 - b) Reading
Background
 - Organisational Assessment & Development - The Way Ahead - March 2000 - *Universalis* Report
 - Draft IUCN Evaluation Policy: For review by Senior Management and the IUCN Council - January 2001
 - Delegation of Authority
 - c) Preliminary data collection
 - IUCN-Lao PDR Progress Reports to ARD from 1999 to date
 - Programme Planning Strategy for IUCN-Lao PDR 24.02.01
 - Briefing notes from SP to DG -- February 2001
 - Summary of current status of IUCN-Lao PDR -- February 2001 -- Scott Perkin
 - Matrix for Organisational Review of IUCN-Lao PDR -- February 2001 -- Scott Perkin
2. On-task in IUCN-Lao PDR (20-31 March 2001)
 - a) Introductory staff meeting
 - Brief presentation of IUCN-Lao PDR Programme (IUCN Lao PDR staff)
 - The Asia Region (SJ)
 - Context and purpose of the Organisational Scoping and Assessment
 - b) Semi-structured interviews of each member of staff
 - c) Data collection from
 - Price Waterhouse Draft Audit Report 1999 Section 4: Salary
 - Various correspondence between IUCN-Lao PDR and Region re organisational issues
 - Opening a Bank Account for Local Office, Staff Health Costs 15.9.98: Memo from CR to FO
 - Staff contracts including TORs
 - d) Follow-up interviews to gather further information, clarification of issues, some on request from staff members, to enhance individual understanding and capacity

- e) Meetings with CR *a.i.*(almost daily)
 - f) Telephone consultation with Director Finance/HR, ARO
 - g) Initial analysis of issues/findings
 - h) Debriefing at staff meeting
3. Post-visit
- a) Detailed analysis of information/issues - shaping of recommendations - report drafted
 - b) Draft report sent to RD, CR, Director F/HR, ARO
 - c) Comments assessed, accepted, negotiated, rejected
 - d) Report finalised

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

- a) organisational structure?
- b) systems, proceedings, mechanisms?
- c) management practices? and
- d) personnel issues general/individual, what present and future capacities are needed to manage the new programme and new ways of working?

Findings:

1. Overall Assessment

Due to the uniqueness of its geo-political context and other factors, the IUCN Lao PDR Country Office remained somewhat isolated from the mainstream, developing management strategies which impacted negatively on its organisation development. The rationale for a more coherent approach to organisational development across the Asia Region and the need to integrate IUCN Lao's organisational systems into Regional and Global systems was poorly understood. The opportunities opened up by the 'Programming Strategy for IUCN Lao PDR', the gradual introduction of a more participatory style of management and the mentorship provided, have opened up a new era and experiences for IUCN Lao PDR and its staff.

2. Programme Planning/Development, Coordination and Quality Control

Management

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

Quality Control

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

Programme Coordination and Integration

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

3. Information Sharing and Storage

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

4. Financial Management

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

5. Human Resource Management

The human resource function has remained invested in the CR, assisted mainly by finance and

6. Administrative Services

Management

Historically, the management of administration has been spread amongst the CR, finance/ programme staff and the receptionist rather. There has been no dedicated unit or staff dedicated to

- bring greater all round efficiency to operations
- free up the time of the CR to concentrate on crucial areas of his responsibilities for representation, leadership in programme development, resource mobilisation and organisational development programme staff to concentrate on programme development; finance staff to meet the growing demands
- strengthen accountability within IUCN Lao PDR
- facilitate the interface of IUCN Lao PDR with regional and global systems
- enhance IUCN Lao PDR's ability to set up future projects smoothly and efficiently.

IT Support

Lao PDR was a late-comer in the use of IT. The commercial provision of services and technical support is in its infancy. IUCN Lao PDR has mainly had to rely on two non-national programme staff, (competent computer users who make no claims to technical expertise), who have struggled to keep the services going. Due to their own commitments and lack of resources for travel, IT experts from other Country Offices have not been able to give the level of support needed.

7. Management Structures

Until recently, IUCN Lao PDR had the characteristics of a 'family' - the CR, to whom everyone reported, being the only source of decision making. Formal systems and procedures were missing. This way of managing was completely, unquestionably acceptable to the majority of staff, particularly as they have had little exposure to other management structures and styles. Due to their exposure to new ways of working and to the increase in workload, staff are beginning to realise that the old ways of working are no longer possible. The roles, responsibilities and authority levels of staff members are gradually being defined in an iterative fashion. In varying degrees staff are becoming increasingly receptive to the need for change.

As the process of programme development is still under way and due to the staff's previous experience, it was difficult to engage in a meaningful discussion on structuring for the future.

8. IUCN Lao PDR and the wider world

Historically, the CR has been the contact point for communicating with the outside world. Staff have been unsure as to whether they are authorised to make contact and do not know what is available.

The strengthening of relationships with the Government of Lao PDR (with varying degrees of caution and excitement) is seen as opening up new opportunities.

The sharing of the Programme Development Plan with the government came as a surprise to some staff members but was seen as a valuable step for building government's confidence in IUCN.

Interaction with the few NGO IUCN members and other NGOs has been limited.

The word 'conservation' is seen by many in Lao PDR as equivalent to 'protection' and antithetical to development. IUCN should give out strong, clear messages on conservation and sustainable development.

9. Recruitment of a National CR

The staff were very clear that their top criteria for a new CR would be management skills.

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

Recommendations:

2. Programme Planning/Development, Coordination and Quality Control

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

3. The potential productivity of programme staff working together and supporting each other with their varied knowledge and skills should continued to be supported and enhanced.
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29. The Director Finance and the Internal Audit Asia Region should support IUCN Lao PDR in developing a higher level of capacity for long term financial management.

5. Human Resource Management

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

52. A major restructuring should be done when the programme development phase is over, and