

Project Update: October 2014

1. Overview

Wetlands in Yok Don National Park play an integral role in biodiversity and local tribal livelihoods and culture, leading to conflict between wetland conservation and the demand for natural resources. My research project is assessing the potential for developing an adaptive co-management strategy for managing Yok Don National Park that can assist in resolving this conflict. Social-ecological systems models of park values, resource use and management are being jointly developed with local people and park managers to enhance shared understanding of the wetland system.

I undertook my first fieldtrip to Yok Don National Park in April 2013. During this trip I conducted a pilot study with park managers and local people at three villages in the core and buffer zone to test my proposed questionnaires. I then analysed this information and revised the questionnaires. My main survey period was conducted from November 2013 to January 2014. I will be returning to Yok Don National Park for a final field trip in January 2015 to get the opinions of local people, park managers and local scientists about the revised social-ecological systems model. I will also discuss with park managers about the institutional, governance and management structures and processes diagram mapping after modelling workshop to determine the obstacles they have been facing to explore more opportunities for co-management with local communities.

2. Research objectives

The overall aim of this study is to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of using social-ecological modelling approach for enhancing the potential for adaptive co-management for managing protected areas at a local level. In assessing this potential, the benefits of enhanced and shared understanding of the social and ecological attributes and processes of the region through development of social-ecological models and the role of shared understanding in developing co-management options will be examined.

3. Research questions

Research question 1: Does collaborative development of a social-ecological systems model for YDNP improve understanding of park management and community needs and impacts amongst both managers and other stakeholders? (Data analysis mostly complete, still requires some additional information from final fieldtrip)

I have individually interviewed 259 local people at nine villages. This information was analysed to evaluate local people's impacts on the park. I have also undertaken focus group discussions with 30 local representatives in each of nine villages to identify the cultural keystone species of each village and what they are used for. I have individually interviewed eight field managers (Heads of Forest Rangers Stations) and undertaken a focus group with two senior managers to determine the current threats facing the park. This information was then used as the basis for social-ecological systems model development during the workshop between park managers and heads of villages. The model derived during the workshop was then refined based on the additional information from the individual interviews. This refined model will be discussed with park managers, key local people and

local scientists during fieldwork this January to test its appropriateness and utility in developing a shared understanding of issues around management of Yok Don National Park.

- Research question 2: How does shared understanding affect in-depth negotiation between park management and community needs? (Data currently being analysed)
I have individually interviewed eight field managers (Heads of Forest Rangers Stations) and held a workshop between park managers and the heads of villages to evaluate the management effectiveness of the park. Data from the interviews with local community members used in addressing research question 1 are also relevant here. After the modelling workshop, park managers and the heads of villages were individually interviewed to understand what they have learnt from the workshop, changes in their perception about wetland natural resource use and wetland conservation and the possibility for changing their current behaviour and systems. This information is currently being analyzed.
- Research question 3: How do institutional, governance and management structures and processes influence the opportunity for adaptive co-management and sustainable community use of park resources?
(Data analysis mostly complete, still requires some additional information from final fieldtrip)
I have undertaken a focus group discussion with two senior managers before and after the modelling workshop to map and then remap the institutional, governance and management structures and processes. These maps have been completed and preliminary results showing changes after the workshop process have been analyzed. Further input from park managers will be ascertained in January 2015.

4. Any outstanding issues

The obstacles I have been dealing with when working at Yok Don National Park are the changing of directors and working with local people. The director of Yok Don National Park had changed once between my first and second fieldtrip which meant that I needed to set up the project again. Working with local people has been more complicated than I first anticipated as most work from 7.00 AM to 5.00 PM and are not willing to meet with me during the day despite being well compensated for their time. Therefore I have started interviewing and undertaking discussion with them during night time at some villages which resulted in the fieldwork period being extended.