



**Best Practice Summary
Chiang Rai**

Country:	Thailand
Local Government:	Chiang Rai City
Type:	Municipality
Best Practice Title:	Urban Ecosystems and Biodiversity Conservation towards Sustainable City
Aspect of Governance:	Thematic Area 3: Urban Environmental Public Services
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Start Date:	2008
Website:	-

Description:

Background

The city of Chiang Rai is part of a development scheme by the Thai government to turn 8 provinces into economic link centers of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) and the South-East Asian Region (BIMSECT). The plan is to develop commercial channels and tourism with neighboring countries and in that way have a lasting impact on the expansion of the economy of the province of Chiang Rai. The large investments and huge influx of visitors to the province have already changed the economic circumstances and the social context of Chiang Rai, especially of Chiang Rai city, the capital of the province. Investors as well as visitors to the province depend on the infrastructure, commercial facilities and services available in the city. This rapid and not very well regulated growth had negative effects on the natural and biological resources in the province. Forest cover, water resources and wildlife are showing signs of

stress and decrease.

Fortunately, administrators of Chiang Rai Municipality showed awareness of these developments and of the threat they posed to the environment. In 2008 they initiated a project for **Enhancing the Urban Ecosystem and Biodiversity in Chiang Rai City**. This is helping to conserve the rich biodiversity of the city and its environments and to create sustainable urban communities, capable of facing the changes created by climate change.

Chiang Rai was the first municipality which started an urban biodiversity conservation program in Northern Thailand. The city contains a strategically located forest in the center of it with a mixed ecosystem, linked to a lake and river, which are also home to unique wetland plant and animal species.

The city administrators were inspired by the biodiversity information gathered from these areas, that were clearly under threat of rapid development. In 2008 they received support from the KNCF (Keidenren Mature Conservation Fund, Japan) and the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI) to turn Chiang Rai into a pilot city on urban biodiversity conversation.

Results Achieved and Relevance to Public Life

In its early stage, the project on "Enhancing Urban Ecosystem and Biodiversity in Chiang Rai City" was designed to concentrate on the restoration and conservation of the diverse ecosystems that exist in the city and to maintain a healthy balance in the urban environment, including economic, social and environmental aspects.

However, after receiving support from Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) to help the pilot city to adapt and cope with the impacts of climate change the project scope was broadened. The objectives of the project were changed from conservation of biodiversity in the city to building the stability of the ecosystem and food support system in the city.

The following major changes were achieved:

- *Changes in policy:* Before the project Chiang Rai Municipality's vision was to develop the city as a gateway to the Mekong Region without paying attention to the environmental implications. Currently, due to the success of the project, according to Mr. Wanchai Chongsuttanamanee, the mayor and the present administrator of Chiang Rai Municipality, the vision has become to turn Chiang Rai Municipality into "a livable city that focuses on good environment, coupled with way of Buddhist principles for people well-being and available to ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015."
- *Changes in strategies:* Based on the above vision, the city has developed seven strategies to achieve development goal as a low carbon city. These strategies focus on reducing pollution from waste, wastewater and energy production, as well as on climate change adaption strategies through conservation of the ecosystems and biodiversity in the city. Another aspect is the preparedness for natural disasters.
- *Changes in city administrators' views and process towards urban development:* The project has contributed to changing the views of

stakeholders and has influenced the development process by getting involved people to comment on plans, implementation and evaluation. The municipality has taken on more of a supportive role, allowing other stakeholders to feel a sense of ownership' in development and sustainability.

- *Changes in budget allocation:* For the last three years, the municipality has made separate allocation in its budget for biodiversity conservation and to improve capabilities in climate change resilience after seeing the first project results.
- *Changes to strengthen the community sector:* The municipality has made extra efforts to get the community more involved in sustainable city development activities. This involves support to community federations, other agencies and educational institutions to link with conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity activities in Chiang Rai city.

The municipality and its administrators are these days guided by a clear vision, policy and procedures. Regular meetings and workshop are held with stakeholders to prepare local level plans and annual development plan.

The UBD and SCCR project has revolutionized the process of urban development and environmental conservation. In conventional planning processes people are not usually consulted in the preparation of the annual development plan, to these plans often do not meet the population's needs. This project focuses on the processes involvement and has established working groups who participate in planning and following up of progress. This includes data gathering for conducting surveys and measuring the impact of the activities.

Specific Results

The UBD and SCCR project has contributed to the sustainable development of Chiang Rai City by addressing the economic, social and environmental aspects as summarized below:

1) Economic aspect:

- Local economic development: The majority of people living near the biodiversity preservation areas are farmers and traders. The project has helped these residents to generate additional income from tourism, both directly and indirectly. For example, by selling plant sprouts (local plants/trees), making slingshots with plant seed bullets, offering home-stay visits to tourists.
- City economic development: After the dissemination of results of the project Chiang Rai Municipality has become famous for other local governments to visit and to learn from the successful projects/activities. This can help the city's economic development in general.

2) Social aspect:

- Strengthened community relationship: In the past, a few people in the community took actions to conserve the forest. After participating in the project, more people have become involved and supportive, each taking

on a more cooperative attitude in working together.

- Traditional knowledge/local wisdom: The project has provided opportunities for the elderly to participate and contribute to community-based activities. This has helped traditional knowledge and local wisdom to be passed to the other local communities, especially the younger generation. This also helps to increase community relationship.
- Belief of local tradition and religions: In the past, the people went up to the hill to visit the pagoda and temple occasionally only for religious purposes. After implementing this project, local people are aware of the conservation of the places and have integrated all activities related to both religious and environmental conservation.

3) *Environmental aspect:*

- Green area: The project helps to conserve and increase the green public area as well as provides recreational opportunities in the municipal area. Moreover, a large green area of forest can also act as 'carbon sink' for the city and support rich biodiversity.
- Food resources such as edible insects, beehives, bamboos etc. are being preserved which helps to increase food security of the city.
- Sources of learning for the youth: DoiSaken has become 'an open and natural classroom' for the youth/students in the city. Schools with environmental curricula can arrange study trips and learn about the environment. This helps to increase environmental awareness to the youth.

Main Activities

The following activities were carried out to achieve the results:

- 1) Bringing in key actors at the national level, such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, including the Royal Forestry Department (RFD), the Office of Natural Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) and the Office of Biodiversity (OOB) as well as the Society for the Conservation of National Treasures and the Environment (SCONTE)). On sub-national levels the Chiang Rai District Offices in Bangkok and Samut Prakan, as well as elected local government representatives and other key stakeholders became involved. All these actors came to an agreement on the process and how best to support integration of results into the national policy level.
- 2) Meetings by the key stakeholders to agree on specific target areas for carrying out a survey and for subsequent conservation and rehabilitation measures.
- 3) Carrying out a bio-diversity survey and documenting the results to establish a baseline set of information.
- 4) Organizing training for local government officers and community representatives to foster greater understanding of the role urban biodiversity plays within the overall urban development and quality of life.
- 5) Setting up a multi-stakeholder locally based working group for managing

the survey and subsequent recommendations supported by expert and technical inputs.

- 6) Organizing workshops to present the survey results to the wider public in order to get feedback and recommendations leading to a management action plan.
- 7) Introducing urban land management tools and mechanisms to the working group and the city administration that could support implementation of the action plan.

Methodology

The following specific methods were developed to achieve the desired outcomes:

- *Paradigm shift*: the municipality changes its role from “operator” to “supporter” to work together on an issue or subject that is interesting to the community.
- *New working methods*: related closely to the paradigm shift, the new working methods meant involving stakeholders more closely in the design and implementation of the project activities as well as using existing human resources and knowledge more fully.
- *Knowledge transfer*: By imparting knowledge about ecosystems and biodiversity, the project managed to make its activities relevant to the local community – knowing why it was important to conserve the environment made it easier to do so.
- *Building community spirit*: by drawing on support from various stakeholders and community groups, the project managers managed to increase the feeling of community and new friendships were created.

Lessons Learnt

This project was the first in Thailand to look at encouraging urban bio-diversity working with a variety of stakeholders on all levels, and the first and most important lesson was how important it is to encourage and manage the participation of all these stakeholders. “Participation” was the key factor for success and sustainable development. Any problems that arose during the implementation were caused by conflicts between different working groups, bad communication between local authorities and the working groups and the political context of the area.

It was also realised that knowledge transfer to the local community and local authorities was a decisive factor for the success of the project. The assistance of external experts to carry out the survey and analyse its results was very important; this is not something the community would have been able to do alone.

The government, both on the local and the national level, also realised how important academic data was for maintaining sustainable development both in the planning and the implementation process.

One of the side effects of the conservation project was the realization that it also helped to increase the community spirit – for a sustainable city interactions between people as well as cultural and spiritual connections are as important as the economic circumstances.

A livable and sustainable city should balance 3 elements: human well-being, social well-being and environmental well-being. The success of Chiang Rai's conservation programme is undoubtedly related to the fact that attention was paid to all these three elements.

Sustainability

Since the project has been successful in all its elements, i.e. the conservation of wildlife and ecosystems, the adaption to climate change and the increase in community spirit, the municipality decided to integrate it into the local development plan. Sustainability of the project results is thereby guaranteed, as well as a budget for future activities. The pilot project has become a best practice by now, which is another way of sustaining the results and transferring knowledge.

Transferability

The concept of the project is not difficult to transfer – the most important element is the political will on both the national and the local level and the availability of funds for carrying out the initial survey and for implementing conservation measures.

The key to success of the project was active participation of and partnership built with all stakeholders of the city: government agencies, academic institutions, more than 10 civil society organizations that joined this project and the business sector, including restaurants, hotels and travel services, which benefit from visitors and study groups.