

Feedback report

WATER PROTECTION INSTITUTE



PROJECT IN THAILAND, Beung Khong Long site

WITH WWF THAILAND

Ms Cardon Marion

1) Context

The project's site

Description

Beung Khong Long is a permanent lake (11 km long and 1.5 km at its widest). It covers 1 300 ha in Seka District, Nong Khai 15 km west of the Mekong River.

In 1982, a dam and sluice were built at the southern extremity of the lake, which has pushed its expansion to the North. The northern part of the lake shows emergent and floating vegetation which is really different of the south part which has little aquatic vegetation. Some 600 ha of marshland fringes the northern shore and extends along the Huai I La waterway for four kilometres.

Beung Khong Long was recognized as RAMSAR site in 2001.

Wetland Use

Beung Khong Long is an incomes resource for a lot of local households. 16 villages are located around the lake with major activities as fishery, farming or cattle-breeding. For example, around 30 boats work on the lake every day for fishing and about 500 cattle graze on the north part of the lake. Local people also collect vegetable matte and firewood from the remaining woodland. The area also possesses beautiful and attractive scenery which attracts local tourism, especially on public holidays.



Fauna and Flora

About 136 bird species have been recorded, including 70 migration birds. Beung Khong Long Lake is indeed an important winter habitat for migratory water birds. For example, about 650 herons and egrets of seven different species and 1,250 ducks of seven species have been observed. Besides at least 64 species of fish and other aquatic species (mollusks and crustaceans) are found in Beung Khong Long (most of them are consumed both for subsistence and commercial purpose). The woodland also supports populations of forest bird species including and has a rich butterfly fauna, including *Euthalia cyanipardus*, specie restricted to lowlands. Mammal species include Moles, East Asian Mongoose and Squirrel spp.

Wetlands' Threats

Even if there is no immediate threat to Beung Khong Long, different activities in the area are pressuring the wetland. These several pressures come for instance from poor farmers' recent settlement (increasing the exploitation of the lake), spread of rubber plantations or use of chemicals for farming. By the way, former threats still remain as hunting, over fishing and forest influence.

The area has been in fact degraded during ten years and would have continued to quickly worsen without the start of a conservation project.

First days on the project

Before leaving France I had few documents about the project and activities but I wasn't clear about which ones were already started or what was the logic behind all the activities. I was going there without a clear idea of what was the project, the environment and more than it, what I was going to do there.

When I arrived in Bangkok, I was welcomed by Colin Mc Quistan (WWF Thailand head of wetlands unit) who explained to me about WWF Thailand, the wetlands unit and the project itself. During 4 days, I also had a meeting with Bill Schaedla (WWF Country director) and other WWF staff as the HR head, who taught me some basic rules about Thai culture. I also visited another WWF project which is an education center, managed by Jim, who I had to work with few weeks later (here the goal was to get some ideas for our own project in North-East).

Finally, I got to Beung Kan, where I met my direct team. This team is in charge of 2 projects: Beung Khong Long and Gun Tin. 5 people are actually working on the field:

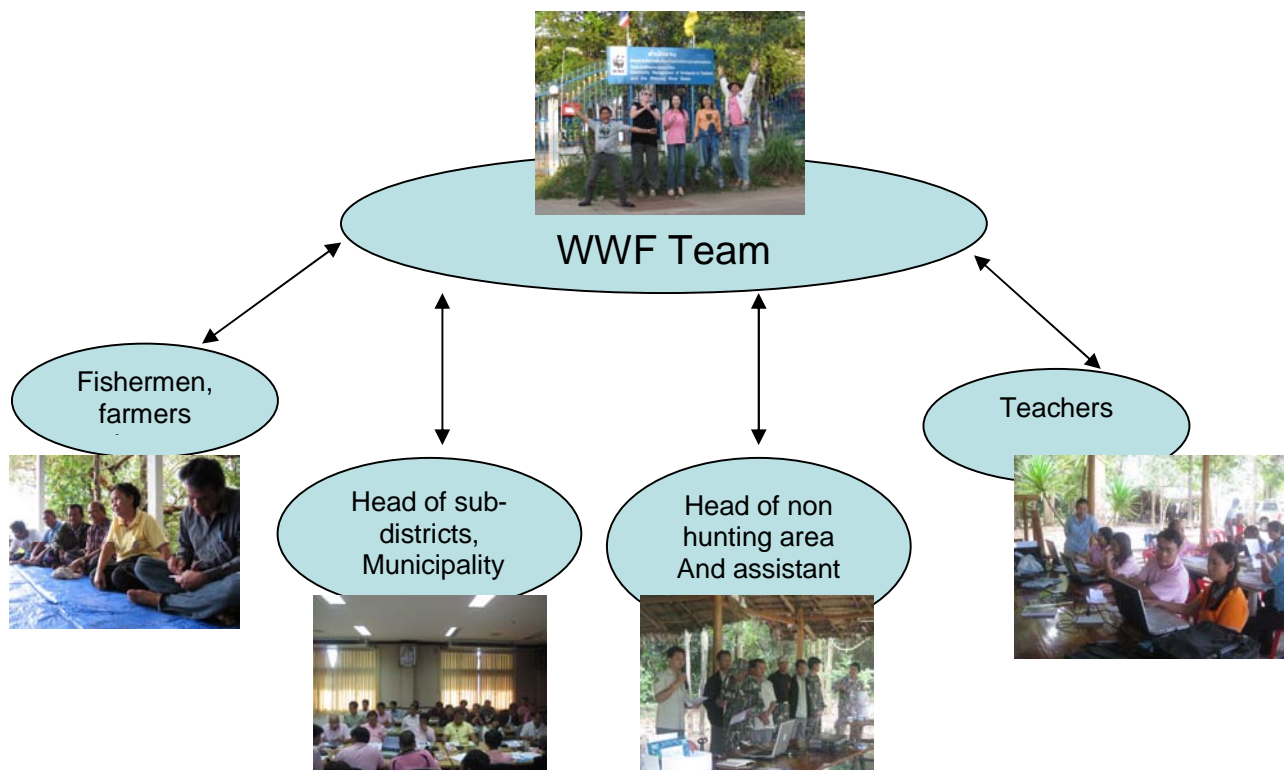
- Anocha for communication
- Mam for education activities
- Ciao and Chaya both dedicated to one project for on field work
- Gop for accounting

The team is managed by Yanyong, which is also responsible for 3 other projects in Thailand: Loei, Nan and Chiang Rai (Giant catfish). I got to meet Yanyong a little later, like one week after my arrival.

All the staff was here when I arrived and they welcomed me very well. They indeed had booked a hotel room for my first night and helped me to find an accommodation for the time I was staying. Then we took an afternoon to present the project, the realizations and the current objectives. I also introduced myself by explaining what Danone, the WPI and my work experience are. First days were of course a little weird because we didn't know each others and the exchanges were very serious and formal. However, we quickly arrived to a friendly relationship and I felt totally part of this team at the end.

Getting to understand

I was somehow lucky because I arrived just 2 weeks before the visit of an evaluation team for DANIDA. I knew there were 2 fundraisers on this project which started 3 years ago with DANIDA but I wasn't clear at the time about which activity was included in the Danida project and which one in the evian project. I got to meet most of the stakeholders during this visit of the Danida evaluation team, especially the ones I was gonna work with:



After this visit, I knew better about the work which has been done during the past 3 years and what was the situation of the project. Clean basis of a strong project had indeed been set thanks to collaborative work and research of the team and the local people. I mean important first steps as the clear definition of the wetland area, the understanding of wetland's use, the biodiversity statement,... The activities of the evian project weren't clear yet but we'll see that helping the team to define them has been part of my job there.

Human and cultural environment

As said earlier, the first days were for me not so easy because all was new for me. I had to adapt to another culture, very different from ours, to understand the project and a new way of working but also to get to know my team and the people I was gonna work with.

But the Thai people are friendly and smiling so it was pretty easy to feel comfortable after getting used to this new culture. All people I met welcomed me warmly. We explained to every new person why I was here and all were very interested in the evian project and my presence. People were indeed really curious and at the same time proud about a French company interested in their homeland.

Everything wasn't of course easy and I also met some difficulties. The most important one was the language barrier. In the working activities I always needed to be with one member of the team to translate what people were saying or what I wanted to say (nobody speaks English except the WWF team). And I have to specify that No and Mam speak good English but my others colleagues speak English a little. That's why I had first to get how they speak English to be sure we understand each other or not. Then it was much easier for me to work with them and with others stakeholders because I knew when I had to repeat or explain differently my ideas. The problem of not speaking Thai was also a problem in my day to day life because in Beung Kan people don't speak English so I learned basic Thai language but also signs language to make me understand at the hotel, at the restaurant or at the shop.

Another problem was the choc of culture for me, especially in the work part. Thai people are indeed very diplomat to each other. I mean that you can't say to someone directly that you're not supposed to do a task or if you ask someone something he will answer "yes" even if he knows it won't be able to do it. The thing is that in this culture you can't loose face. That was pretty hard to understand for me, coming from Europe where we more say everything to each other face to face at work. This state of facts leads to some pretty interesting situation where you clearly wondering how you're gonna make someone get a message without hurting him.

Finally, I would say that all the difficulties I could have met were easy to go through. First because I am someone pretty adaptable and I used that force to make everything work there. But you can also count on the kindness of Thai people, who will excuse some mistakes from you just because you're foreigner.

2) Activities and Realizations

Workplan defined on arrival

When I arrived on the project, the team described to me the activities they have planned to do. We looked at the steps of the project which was going to happen during my stay but also which was matching with my profile. We defined several activities I could work on and built a workplan according to what we thought we could develop together during my stay.

Introduction Time

- Arrive in Bangkok
- Orientation with WWF Thailand staff
- Arrive in Beung Kan

Orientation with WWF BKL staff

Nature Trail And Exhibition center

Define messages to communicate about
Define trainee targets
Define both roles of exhibition center and trail
Define numbers of signs have to be developed
Regroup content for developing signs and materials
Study prices for materials
Decision about the best possibility fitting budget
Develop signs and materials
Signs and Materials implementation
Build trainee programmes for NHA staff

Education program and materials

Meet several teachers and schools
Exchange with other education centers about their experience
Define priorities subjects for a majority of students
Define education programmes to be proposed by NHA staff
Choose materials to be developed and tools needed according to the budget
Develop the materials and tools
Build trainee programmes for NHA staff

Communication

Build a leaflet explaining the tools and education programmes proposed at NHA
TAO information corners (3)
Beach information sign
Organize an opening day to present new EP and tools to key stakeholders
Update website
Produce materials to report to evian, RAMSAR, ... (interviews, movies, pictures,...)

End of mission

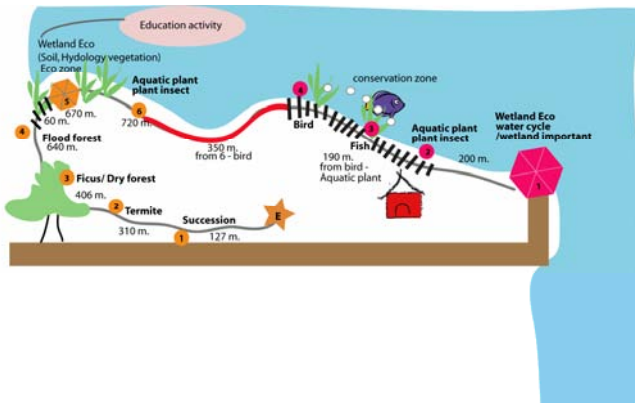
Wrap up meeting in Bangkok
Feedback on mission

Activities realized

We tried to follow the workplan but the life of the project of course introduced some changes in the activities I did realize.

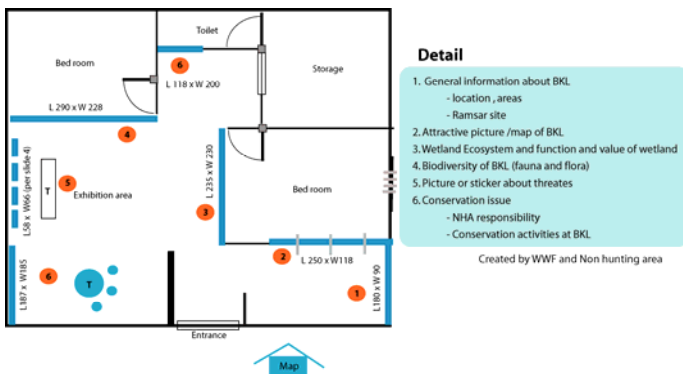
1. The Nature trail

During the mission, I worked on the first development steps of the nature trail which is going to be built in the Non Hunting Area (NHA) in BKL. We first had meetings with the local staff, which is part of a government agency. We defined together the subjects we want to develop on the nature trail signs. Then, we had to measure the trail and exactly where the different signs will be implemented. We also started to develop the contents of the signs together with the assistant of the head of NHA. Finally, I took part in the definition of development's costs and also the choice of what should be first developed with the project's budget. The nature trail should be finished around april or may.



2. The exhibition center

On the same time, we worked all together on the exhibition center we are going to develop in the same area. We decided that the best place for this exhibition would be a little house which is on the NHA. We defined the subjects of the signs which would be developed, the organization of the rooms and also for example the documents we could leave around for the students or people coming here. When I left, we had already started to write the content of the signs and the exhibition center should be finished in the early of 2009.



3. Work with teachers and schools

During my stay on the project, we had several activities with the schools to make the students sensitive about the protection of the BKL area. For example, we took part during 3 days in a youth camp. It was in one of the BKL schools but students of almost all schools around the site were there. We had 180 students there during 3 days, learning about biodiversity, environment or water cycle. Then, we also worked specifically with teachers to develop education programs for both primary and secondary schools. It was very interesting to make teachers and NHA staff work together on this one because the programs are developed according to the tools which will be provided by the trail and the exhibition center. When I left, the programs just had to be printed before being used by the schools.

On my last day we realized also a training for students about water quality called "water spies". The goal was to give the students the capacities of

monitoring water quality. Teachers from Chiang Mai, who already implemented such a system, came to train the teachers and students through theory and on field study.

Finally, we had other activities with the schools like developing teaching materials. A good example can be the wetlands rooms which are being developed in the both secondary school. One was actually finished before I left.



4. Tour studies

During my stay we had several tour studies on the project. Sharing the best practices of the project is indeed one of the objectives of the project. We got to explain the project, the activities and learnings to representative of other districts or other NGO. We usually spent 2 days on the site, meeting local representative, farmers, fishermen and NHA staff.



5. Danone activities

The mission had also the goal of creating a direct link between Danone and the NGO. I worked on the documents asked by Danone for the project. I helped writing the project proposal, organizing meetings with the team to develop the 1st draft they made, clarify the activities and get everybody agree about the priorities definition. I also wrote the communication report asked by Ramsar and Danone.

Another activity was the need of Danone for pictures and videos. We took a lot of time to go all around the site making pictures, videos and interviews. Another example is the visit of the local evian team, which came for 2 days to discover the project and the BKL lake.



6. Other activities

Some other activities of course came on going because they were planned already or because the team took an opportunity. For example, there was an evaluation of DANIDA and WWF Denmark on the different projects supported so we had several meetings on site but also in Loei or Udon Thani. We also participated in a meeting with the governor and all local stakeholders, including from other districts: the provincial wetland committee. It was an opportunity to expose all project's realizations but the evian's project too.

I finally took part in meetings some people asked us to organize, as the Kam Sonbon meeting. It was a collaborative research on how to manage better the tourist area of Kam Sonbon. Our help on this meeting was asked by head of the sub-district.



3) Key Learnings

Before departure

- Get the NGO more involved in the choice of the employee
After several exchanges about this point with the staff, I can say that they would appreciate getting more involved in this choice. They would like to be able to express first their needs and then choose with Danone an employee who matches for both NGO and Danone. The employee could so directly be involved in activities adapted to his profile.

=> Reco: first ask the NGO about the needs like specific profile or generalist, which period,... then define Danone needs and look for profiles matching both needs. Common criteria could also be defined between the NGO and Danone. It could be also a way of defining a period and length of stay together : the NGO could need a very specific profile for a small period or a general profile for a longer stay. Finally, exchange about profiles with the NGO before making a definitive choice.

- Plan a direct exchange between the NGO and the employee
I think it would have been easier to understand the project and start faster the mission if I could have had some direct talks on the phone or online with the team before leaving.
I could have had a better idea of where I was going and what I was going to do there.

=> Reco: a direct exchange between the employee and the NGO would facilitate the understanding of the employee. It could make the arrival easier and permit to define better the activities before leaving.

- Give the employee a background about Danone-NGO exchanges
I was sometimes lost in NGO questions because I didn't know the history of Danone-ramsar-project relationships. For example I often heard about a "Christophe from Danone" who I don't know. Another example could be the picture of Yanyong used on evian bottles that he never saw.

=> Reco: keep written documents about all contacts between Danone and the NGO. The project manager from Danone could take like half a day to explain the employee the relationship with the NGO and the historic of contacts. The employee can then understand better the questions and wonderings of the NGO on the field.

On the project

- Make the choice of someone who can easily adapt

- Even if Beung Kan is not totally lost, the employee won't meet many people speaking English and will be alone most of the evenings/weekends. The people speaking English don't often speak very well so it's important to make sure you understand what they really want to say and that they understand well what you want to say.

- Time of works is really different (all day from 7h30/8h to 17h/18h)

- Thai culture is very different and some difficulties can be met in the everyday work as the fact that in Thai culture people will often not wish to disappoint and answer no, so despite the fact that they cannot do something they will say that they can. This cultural difference created some frustration early in the placement, until I adjusted my expectations on their inputs to project activities.

⇒ Reco: the employee needs to be someone who is not afraid of being alone and who is strong on a mental point. He would have to adapt to very different situations or people. The employee could take few hours of Thai language and culture classes before leaving. Having a good level in English is very useful to be sure of how you are understood but also of what you should understand!

- Explaining the evian's project

- It is important to explain the project and the employee's presence to the stakeholders on the project

- Danone and evian are not famous in Thailand and that makes difficult to explain the project

⇒ Reco:

- Give the employee clear way of explaining the project

- The employee should leave with some documents about Danone and evian but also with bottles of evian with the WPI information

- Accommodation and material

- Accommodation was great and the wireless access very useful to keep contact with Danone and also family and friends

- Material was ok for camera and video but the computer had a lot of bugs. The battery was also not good, which means I couldn't go for a long time out with my computer. Moreover, the hard drive capacity was very small so to keep all pictures and movies I had to buy an external hard drive.

Finally the mobile phone just stopped working just before the end of the mission.

⇒ Reco:

- Leave the choice of accommodation to the employee in Beung Kan

- Give new computers with good battery and big hard drive capacity

- Provide an external hard drive and a video camera

- Buy a mobile phone in Thailand so a guarantee would be available. The 1-2 call system is very easy and has a good cover everywhere in the country.
 - Length of stay
It was very frustrating not to be able to stay longer. It takes indeed like one month to get the project, the stakeholders and the working methods. After 3 months, you just have time to work on some activities but time flies and you don't go to the end of your tasks.
- ⇒ Reco:
- Give the employee clear way of explaining the project
 - The employee should leave with some documents about Danone and evian but also with bottles of evian with the WPI information



After the mission

- Keep the contact between the employee and the NGO
It is important for both NGO and the employee to keep contact after the employee has left the project.
- ⇒ Reco:
- Use the employee as a direct point of contact with the NGO and the project: it's always easier to communicate when you know the people!
 - The employee could still support the project through for example English writing materials
 - The employee could be an ambassador for the Thailand project, the Ramsar sites and the good work of WWF in Thailand.
- Clarify the Danone people in contact with NGO members
On the project it was very difficult for local staff to be very clear about which people are working on the project by Danone. Moreover, they think they don't get enough information about how the project is managed in France and what communication is made about it.
- ⇒ Reco:

- Define a clear structure of contacts by Danone and communicate it to the NGO with pictures of people and clear definition of their role on the project. The best would be to have 2 contacts for the NGO: Nathalie Rizzotti from RAMSAR and the employee
- It is important to give feedback on the project to the NGO. It would be great to define like 3 reports by year to explain what has been done on the project, the communication, feedbacks from the other projects supported...
- We should inform the marketing staff of WWF Thailand every time we want to communicate about the project to involve them more.

4) General conclusion

For WWF Thailand

I can say this experience has been very interesting for the NGO.

For the headquarters, welcoming a volunteer for a short time like this was a new experience and they can now use it as a new knowledge.

For the local team, it's very interesting to have a new eye on the project. Having someone who doesn't know the project, the culture... is a way of opening the team to other ideas and other methods. Moreover, different competencies were available for the project which is a plus for the team. I also think that having someone from a foreign country sometimes helps in the work because local people could be more involved or reactive, not to disappoint the foreigner. Finally, it was a great opportunity for the staff to speak English and develop their language competencies.

For WWF Thailand in general, it's a good way to know better what the WPI projects are, what Danone is and what the goal of the partnership is. It's indeed a way to clarify the project and also how the project is working in France.

For Danone

This mission of course gives also to Danone about the project and its activities. It's also a way to make this project more human by creating real human links between the NGO and Danone.

Then, communication about this experience is a very good way of involving all employees in this company project. It is really important that people who are interested understand what was this experience and what are the projects supported by Danone. I think that it's really amazing that such a company propose this kind of opportunity to their employees. This message is really important and now, it's possible to share this experience with all employees. I hope that the story of the Thailand's project will give other employees real conviction that they have to apply for the next missions!

Moreover, the WPI is a real opportunity for Danone to make the idea of sustainable development really concrete. We can indeed now tell concrete stories about what are the projects we support, what the NGO work is and how these projects are important for the local people. It could be really interesting

to communicate in an external way about the 3 employees' experiences but also about the on going life on the project. This would be a way of illustrating Danone involvement in environmental issues.

For me

The experience was really interesting for me in several ways. First it was a real pleasure to work on such a project, which has direct impact on local people's environment. You can see everyday concrete activities going on and provide people useful tools for managing their wetland. Moreover, it has been for me a real discovery of a new culture. I had to change my way of working, eating... and it has been a real pleasure to get involved in such a nice culture. I mean that people are really always smiling, are very tolerant and welcoming. Working there was also a good thing for me because I learnt how to work differently, in English and with more diplomacy. It also had confirmed my capacity to live abroad, to adapt to new life and people, my cultural openness and my sustainable development conviction.

