

# Evaluation Summary

## ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION THROUGH INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT IN LAO PDR

Country: **Lao People's Democratic Republic** | Sector: **Biodiversity sustainable management**

Evaluator: **Oréade-Brèche**

Date of the evaluation: **August 2023**

### Key data on AFD's support

**Projet numbers:** AFD CLA 1111 02 Z

**Amount:** € 6.8 Million including € 5,3 Million from the EU.

**Disbursement rate:** 54%

**Signature of financing agreement:** July 17, 2020

**Completion date:** June 2024

**Total duration:** 48 months

### Context

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)** signed the financing agreement « AFD CLA 1111 02 Z » as beneficiary of the grant entitled « Ecosystem Conservation through Integrated Landscape Management in Lao PDR » (ECILL) with the objective of **ensuring the security of Lao PDR forests and biodiversity and assist rural poor people in sustainably managing their natural resources.**

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the French consulting firm **Oréade-Brèche** was awarded the contract for leading of the project mid-term review. The key objectives of the evaluation relied on (1) **Assessing the results of the project** against the criteria as « relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impacts, and foreseen sustainability, », (2) **Providing conclusions and recommendations for the successful completion** of the project activities and for a potential extension of its duration. In this purpose, a **10-days field mission** was carried out in Nam Kading protected area and Xe Champhone, while WCS field staff based in Nam Et Phou Louey and Phou Si Thone sites were interviewed.

### Actors and operating method

This project is managed, implemented and coordinated by a Project Management Team built by WCS under AFD supervision. The Project Management office is based in Vientiane. **EU and AFD** are the **donors**.

The project is overseen by a **steering committee (SC)** in charge of the monitoring, evaluation, and guidance of the activities. The SC includes representatives from EU, AFD, WCS, national and provincial governmental agencies such as Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MONRE).



### Objectives

#### Expected outputs

Four **main outputs** are expected from the project, namely:

- Result 1: **Improved integrated protected areas management** at site level, and broader system-wide improvements in management effectiveness are achieved with **over 740 000 hectares of high biodiversity** habitat including forest, wetlands protected.
- Result 2: **Established or expanded conservation enterprises that are climate-smart**, linked to conservation outcomes and deliver economic benefits for communities, including community-based tourism and environment-friendly sustainable agriculture..
- Result 3: Demonstrated **improved green growth business practices and improved relevant policies** by leveraging the examples of leading companies committed to net zero deforestation supply chains as well as no net loss of biodiversity..
- Result 4: **Government agencies have enhanced understanding of approaches to sustainable protected area management** that engage local communities and the private sector, thereby influencing subnational planning and national policy.

## Performance assessment

### **Relevance: A project relevant to the regulation and stakeholders' needs**

The relevance of the project goals and activities were hugely confirmed over the analysis and consultations carried out. The project activities including conservation and development are relevant to the biodiversity threats. They also meet the needs of the project stakeholders and the specificities of women and young people. However, the contributions of the ECILL project to structured value chains remain weak as the production of goods and services are not well established yet.

### **Coherence: An internal coherence that may have been stronger from scratch and an external coherence to improve with similar projects**

The project is coherent with (1) national and provincial regulations and strategies, and (2) other donors' interventions or projects but a higher level of collaboration with the multi-country Hotspot II project, COMBO+, ICBF projects, REDD+ projects and program is recommended for sharing experiences and avoiding overlaps.

The ECILL theory of change is consistent, but it was not developed for every site and it does not mention the critical role played by the local communities. The logical framework poorly reflects the actual objectives of the project. The coherence between the budgets' activities and their respective high ambitions is arguable.

### **Effectiveness: An effectiveness that does not meet the initial plan**

Fewer results than expected were achieved. However significant and inspiring progress were realized. In component 1, the main results achieved were:

- An innovative model of natural resources management, empowering communities
- Patrolling in the Guardian Villages (GV) having Community Conservation Agreement (CCA);
- Effective monitoring of natural resources done in all the sites;
- Significant outreach campaigns with the know-how to duplicate them;

In component 2 and 3, the main results achieved were:

- Development of livelihoods in all GV thanks to the Village Initiative Fund mechanism;
- Examples of business development, (coffee and possibly ecotourism)

In component 4, most of the expected results by the end of the project were already achieved, including support to policy dialogue, capacity building. The only activity remaining was the setting up of the roadmap and strategy on sustainable financing of PA.

### **Efficiency: An efficiency affected by the Covid 19, the time required for the development of innovative tools while the project' objectives were incredibly ambitious**

The implementation of the activities belonging to SO1, SO2/SO3 was longer than expected. This situation was mainly the consequence of the time required for developing and trying out the GV tools as well as the development of livelihoods, in a context of Covid 19 pandemic. The efficiency of the project was also impacted (i) by a significant number of studies, (ii) the location of the field offices distant from the intervention areas, (iii) the lost of information due to a turnover in the staff and (iv) even more by the size of the area of intervention, highly ambitious.

In spite of collecting an impressive amount of dataset, the current monitoring system turned out to be scattered, with a weak use of the data analysis for making decisions.

### **Impact and sustainability : The long-term impact and sustainability of the project activities not granted**

The sustainability of project is expected to be eased by (i) a shared understanding of the concerns and successful appropriation of the project and activities by stakeholders, (ii) successful capacity building sessions, (iii) the empowerment of the communities (through PLUP, CCA, CAP), (iv) wildlife monitoring by the local communities. However (i) the massive ongoing deforestation, (ii) the weak law enforcement by the local authorities, (iii) the lack of sustainable livelihoods activities, (iv) the very recent implementation of the GV model and (v) the lack of clear and transparent mechanism to collect and manage the money dedicated to PA operations raise concerns on the long-term impacts of the ECILL project.

### **Added value of AFD's contribution**

The main added value was the availability of funds as public authorities in Lao PDR suffer from a significant shortage in means. Hence, having a project that could (i) support huge changes in the regulation of PAs and wetlands, (ii) support the implementation at a significant scale of the GV principle, (iii) ensure PA patrolling are already a significant added value.

## Conclusions and lessons learnt

Based on (i) the fact that the project set up all the basis to implement properly most of the activities during an extension phase, and (ii) the project is on the right track, the **evaluators are in favor of a "no cost extension" until June 2025.**

This extension is expected to (1) Achieve the expected results by the new program closing date, (2) Develop partnership to effectively implement the project activities, (3) Increase knowledge sharing as many lessons have been learnt. Based on additional outcomes from the current project implementation, a potential phase 2 of the ECILL project may be addressed at a later stage.

The main lessons learnt are :

- Setting up a new process such as GV in a context where only public authorities had the duty and the power to manage PAs, takes more time than expected.
- Surveillance remains the main pillar of all PA support, hence monitoring its effectiveness is essential.
- Local communities' empowerment through livelihoods and economic developments also take time, meaning that these activities have to start at the very beginning of any project.
- Monitoring must inform the project management.
- Technical working groups among various public departments can provide good outcomes and can improve its sustainability.
- Policy dialogue can significantly benefit from NGOs well introduced with public authorities.