

RAISING THE STANDARD

The Use of Competence-Based Occupational Standards for Conservation Staff

► By MIKE APPLETON

Introduction to Occupational Standards

Occupational standards have long been used in many areas of work and are now becoming more widespread in the field of conservation and protected area management. An occupational standard can be described as:

'...a definition, usually developed and accepted by industry, of the knowledge and competencies required to successfully perform work-related functions within an occupation' (Alliance of Sector Councils, 2001)

Of course, employers have always set standards through the use of job descriptions and specified duties, while trainers and training institutions have set standards through the use of examinations and 'outcome' statements linked to training courses. However, the development of occupational standards has shifted the emphasis from qualifications and attendance at training courses as indicators of competence to actual performance in the workplace. It has also shifted the focus for determining what constitutes competence from trainers and training institutions to employers and broad based occupational sectors.

In some occupations, particularly where our welfare depends on the competence of individuals, this approach is nothing new. We expect doctors to be competent and their basic skills, knowledge and understanding will be similar wher-



Photo by Mike Appleton/FFI

Participants in training courses can help to improve standards. Biological survey trainees at Leuser National Park in Indonesia evaluating their course.

ever we are. The basic skills for a doctor are not normally defined by a particular lecturer, hospital or university, but by a national, or even international agency. Similarly specialists in car mechanics should have consistent skills, defined and taught by the particular car manufacturer. There are, of course, some bad doctors and poor car mechanics, but people often deal with this problem by assessing not just qualifications but also competence. We do this by asking friends and colleagues to recommend a doctor or mechanic whom they know to be good at his or her job.

Although the idea of an occupational standard is readily understood, describing what an occupational standard should consist of is more challenging. According to the company Integrated Business Compliance (2001), a standard will normally include:

- What a person should be able to do.
- The way in which one can judge how well a job was done.
- The conditions under which the person must demonstrate his or her competence.
- The types of evidence necessary to assure that what was done was carried out in a consistent manner, based on effective knowledge.

Potential Benefits of Occupational Standards in the Conservation and Biodiversity Sectors

If it is natural for us to expect doctors and mechanics to have universal standards of competence, irrespective of where they studied and whom they work for, should we not also expect those who care for unique and irreplaceable species

and ecosystems to have such standards? The conservation sector is relatively young. There are still few technical or vocational qualifications available in conservation and ecosystem management. As well as helping to ensure that the staff are truly competent at their jobs, the use of occupational standards in conservation would provide a much wider set of benefits.

Recognising a profession

‘Protected Area Managers’ or ‘Conservation Technicians’ are still not widely accepted professions in much of the world. Staff in these positions often come from a wide range of backgrounds and frequently these jobs are stepping stones in a civil service career. Since this type of work has no clear professional structure, it is often not recognised seriously by policy and decision makers and frequently does not attract high calibre new recruits. A sector that develops and promotes occupational standards gives a clear message that it is concerned with competence and expects its workers to be professional and effective.

Assisting training providers and beneficiaries

A set of common standards could provide a basis for the design and delivery of education and training programmes for biodiversity conservation, and ensure that providers work according to common standards and help trainees to assess the scope of courses offered to them. This does not mean that all training courses or curricula should be the same, but that they should lead to common standards. A recognised set of standards would also help employers to judge the suitability of applicants for jobs.

Recognising different modes of learning

Implicit in the use of occupational standards is the recognition that people can become competent at

their work in many different ways, shifting the emphasis away from just paper qualifications. The skills and knowledge of conservation staff who lack formal training opportunities, may be recognised through a variety of routes:

- **Academic Qualifications:** A relevant academic qualification helps to provide all or some of the knowledge needed to do a job, but often not in specific occupational skills. Many jobs require multi-disciplinary skills that no single qualification can easily deliver.
- **Vocational Training:** Training is probably the most widely recognised means for improving skills and increasing knowledge and has been defined as ‘a systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitudes required for an individual to perform adequately a given task or job’ (Stone, 1997).
- **Learning on the Job:** Many people improve their skills and competence by learning from experience and from colleagues.
- **Self-learning:** Committed and professional staff take an interest in their job and are likely to read relevant books, follow news stories and discuss topics of interest with friends and work colleagues

Recognising changing demand

The modern world of mobile labour forces and rapid rates of change makes it difficult for qualifications to keep up with the demands of the workplace. As Dr. N. Ishwaran, Senior Programme Specialist for the UNESCO World Heritage Centre stated in 1999: ‘The (Protected Area) manager needs new knowledge and skills to communicate, negotiate and resolve conflicts and to establish agreements and cooperative mechanisms for implementing Integrated Conservation and Development Projects, quite differ-

ent from the knowledge and skill-set he had acquired for policing protected areas, restricting resource use by local people and studying the unique fauna and flora found within the boundaries of the protected area’.

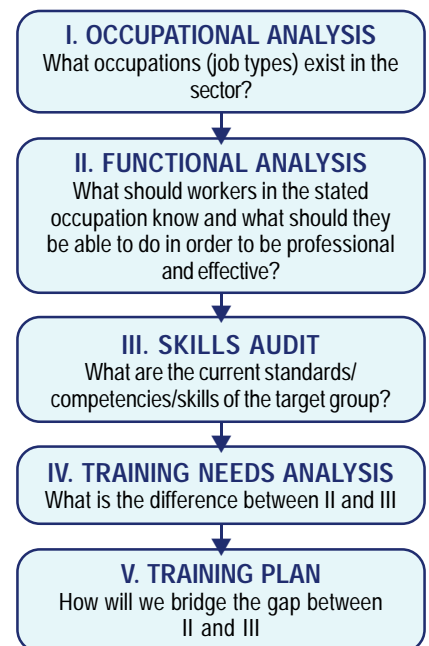
Whereas 20 years ago a higher degree in biology or forestry may have equipped a protected area manager with many of the skills and knowledge needed for the job, currently such a qualification is likely only to cover a small part of the demands of the job. Occupational standards should assist employers in planning and implementing continuing professional development programmes for staff.

Enabling transferability of and regional recognition of skills and courses

Common standards help to ensure that qualifications are ‘portable’, that is equally relevant in different areas. This helps potential staff find jobs and provide a common ‘language’ of competence, thus promoting better communication and international recognition of skills

Helping to analyse training and development needs

There are normally 5 stages of a typical Training Needs Analysis process



Once a set of standards and competences is in place, the identification of training needs and the design of training courses, materials and activities become much more logical and objective. In addition, common standards help to collect and collate training needs information, nationally and internationally, enabling the efficient targeting of resources and the provision of training tools and programmes.

To reflect the real needs for a particular occupation, occupational standards are normally defined and agreed upon with extensive inputs from industry and employers rather than by training providers alone.

Examples of the use of Occupational Standards in Biodiversity Conservation

Standard setting is not new in conservation. It has evolved from outcome-based training courses through the development of national occupational job descriptions and training syllabi, and through the development of national and even international competence-based standards. It is worth looking at some examples of this evolution.

Standards in terms of defined occupational duties

Most protected areas authorities have defined the main duties of their staff. The NIPAS Act in the Philippines, for example, defines a clear set of occupational duties and responsibilities for protected area superintendents (DENR 1992). These include such responsibilities as:

- Establish a productive partnership with the local community, including groups, in the planning, protection and management of the protected area.
- Assure the proper utilization of annual budget allocations and the proper disposition of fees and other funds generated within the protected area.
- Develop and implement a park information, education

Table 1. Competences identified by forest guards in Nepal (Dearden, 1999)

By the end of the programme, the trainees will be able to

1. Explain past and present ...forest policies
2. State the tasks and duties of Forest Guards in both community and national forestry
3. Explain the importance of national forestry
4. Explain the importance of community forestry
5. Explain the role of people in community forestry
6. Explain the process of identification and organisation of user groups
7. Explain the importance of forest operation plans
8. Explain the importance of monitoring forest operation plans
9. Apply the techniques of effective extension
10. Perform basic survey techniques
11. Perform basic mensuration techniques
12. Construct, maintain and operate a forest nursery
13. Perform basic silvicultural techniques
14. Explain the techniques of plantation establishment and management
15. Identify the causes of forest degradation
16. Identify forest offences
17. Explain the ways and means of checking forest offences
18. Apply the procedures of reporting forest offences and other development activities
19. Apply fire control measures
20. Perform basic harvesting techniques
21. State the ways and means of minimising fuel wood consumption
22. Apply basic soil and water conservation techniques
23. Explain the importance of wildlife conservation
24. Apply basic principles of first aid

and visitor programme.

- Act as a peace officer for the purpose of maintaining peace and order within the protected area.

This type of job specification is useful, but it describes what the employee should do, rather than what skills and knowledge they need to be able to work efficiently and effectively.

Standards in individual training courses

It has long been good practice for the design of training courses to include clear outcome statements along the lines of '*At the end of the course, the participant should be able to...*'

These are standards, normally defined by the training programme designer in consultation with the employer of the trainees. However, different trainers and organisations can have different views of what is required. This can lead to inconsistency in training programmes and confuse participants. In Cambodia trainees have criticised contradictions and overlaps between training programmes delivered by different

international conservation NGOs.

An interesting example of how to address this issue is the Nepal experience, where forest guards were encouraged to set their own standards and design their own curriculum based on their perceptions of the needs of their occupation. The set of competences agreed on is shown in **Table 1** above.

National Occupational Standards

In the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, programmes are underway to develop and encourage the use of national occupational standards and competences for all conservation staff including volunteers. Each system has taken a slightly different approach and encountered some common problems and different solutions.

Since 1985, the **United Kingdom** has been developing national standards and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for almost every occupation, including environmental conservation. Developing conservation standards was not a straightforward process, mainly because the initial functional analysis

rapidly revealed the following main issues:

- Many of the skills for conservation workers overlap with those from other sectors.
- The range of skills demanded across the whole sector was vast, ranging from construction work to biological surveying to business management.
- Management staff are expected to have and use a range of practical and technical skills.

Consequently early drafts of the standards were highly complex and off-putting to many employees and trainers; the solution was to simplify the system. At level 1 (entry level), a common set of standards was established for land-based workers in all sectors (agriculture, conservation, horticulture) with some specialist options to accommodate local and vocational variations. At levels

2 (supervised staff) and 3 (technical and supervisory staff), specific NVQs for Environmental Conservation were developed, including several elective units in order to reflect the variety of specialist skills of conservation. At levels 4 (managerial) and 5 (strategic), generic management NVQs are used, and tailored to meet the specific needs of senior conservation managers. A detailed manual for the NVQs is available via www.lantra.co.uk. **Table 2** below shows details from one standard.

In **Canada**, the development of occupational standards is being led by the Canadian Council for Human Resources in the Environmental Industry, founded in 1993 with a mission "to ensure an adequate supply of people with the demonstrated skills and knowledge required to meet the environmental human resource needs of the public and private sectors" (Canadian Council

for Human Resources in the Environment Industry, 1996/7)

The main occupational levels used are 'Technician' and 'Graduate Level'. Standards currently available and relevant to biodiversity conservation include the following (**See Table 3**).

Unlike the UK system, which focuses on the skills and knowledge required for competence, the Canadian system also considers the total skills requirements of the national workforce for each occupational sector, defines the relative importance of the various skills and indicates the proportion of required practitioners in a particular sector. Details of the Canadian standards can be found on www.cchrei.ca

In **Australasia** a slightly different approach has been taken. The Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council has introduced a Benchmarking and Best Practice Programme, resulting in the compilation of best practice guidelines on a wide range of topics including: Visitor Risk Management and Public Liability (ANZECC n.d.); Staff training practices (ANZECC 1996); Performance reporting on natural resource management (ANZECC 1997); Park education and interpretation (ANZECC 1999); Protected area management planning (ANZECC 2000b); and Cultural heritage management (ANZECC 2001).

Many of these include recommendations for standards and competences and the Staff Training Practices document recommends a competence-based approach to staff training needs analysis. All of these volumes are available on <http://ea.gov.au/parks/anzecc>

International Standards

There have also been some attempts to define standards at the international level, particularly for the occupation of ranger. At an international seminar investigating the potential development of international ranger training programmes

Table 2. Edited Example of a National Standard from the UK (Lantra 2000)

Unit 22, Element 22.2 CONSULT AND COLLABORATE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY	
Performance criteria. You must ensure that you:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and use opportunities for consultation and collaboration with the local community 2. Establish and maintain contacts with relevant sections of the local community 3. Actively seek reactions and opinions using appropriate methods 4. Gather and evaluate information where conflicts arise, and develop recommendations for action 5. Obtain organisational agreement before resolving conflicts 6. Keep relevant people informed of the outcomes of work and consultation 	
Knowledge and understanding: In <i>consulting and collaborating with the local community</i> you will need to show that you know and understand the:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Types of opportunities available for collaboration and consultation with the local community 2. Ways in which contact with the local community can be maintained 3. Reasons for and importance of contact with the local community 4. Likely impact of the work of the organisation on the local community 5. Methods of gauging community opinion 6. Potential and actual conflicting interests: 7. Methods for resolving conflicts 8. Importance of only acting within ones own agreed authority, keeping others within the organisation informed, and knowing when to ask for intervention from others 	

Table 3. Occupational Standards available for protected areas staff in Canada

<i>Technician Level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries and Wildlife Management
<i>Graduate Level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and Outdoor Recreation • Fisheries and Wildlife Management • Parks and Outdoor Recreation • Integrated Natural Resource Management • Environmental Education • Environmental Communications • Environmental Research

Table 4. The Losehill principles

- All rangers should:
- Have an awareness of international / national designations, wider environmental ethics and sustainable resource management, including the history of national parks and other protected areas, and the development of rangers in such areas. A code of ethics for all rangers could be included.
 - Have good communication skills, including an awareness of the variety of techniques for communicating messages, information and values (field studies, guided walks, role play, earth education, written word).
 - Understand the dynamics of and relationships between local landscape, biodiversity and culture, and the resulting conflicts of use.
 - Have the knowledge and ability to deal with visitor safety and countryside emergencies.
 - Have the ability to survey, monitor and report on the natural resource, as the 'eyes and ears' of the organisation.
 - Have knowledge of habitat and facility management techniques, with skills in such techniques as an optional specialism.

held at Losehill Hall, Peak National Park, UK in 1997, six essential elements of a ranger's skills were identified. These have subsequently become known as 'The Losehill Principles' (See Table 4).

One problem with the Losehill principles is that they are more readily applicable to the highly trained and relatively well-educated multi-tasking rangers of Europe and America than to the more field-based rangers of many developing countries, whose duties often include more direct protection and enforcement work and who frequently act as a para-military force.

The Third World Congress of The International Ranger Federation held at Kruger National Park, South Africa (Sept. 10-17, 2000) identified three levels of ranger: Entry or novice level; Full performance level (sometimes referred to as "professional" or "journeyman") level; and Master level. The conference agreed on the "universal essential competence" in terms of knowledge and skills/abilities for Rangers initially at the 'Master' level (See Table 5).

Table 5. Universal competences of a Master Ranger. (International Ranger Federation, 2000)

Knowledge Requirements	Skill/Ability Requirements
1. Basic Ecology and Conservation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principles, functions and processes of natural and cultural landscapes, to include and recognise humans and their role in influencing landscapes • What is natural • Methods and mechanisms of self-discovery • Basic monitoring and measuring techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe and detect changes in the landscape and take appropriate conservation action, including recording, reporting and, as appropriate, managing
2. Ensuring Ecosystem Integrity (Resource Protection, Legislative Purpose/ Framework and Relationship of Protected Area to other Relevant Resources)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant and applicable international, national, state, cultural, strategies, treaties, laws, conventions and policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce existing legislation appropriately while exercising personal safety and protection of others. • Exercise legislative and administrative procedures and processes, including collection of information and preparation for court, etc.
3. Interpretation, Education and Information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophy of interpretation and education as to their importance and their roles in safeguarding protected area resources. • Methods and techniques of interpretation and education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate effectively using a wide range of methods, and at a professional and global level.
4. Relationships with all Relevant Communities, and Other Stakeholders	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who the neighbours and those living in the protected areas are and what knowledge and expectations they have (their culture). • Local political agendas, and "key players" in the communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate political, social and cultural sensitivity and tolerance. • Involve and integrate the communities in issues of managing the protected area. • Listen effectively and engage in facilitation, conflict resolution and problem solving.
5. Technology and Infrastructure Maintenance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How it works, what it does and how it should be maintained. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage, maintain and safely operate a range of infrastructure and equipment.
6. Emergency Responses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to care for oneself and safely travel in wild or undeveloped areas characteristic of the protected area. • Emergency procedures pertaining to people, flora and fauna, etc. • Inter-agency responsibilities. • Agency responsibilities and limits of one's responsibilities. • Leadership/management structure and hierarchy relevant to a particular emergency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond appropriately to emergencies and incidents characteristic of one's protected area, including such things as search, rescue, fire suppression, first aid, and environmental and natural disasters.
7. Office, Project and Financial Management and Operational Planning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic business principles. • Basic office skills such as filing, correspondence, etc. • Applicable and appropriate reporting procedures. • Relevant administrative procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write effectively. • Management of budgets and projects, including preparation, monitoring, evaluating and reviewing. • Demonstrate how, where and what to plan, implement, evaluate and update or revise.
8. Workplace Communication and Relations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenets of human resource management. • Team participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate effectively as a member of a team.

For the Occupation of ‘Protected Area Manager’, the Protected Area Conservation Strategy (PARCS) project in Africa defined 12 main responsibilities and accountabilities for Protected Area Managers and invited managers in 10 countries to assess their skills against them (See Table 6).

The work of Stone (1997), also in Africa, successfully attempts to clarify and explain many of the issues and processes related to staff development, needs assessment and standards for protected area staff. This work is aimed specifically at ‘Protected Area Training Officers’, an unfamiliar occupation in Southeast Asia, but it contains a great deal of useful guides for managers and staff in developing, implementing and maintaining high standards in protected area management.

The European Project ‘Training of Protected Area Staff’ (TOPAS) is developing occupational standards for protected area staff in 9 European countries. The project is identifying existing national training courses and testing them in other

Table 6. Generic responsibilities and accountabilities of Protected Area Managers in Africa (Pitkin 1995)

- Ensure availability of a competent and well-motivated staff.
- Ensure appropriate infrastructure within budget.
- Ensure financial and accounting integrity of the protected area.
- Ensure development and achievement of tactical plans and budgets and contribute to protected area strategic planning.
- Ensure that all activities within the protected area comply with laws and regulations.
- Ensure optimum levels of visitor satisfaction.
- Ensure agreed intervention programmes are completed to budget and timetables.
- Ensure harmonious relationship with neighbouring communities.
- Be aware of research activities and progress against plan.
- Represent the protected area and its interests in public meetings.
- Ensure an appropriate balance between resource conservation and use in the protected area.

countries in order to ascertain their regional relevance and to update them accordingly. This will lead to a network of deliverers of training programmes that together meet a common set of standards. Information on TOPAS can be found on www.topas.mtnforum.org.

Institutional Standards

The IUCN Management Effectiveness Task Force (Hocking et al, 2000) has developed a useful set of criteria for evaluating and monitoring the management effectiveness of protected areas. While these are not occupational standards, they could provide a useful framework for international standard setting (See Table 7).

Developing Standards for ASEAN

Opportunities and issues

The examples above illustrate the growth in interest in standard setting for conservation staff around the world. The question to be asked is if this approach is appropriate to the countries of ASEAN. One approach would be to adopt one of the systems from Canada, Australia or the UK, but these present some problems:

- They have all been developed for national use only and therefore reflect the experience, administrative structures and culture of one country. In all three cases, there is an extensive professional and career structure in the country that is not reflected in most ASEAN countries.
- They were all produced at significant expense in terms of staff resources and consultancy time. Most ASEAN conservation authorities are unlikely to be able to resource such an extensive process.
- They are all very complex and highly detailed and reflect working practices and organisational capacities that

Table 7. Main functions of protected areas used for evaluation of effectiveness (Hocking et al, 2000)

<p>General</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legislation 2. Law enforcement 3. Planning 4. Resource inventory 5. Resource management 6. Maintenance 7. Neighbours 8. Economic benefits to local communities 9. Communication 10. Management systems
<p>For IUCN Category I Protected Areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Control over access/use of the protected area
<p>For IUCN Category II, III, V Protected Areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Resident communities and/or traditional landowners 13. Visitor opportunities 14. Visitors 15. Commercial tourism
<p>For IUCN Category IV Protected Areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Management intervention
<p>For IUCN Category V Protected Areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Control of land uses and activities
<p>For IUCN Category VI Protected Areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Sustainable production

simply do not exist in many ASEAN countries. The UK standards document runs to nearly 300 pages and is highly detailed. The standards have been criticised nationally for this, although they have been simplified from first drafts.

- The use of nationally or regionally validated qualifications linked to the standards and based on independently verified work place assessment (the UK NVQ model) is probably unrealistic in the short to medium term.

Accordingly, although these examples provide an excellent basis for analysing occupations and defining standards, the approaches taken would not be appropriate for an ASEAN wide system.

More applicable potentially may be the exercises carried out

by PARC in Africa and by the International Ranger Federation, both of which have attempted to define international generic standards, and to provide a clear definition of the occupation and the standards to be expected without being too specific or prescriptive. The development of a set of occupational standards for conservation staff in ASEAN using this type of approach has the potential to deliver many of the benefits listed in the introductory section of this article as well as some specific benefits in the context of the region. The standards would:

- Assist trainers and training providers to design and assess courses to a common and consistent standard across the region.
- Support those states that are still developing national parks systems and services.
- Facilitate the assessment of training needs both nationally and regionally by providing universal benchmarks for competence.

However the development of such a set of standards also presents a number of challenges. They need to be:

- Based around a set of occupations that are commonly recognisable across the re-

gion. The logical starting point is the set of occupations associated with protected areas, but even here there are differences in job specifications.

- Clear and specific enough to be useful without being so prescriptive as to exclude national differences in approach or specific local contexts.

ARCBC and Regional Standards

In its 2002 work plan, ARCBC plans to conduct a regional standard setting programme, principally for protected areas staff. This will involve three main stages.

Standards Review

ARCBC is collating a full review of existing work on standards from around the world in order to gain a fuller understanding of the use of standards around the world. This paper partly summarises that review. ARCBC is then planning the following programme:

- National review of existing protected areas staff standards, job profiles and qualifications in the 9 ASEAN countries that are ARCBC partners.
- Site-based review of qualifications and standards at one representative protected area

in each country, possibly an ASEAN Heritage Park.

Standards Development

Following the review process, the development team will produce a set of draft standards for a number of priority occupations in protected areas management and will also investigate the development of a set of knowledge standards for key biodiversity decision makers in the ASEAN region. A regional workshop will be organised to review these drafts and to agree on the final draft standards, which will then be tested at the representative protected areas in each country.

Standards Dissemination

The set of standards to be agreed upon will be launched across the region in a number of ways:

- Setting up a standards area on the ARCBC web site.
- Holding an official ASEAN launch event.
- Using the standards to classify the materials on the ARCBC's web based training resources centre.
- Working with national and regional training providers to link training courses and curricula to the new standards.
- Explaining and promoting the standards in ARCBC partner countries. ■



Photo by Mike Appleton/IFFI

Modern park management brings with it many demands. Armed Rangers in Thailand's Western Forest complex inspect an elephant salt lick.

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References

Note. As a reflection of how much information is now available on the internet all but one of the references cited are available for viewing or downloading free of charge from the websites shown. In order to increase accessibility of these and many other important references on biodiversity training all of these documents are also available at the ARCBC training resources databases on a single site: <http://www.arcbc.org.ph>

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Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests

The "Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests" (SGP PTF) was officially launched through the Regional Inception Workshop in early December 2001 in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines. Funded by the European Commission (EC), the SGP PTF is managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the Executing Agency, the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA).

The overall operation is for five years with EC contribution via the Tropical Forest Budget Line of 15,132,500 Euros. Operations will take place initially in four countries (Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand) with the possible expansion to other countries in South and Southeast Asia when conditions are propitious.

The SGP PTF will complement the existing Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) and related financing instruments to benefit poor and underprivileged forest user groups by pursuing the following key objectives: (a) act as catalyst to promote and demonstrate community-based management and resource-use in tropical forests; (b) draw lessons from local experience and support the spread of successful community-level strategies and innovations; and (c) build grassroots level capacity to tackle problems that are contributing to forest destruction and degradation through partnerships and networks.

The principal thrust of the SGP PTF will be the execution by civil society organisations at country level of small (20,000 – 200,000

Euros) forest-related projects. The programme will benefit from the experience acquired both by the GEF SGP and by EC forestry programmes in the region. The SGP PTF will further enhance its community focus through extensive networking and collaboration to draw on the expertise of a number of institutions in the region with rich experience in community-based tropical forestry.

The SGP PTF will be implemented in two phases with an initial start up phase that will finalise the technical, administrative and financial framework for its operations. This phase, which will be completed by March 2002, will draw up country-specific guidelines for the selection of local project proposals. PTF Coordinators will manage this process in close collaboration with local stakeholders, and coordinated through National Steering Committees. Once this phase is completed, there will be a formal call for proposals detailing eligible organisations and thematic areas; the application and selection procedures; and the roles and responsibilities of the grantees and the SGP PTF.

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