

CEPF Final Project Completion Report

Instructions to grantees: please complete all fields, and respond to all questions, below.

Organization Legal Name	FISHBIO Laos
Project Title	Establishing multi-community co-management of an aquatic biodiversity hotspot with <i>Probarbus</i> fishes and soft-shell turtles, in the Mekong River at Keng Mai rapids, Lao PDR
CEPF GEM No.	77636-000 / CEPF-036
Date of Report	30 September 2016

CEPF Hotspot: Indo-Burma Hotspot

Strategic Direction: Strategic Direction 4: Empower local communities to engage in conservation and management of priority key biodiversity areas

Grant Amount: \$20,000

Project Dates: 1 May 2015 – 31 August 2016

1. Implementation Partners for this Project (*list each partner and explain how they were involved in the project*)

District Agriculture and Forestry (DAFO) staff from Sanakham District, Vientiane Province, and Kenthao District, Xayaboury Province served as implementation partners by joining all project workshops and events. They helped facilitate community meetings, discussed problem resolution with communities related to Fish Conservation Zone (FCZ) regulations, and completed regular check-ins with village FCZ enforcement teams as part of FCZ co-management.

Community members in the four project villages of Ban Palath and Ban Donsok in Vientiane Province, and Ban Houayla and Ban Donmen in Xayaboury Province, actively participated in all stages of the project to establish and enforce the project FCZ. Community members decided on FCZ regulations, installed FCZ signs, and patrolled the FCZ in enforcement teams.

Conservation Impacts

2. Describe how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF investment strategy set out in the ecosystem profile

This project focused on two CEPF priority species, *Probarbus jullieni* and *Probarbus labeamajor*, and relates to Strategic Direction 4 of the Indo-Burma Ecosystem Profile: "Empower local communities to engage in conservation and management of priority key biodiversity areas." The established Fish Conservation Zone (FCZ) is located in Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) LAO15, the stretch of the Mekong River between Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Specifically, the project addressed investment priority 4.2 (Pilot and amplify community forests, community fisheries, and community-managed protected areas), and investment priority 4.3 (Develop co-management mechanisms for formal protected areas that enable community participation in all levels of management). Community members actively participated in every step of the FCZ design and planning process, and currently oversee the management of this protected area with government support.

As both species of *Probarbus* are endangered, this project is also directly linked to investment priority 1.2 (Develop best-practice approaches for conservation of highly threatened and endemic freshwater species). The project aimed to protect reproducing fishes through the creation of a protected area that encompasses critical *Probarbus* spawning habitat. Because the protected area is closed to all fishing year round, other fish species will undoubtedly benefit from the FCZ as well. The project may also provide benefits to Asiatic soft-shell turtles (*Amyda cartilaginea*), a CEPF priority species that villagers have reported living in the project area.

3. Summarize the overall results/impact of your project

This project resulted in the establishment of a community-based, co-managed FCZ to protect endangered *Probarbus* fishes in northern Lao PDR on the mainstem Mekong River in Xayabour and Vientiane provinces. A co-management framework was developed whereby four villages share responsibility for enforcing and managing the FCZ with support from local government authorities. As part of the FCZ establishment process, FCZ regulations were approved at the provincial, district, and village levels; informational signs were installed at the FCZ and all project villages; FCZ management committees were established in all villages; enforcement teams were appointed and trained in all villages; and regular patrolling of the FCZ took place during the 2015-2016 *Probarbus* spawning season. These activities all served to strengthen sustainable fisheries management in the project area and increase public understanding of fisheries conservation and the national aquatic law. A participatory approach enabled local community groups to take part in the design, implementation, and management of the FCZs. This resulted in communities developing an increased feeling of pride for protecting their local natural resources, and a sense of authority to enforce FCZ regulations to prevent destructive fishing practices in their village areas.

Planned Goal (as stated in the approved proposal)

Declines of threatened *Probarbus* fish species in Lao PDR are halted, as a result of implementing community-based models of aquatic resources management at a priority biodiversity site in Xayabour and Vientiane Provinces.

4. Actual progress toward Goal at completion

A community-based model of aquatic resources management was successfully implemented at a priority biodiversity site in Xayabour and Vientiane Provinces. Villagers did report seeing an increase in juvenile *Probarbus* fishes outside the FCZ following the *Probarbus* spawning season. However, long-term fisheries monitoring would be required to assess whether the *Probarbus* population is actually increasing.

Planned Objectives (as stated in the approved proposal)

List each Objective from the proposal

Objective 1: Fish Conservation Zone (FCZ) is formally approved by local communities and government authorities

Objective 2: FCZ regulations are fully understood by District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) officials.

Objective 3: FCZs are clearly designated.

Objective 4: FCZ regulations are fully understood by the inhabitants of 4 villages

Objective 5: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (with regard to aquatic resource use) of populations of target villages are fully understood.

Objective 6: Enforcement teams in 4 villages have the skills necessary to patrol the FCZ and enforce FCZ regulations.

Objective 7: Assess effectiveness of local management and enforcement to support the sustainability of the FCZ after project completion

5. Actual progress toward Objectives at completion

All objectives were satisfactorily met at the time of project completion, and are described in terms of activities and deliverables in questions 8 and below. Fish Conservation Zones were formerly approved by the local communities and District Agriculture and Forestry Office officials (see regulations submitted in supporting documents); FCZ signs were erected to designate the FCZ; repeated outreach was conducted with project villages to raise awareness and understanding about FCZ regulations; KAP surveys were conducted to assess local knowledge, attitudes and practices, and are summarized in a final report; enforcement teams were trained and assessed; and discussion about sustaining the FCZ were held with local communities.

6. Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its goal and objectives

The project successfully built on the experiences working with communities in northern Laos through previous projects funded by CEPF. The major strength and success of this project was receiving strong endorsement and project support from the local communities. Local people repeatedly expressed that they want the FCZs in their communities because they recognize the benefits these protected areas can provide now and in the future. After several months of meetings, patrolling, and community outreach, community members in the three project villages are now very familiar with the FCZ regulations and the aquatic resources law. Challenges remain in educating people from outside communities that come to these areas to fish; however, continued community monitoring around the FCZs will serve to reinforce the regulations for outsiders. Having a legal framework for community co-management of FCZs included in the national fisheries law is an important component for government support and project success. Within this legal framework, the project communities now have an increased governance capacity to manage their local natural resources. The villagers report that incidences of dynamite fishing in the area have declined since the implementation of the Fish Conservation Zone. The location of the FCZs on the border between two provinces also required extensive coordination between two provincial and district governments, as well as coordination at the local level to share enforcement responsibilities among multiple villages. Ultimately, project staff were able to address these challenges for successful project implementation.

7. Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

N/A

8 and 9: Project Activities and Deliverables

Objective 1 (as stated in the approved proposal)

List each activity and deliverable from the proposal

Describe the activities implemented and deliverables met under Objective 1 Repeat point 8 above for each Objective in your approved proposal

Objective 1: Fish Conservation Zone (FCZ) is formally approved by local communities and government authorities

- Refresher meetings were held in four project villages from June 24-30, 2015, and villagers reaffirmed their interest in FCZ establishment. FCZ regulations were approved in all villages (see signed regulations).
- A brief social assessment and baseline KAP surveys were conducted in all project villages in October 2015 (see KAP survey report).

- Meetings were held with Xayabouri and Vientiane Provincial Agricultural and Forestry Office (PAFO) representatives in order to receive approval of FCZ regulations on July 21, 2015, in Kenthao District (Xayabouri Province) and August 17, 2015, in Sanakham District (Vientiane Province).

Objective 2: FCZ regulations are fully understood by District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) officials.

- A district-level workshop was held to announce and publicize FCZ regulations to DAFO officials in Kenthao and Sanakham Districts.

Objective 3: FCZs are clearly designated

- FCZ signs were designed and constructed based on the approved FCZ regulations. A total of 12 signs were installed, three in each village.

Objective 4: FCZ regulations are fully understood by the inhabitants of 4 villages.

- Ground-breaking ceremonies and meetings were held to disseminate FCZ regulations in 4 villages from Nov 19-21 and Nov. 27-29, 2015.
- Enforcement team members were tasked with educating fishermen on the river about the FCZ regulations.

Objective 5: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (with regard to aquatic resource use) of populations of target villages are fully understood.

- Knowledge Attitudes and Practice (KAP) surveys were conducted in four villages at three points during the project: before FCZ establishment (October 2015), two months after FCZ establishment (February 2016), and at the project handover workshop seven months after FCZ establishment (June 2016).
- Results of the KAP Surveys are summarized in the KAP Survey Final Report.

Objective 6: Enforcement teams in 4 villages have the skills necessary to patrol the FCZ and enforce FCZ regulations.

- A training workshop for enforcement teams from all 4 villages was held in Ban Palath on December 10, 2015.
- District-level law enforcement helped monitor village enforcement team activity throughout the Probarbus spawning season (January-March 2016).

Objective 7: Assess effectiveness of local management and enforcement to support the sustainability of the FCZ after project completion.

- A transition workshop, accompanied by a Buddhist ceremony and fish releasing, was held on June 19, 2016 to handover project management to all local communities. Discussions were held regarding enforcement activities and how to support FCZ sustainability.

10. If you did not complete any activity or deliverable, how did this affect the overall impact of the project?

N/A

11. Please describe and submit any tools, products, or methodologies that resulted from this project or contributed to the results

1. Four sets of FCZ regulations were approved by village, district, and provincial authorities.
2. Signboards showing the approved FCZ regulations, an FCZ map, and a list of banned fishing gear were designed and installed in all project villages.

3. The results of three Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices surveys are summarized in a final report.
4. Photos of the project can be found at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fish-bio/sets/72157656335023879/>
5. The following blog stories about the project were published on the FISHBIO website:
 - Fish Conservation Zones: How to Save Your Fish and Eat Them Too <http://fishbio.com/field-notes/the-fish-report/fish-conservation-zones-how-to-save-your-fish-and-eat-them-too>
 - Protecting Kengmai Rapids: <http://fishbio.com/field-notes/mekong-basin/protecting-kengmai-rapids>
 - Making it Official: <http://fishbio.com/field-notes/mekong-basin/making-it-official>
 - Kengmai Check-In: <http://fishbio.com/field-notes/mekong-basin/kengmai-check-in>
 - A Fish Conservation Zone Blessing: <http://fishbio.com/field-notes/mekong-basin/fish-conservation-zone-blessing>

Benefits to Communities

12. Please describe the communities that have benefited from CEPF support

*Please report on the size and characteristics of communities and the benefits that they have received, as a result of CEPF investment. Please provide information for all communities that have benefited **from project start to project completion**.*

Community Name	Community Characteristics							Nature of Socioeconomic Benefit												
	Subsistence economy	Small landowners	Indigenous/ ethnic peoples	Pastoralists / nomadic peoples	Recent migrants	Urban communities	Other*	Size of Community				Increased access to clean water	Increased food security	Increased access to energy	Increased access to public services (e.g. health care, education)	Increased resilience to climate change	Improved land tenure	Improved recognition of traditional knowledge	Improved representation and decision-making in governance forums/structures	Improved access to ecosystem services
								50-250 people	251-500 people	501-1,000 people	Over 1,001 people									
Donmen	X	X									1,119								X	
Hoayla	X	X							371										X	
Donsok	X	X							329										X	
Palath	X	X								750									X	

*If you marked "Other" to describe the community characteristic, please explain:

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Lessons Learned

13. Describe any lessons learned related to organizational development and capacity building.

Three new FISHBIO staff were hired during the course of the project, and gained capacity in coordinating community fisheries management and conservation projects. In particular, they developed capacity related to conducting KAP survey interviews. We realized after reviewing our results that more improvement is required in this area, such as asking follow-up questions in the field to understand why villagers provided certain answers. FISHBIO improved on our experiences conducting and analyzing KAP surveys that we developed in our previous CEPF-funded project on establishing FCZs for *Probarbus* fishes in northern Lao PDR.

14. Describe any lessons learned related to project Design Process (*aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings*)

Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the success of this project was that fact that it represented a continuation of a multi-phase conservation effort carried out over several years (all funded by CEPF). The foundation and continuity established with the project communities over repeated visits served to bolster local support and understanding of the project goals. This was crucial because the FCZ co-management and enforcement process is participatory and community driven. Starting with initial biodiversity surveys lead by IUCN, followed by community consultations lead by IUCN with FISHBIO participation, and completed with the current FISHBIO-lead phase of FCZ establishment, community members got to know project staff and develop a strong understanding and desire for the benefits of FCZs.

All of the communities requested more funding for enforcement activities, indicating the stipends we had initially proposed may not be sufficient. People in the less populated villages said that the enforcement duties are a bigger burden on their community members, since there are fewer of them to participate in the process. The FCZ is also several kilometers away from some of the villages, which makes patrolling more difficult and expensive (the villagers reported using 5-6 L of fuel per trip to the FCZ). There may be ways to redistribute enforcement patrolling duties and resources to ease the burden on some of the smaller or more distant villages. The FCZ itself is also very large compared to other FCZs in Laos (5 km in length). While this likely increases its benefit to fish, it poses challenges for patrolling, especially in the rainy season. One solution might be dividing the FCZ into upstream and downstream sections, and having villages at either end of the FCZ be responsible for patrolling their relevant sections. The villagers noted some communication challenges among the villages related to coordinating the rotating schedule of enforcement teams. This is an area that may require more support in future projects.

15. Describe any lesson learned related to project Implementation (*aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/shortcomings*)

Working with government and communities to agree to the same regulations was not easy to do, especially since it had been two years since FISHBIO and IUCN staff had discussed FCZ regulations with the communities. Our first step was to gather information and establish basic regulations agreement among the four villages. This kind of refresher was not needed in our previous CEPF-funded project, but proved very helpful in the current project. The District Governors showed very strong support for this conservation project, and the project helped build the conservation capacity of some local government officials in addition community members. KAP surveys indicated a general improvement in villager relations and perception of local government authorities, but suggest that more government relationship building may be particularly important in smaller villages. Following up on community monitoring activities is an important element that we could improve in the future. Holding a Buddhist blessing ceremony and fish releasing at the FCZ helped connect this conservation project with the cultural and religious practices of the local communities.

16. Describe any other lessons learned relevant to the conservation community

N/A

Sustainability / Replication

17. Summarize the success or challenges in ensuring the project will be sustained or replicated

The project helped build community ownership and solidarity for local conservation, which increases their likelihood of sustaining the project. However, additional funding is needed for fuel, equipment, and enforcement team salaries. The communities have proposed opening up a portion of the FCZ one day a year for a community fishing fundraiser that would raise money to support the FCZ. FISHBIO hopes to secure funding to help the communities navigate the FCZ regulation amendment process and organize this fundraiser to help ensure the sustainability of the project. FISHBIO also hopes to organize a study tour for staff from Fauna and Flora International in Myanmar to visit the Kengmai project site so that FFI may replicate this project approach with villages in the upper Ayerwaddy Basin as part of their own CEPF-funded project.

18. Summarize any unplanned activities that are likely to result in increased sustainability or replicability

N/A

Safeguards

19. If not listed as a separate Project Component and described above, summarize the implementation of any required action related to social and environmental safeguards that your project may have triggered

FISHBIO made every effort to ensure that the establishment of these FCZs was a voluntary and participatory process. Communities were provided with project staff contact information for airing any grievances during the project, and opportunities for sharing feedback and concerns were provided during community meetings. Background surveys with project villages revealed that all of the people engaged in fishing are considered part-time fishers, with other sources of livelihood. As the FCZ only restricts a portion of the fishing areas, it is not considered to have a strong negative impacts on livelihoods, as there are other fishing locations available in the river.

Three Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) surveys were conducted throughout the project, and are summarized in the attached KAP survey report. In general, concerns about negative impacts of the FCZ appear quite low across all villages. The few concerns that were expressed about increased difficulties in catching fish may be related to general fisheries declines, which is something the FCZ may help to alleviate in the long term. The FCZ does not appear to have negatively impacted fishing practices or food consumption with its first seven months of establishment, and community support for the FCZ remains high at the end of the project. Support for the FCZ largely stems from a desire to protect fishes to improve current fishing catches, and provide for future generations. Respondents also felt it was generally important to protect fish spawning and refuge areas.

Additional Funding

Provide details of any additional funding that supported this project and any funding secured for the project, organization, or the region, as a result of CEPF investment

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
FISHBIO	Co-Financing	\$20,000	Funds were used to pay for staff salaries and operating expenses not covered by the project grant.

* Categorize the type of funding as:

A Project Co-Financing (other donors or your organization contribute to the direct costs of this project)

B Grantee and Partner Leveraging (other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF funded project)

C Regional/Portfolio Leveraging (other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project)

Additional Comments/Recommendations

Use this space to provide any further comments or recommendations in relation to your project or CEPF

N/A

Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

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