**Press Release:**

**Celebrating their over five-year achievement of forest protection, local communities in Mondulkiri pledged to continue sustainably managing their natural resources**

The final dissemination workshop featuring key achievements in community protected areas in Srepok and Phnom Prich Wildlife Sanctuary was organized in Sen Monorom town, Mondulkiri Province on March 17, 2023. The project “Advancing CSOs’ Capacity to Enhance Sustainability Solutions" funded by the European Union (EU) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) was wrapped up with good outcomes.

This project was implemented from February 2018 to December 2022 with the aim to promote sustainable management and solutions to natural resources in Cambodia’s Eastern Plains Landscape. The project encouraged communities living around protected areas to contribute to resolving land conflict and safeguarding the natural resources upon which they depend.

The workshop was attended by more than 90 participants, including the participation of H.E. Chhor Rattanak, Under-Secretary of State of Ministry of Environment, H.E. Ngin Sovimean, Deputy Provincial Governor of Mondulkiri, local communities, representatives of the General Department of Local Communities and General Department of Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment, Mr. Steve Paglia, WWF-Cambodia Conservation Program Director, Mr. Mey Phalla, Head of Eastern Plains Landscape, WWF-Cambodia, and representatives of Mondulkiri Provincial Department, local authorities, members of NGOs and other partners. The workshop participants heard information sharing on the project’s key achievements, lessons learnt and good implementation practices of community livelihood initiatives that promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

After more than five years of implementation, 18 Community Protected Areas covering 57,361 hectares of forest area were enabled with institutionally secured access to sustainably managed natural resources. These communities protected areas are located adjacent to the Srepok and Phnom Prich Wildlife Sanctuaries and are among 24 community protected areas in whole Mondulkiri Province. These 18 community protected areas are composed of 16,035 members, representing more than 16% of the total population of Mondulkiri province.

Through the project implementation, the local communities also enjoyed livelihood improvement alternatives, focusing on agriculture and NTFP-based enterprises such as raising [domestic] animals and planting crops, which are additional sources of income rather than depending solely on natural resources. For instance, the "Mondulkiri wild honey" with its Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) product trademark plays an important role in enhancing the income for the communities involved, providing an incentive for forest and biodiversity protection.

Among project key outcomes the participants witnessed at the workshop was the communities’ ownership over the management of their natural resources. The communities become more actively involved in all forms, such as activities planning, community forest patrolling, stakeholder networking to further enhance the protection and conservation of the natural resources in their community protected areas.

**His Excellency** **Chhor Rattanak, Under-Secretary of State of Ministry of Environment** said, “I appreciate the key achievements of the project and the cooperation in the management of protected areas of the Eastern Plain Landscape as well as all conservation activities in the Kingdom of Cambodia. I thank in particular all partners and stakeholders for the wildlife sanctuary management support through the provision of technical assistance in law enforcement, wildlife and biodiversity research, and cooperation in natural resource management through community protected areas.

**His Excellency Ngin Sovimean, Deputy Provincial Governor of Mondulkiri** said: “I would like to commend the significant achievements of the project implemented by WWF and other partner NGOs in supporting community livelihood activities development through the establishment and implementation of the community protected areas management, promoting sustainable access to natural resources.

Through the project implementation, gender mainstreaming has been embedded into community practice for managing their community protected areas, encouraging women to play roles in the community protected areas’ management committee. As a result, the number of women serving executive roles increased from 26% to 42%, with 83 women represented their communities among a total of 200 community protected areas’ executive members.

**His Excellency Ngin Sovimean** continued: "Provincial authorities are pleased to provide additional support and call on local authorities to continue the cooperation and support, which are contributing to sustainable development. "These achievements are a step towards learning [good practice] and expanding it in order to benefit the wider community in Mondulkiri in the future."

**Mr. Mey Phalla, Head of Eastern Plains Landscape Program, WWF-Cambodia**, expressed his deep gratitude for the partnership and good cooperation and support from the Ministry of Environment, Provincial Department of Environment. "I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the local authorities, both national and sub-national, for their support in ensuring smooth project implementation, realizing the desired goals as a contribution to sustainable management of natural resources," he said.

Building on the achievements of the project, the communities pledged a continuation of collective efforts with all relevant stakeholders to sustainably manage their natural resources, while actively seek partnerships with social enterprises and other private sector to further develop community livelihoods initiatives in order to enhance local economy and contribute to biodiversity conservation in the landscape.

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