

Projects come, projects go: lessons from participatory monitoring in southern Laos

MICHAEL KØIE POULSEN^{1,*} and KHAMPHAY LUANGLATH²

1 NORDECO (Nordic Agency for Development and Ecology), Skindergade 23, DK-1159 Copenhagen K, Denmark;

2 Provincial Agricultural and Forestry Services, That Luang Colony, Pakse, Lao P.D.R.;

**Author for correspondence (e-mail: mkp@nordeco.dk; fax: +45-33919032)*

Abstract. This paper examines how a biodiversity monitoring system based on data collected by protected area staff and local communities was established and maintained in Xe Pian national protected area, Laos. Monitoring activities commenced with project support in 1998. Protected area staff, district forestry staff and villagers continued the monitoring work after 2001 when the external advisers left. More than 2500 records of wildlife, natural resource use and threats to the protected area were collected by villagers and protected area staff, mainly through use of patrols, village discussions and village logbooks. The management interventions that followed the monitoring activities were a reaction to immediate threats or perceived trends in biodiversity rather than to trends revealed by analyses of the collected data. Patrols and village discussions came to a virtual standstill when external funding ceased, probably because of lack of supporting national policies. The annual running cost of the monitoring system was only about US\$ 4000 or 0.02 per ha of forest habitat.

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