

## Engaging Buddhism in Forest Management in Thailand

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### Abstract

Thailand's royal forest department, the authorized office for control over the state's forest lands and natural resources, has been chronically challenged by the increasing number of Buddhist forest monks, who have encroached and built temples and monasteries in the protected forest areas. The conflict reflects the disagreeable concept of human exclusion from nature. With the highly respectful religious status and Buddhist tradition, it has made the conflict uneasy. The monks themselves receive a lot of support to stay in the forest due to the environmental friendly lifestyle, and prior well-known roles on community development especially forest conservation. However, the state's forest laws say something different. In the last four years the conciliation project '*Buddha Utayan*' or the joint project with monks for forest conservation and reforestation was initiated to clear up the conflict. It made use of the provisions and interpretation of the forest laws. The project has gone extra miles in terms of monks and local people participating in the forest conservation, but unfortunately failed in the strategic objective to halt the expansion of forest encroachment by the forest monks in later years.

**Keywords:** Thailand; Buddhism; Forest monks; Forest Conservation

### Introduction

The conflict between the Royal Forest Department (RFD) and Buddhist monks over the rights to dwell in the forest has gained attention from local reporters, local people, and community-rights NGOs since 2009. Prior to the past four years there were not serious issues. This year (2013) the RFD revealed the encroachment of about four thousand temples and monasteries within the protected forest, and stated that they will be moved out by the law enforcement. The four thousand monasteries are newly found after the 2009 nationwide survey. The report has touched local reporters, local people, as well as the community-rights NGOs once again with the recurring conflicts between the forest offices and the monks.

From the 1960s until today, pursuing the Western conservation concept, local people have been accused of being forest exploiters and degraders by the state's agencies supervising the management and conservation of the forest, natural resources, and environment. Mainly they are the Royal Forest Department (RFD), and the Department for National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP). Legislative directions have brought the protected forest and natural zoning concepts into force. Monks, who have practiced meditation in the forests, are deemed to be forest encroachers and in some respects forest degraders. The same situation affected rural people, who for generations have lived within or near the forest, utilized the forest products, and of course managed forest conservation in their indigenous ways. The forests, where they have lived, were announced legally as the state's national resources. The forest products, for instance, food, fuel, fodder, and construction materials cannot be taken for granted. The RFD and DNP have assumed the duty of confiscating forest lands occupied by local people. Monks, although, not practically impacted earlier, were reminded, for the first time in 2009-2010, of the prohibitions in the legislation, and were meant to be migrated out of the forests. Through many coordination meetings between the forest offices and Sangha Supreme Council (monks' office) and public discussions with concerned parties it was determined that monks could remain in the protected forests by participating in the joint project with monks for forest conservation and reforestation as known as *Buddha Utayan* project.

Today four thousand new monasteries have encroached into the protected forest, making altogether 24 sq.km. of forest lands lost, as reported by the director general of 117-year old RFD. Ambitiously, the office would strictly enforce the forest acts in close coordination with the Sangha Supreme Council and finally resolve the chronic issues. This paper will analyze the issues of Buddhist monks and monasteries in the forest together with the legislation related to the conflicts by using the framework of the rights of communities to manage and conserve their own community forests. In addition, the contribution of the forest monks in the local community and analysis of the *Buddha Utayan* project as a tool for engaging monks in forest management will be discussed. The word 'forest management' used in this paper has a broad meaning and includes forest conservation, protection, afforestation, reforestation, and so on.

### Buddhist monks and monasteries in the forests: Historical background

Buddhist monks are religiously respected by more than 95 per cent of the Thai population, the highest per capita

percentage in the world, according to the 2012 report from the country's Office of National Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism, the Buddhist sect that studies and strictly conforms to Gautama Buddha's teaching (*Dhamma*), is followed by the majority of monks and lay people.

Since the time of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, Buddhist monks were encouraged to live in the forests and practice meditation. The Gautama Buddha himself lived in the forest most of the time after his ordination. Accounts of his life are rich in imagery of plants. For example, according to Buddhist traditions it is believed that where the Buddha took his first steps the lotus flower (*Nelumbo nucifera*) sprang up, he often meditated under a jambos tree (*Syzygium jambos*), his enlightenment occurred under the sacred bo tree (*Ficus religiosa*) and when he departed life the sal trees (*Shorea*) blossomed out of season (Gosling, 2001). In meditation practice monks usually study their mind, and the truth of life and nature, which is the essence of Buddhist doctrine. Deep forests, usually isolated, quiet, and far from human disturbance, are good places to practice meditation. As the forests function as shelter and as a place for practicing meditation, monks and laypeople together protect and conserve forests and the natural environment. Cutting down a plant, digging the earth, hurting or killing animals, are for example prohibited according to the monk's 226 precepts. The areas where monks live are known as *khet apaiyathan* (forgiveness zone) or lives sanctuary. These are the reasons why Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel (1995) described Buddhism as 'ecocentric', which is focusing on all living things. The monks therefore play the role of forest and wildlife conservator, besides being the spiritual leader and preacher. In Thailand, monks have been supported to live in the forests either permanently or temporarily to practice meditation since the Buddha's time.

Buddhist monks are referred to as forest monks and urban monks, depending on where they live. The forest monks focus on the meditation practices for purifying the mind from internal and external arousing factors. The quiet nature, like the isolated and quiet forest, therefore, is good for them. The urban monks focus on the *Dhamma* or Buddha's teaching, and probably other scholarly education, so it is considered convenient for them to stay in the urban towns and close to the secular schools or universities. Nevertheless there are no major differences in the monks' daily activities and precepts. Early in the morning before dawn, the monks' day starts with praying and meditation in their living quarter; at dawn, walking to the villages on their alms round; then returning to the temple and having their daily single meal. The Buddha laid down the rule that monks shall not cook or store their own food, as well as cultivate and buy food. The intention was for the monks to be free from greed of food storing and the worldly burden of cooking. This rule, not only makes the monks dependent on the generosity of lay followers, but also indirectly makes them adopt the polite and humble manner resulting from the alms dependence. Anyhow, this is to simplify the lives of monks and to enrich the spiritual lives of lay people. The remaining time of the day is dedicated for studying *Dhamma*, meditating, cleaning the quarter, praying, giving sermons, and relaxing. The monks' simple lifestyle is considered as environmentally friendly, and it influences lay people not to furnish luxurious things to the monks.

Historical perspectives on religious background and the social norms and traditions support monks to stay in the forest, far from human worries and disturbance. The traditions have been observed continuously without conditions.

### **Forest monks and Forest Laws: Conflicts development**

Like other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand in the early time had more than 50 per cent forest cover, people freely accessed the forest and made use of timber for small construction, cut down some trees to clear a plot of land for agriculture, collected non-timber forest products for subsistence and financial purposes, and some households even dwelled in the forest close to the watershed. The same as community people depending on forests, the monks, who depend on both forests and people, have lived close to the forests and community throughout time. However, the big changes to the country's forest conservation context started in the 1960s, when a series of legislation, for example, the 1960 Act for the Preservation and Protection of Wildlife and its 1992 Amendments, 1961 National Park Act, and 1964 National Forest Reserve Act, changed the freely accessible forests status to formal conservative status, that not only limited access to the protected forest areas but also excluded indigenous people and forest dependents who live within and surrounding the forest from the areas (FAO 2009).

The human unfriendly approaches resulted from the severe deterioration rate of the country's forest cover by the spheres of capitalism, and advice derived from the Western organizations who provided financial and technical support at that time, for instance, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), United Nations for Development Program (UNDP), etc. Deforestation and environmental degradation was caused by the encroachment of rural people seeking agricultural lands, and the exploitation of forest and ecosystem services by humans dwelling in the forest. Not

taking the state's long term timber concessions into account, the local people, who have lived in the forest for generations, and who entered into the forest for food, fuel, fodder, and construction materials, have been accused of being the forest encroachers and exploiters, whom the state should strictly get rid of. The Western influenced concept of excluding people from the protected forest, and that natural resources are public treasure to be centralized and controlled by the state only, has impacted to one to two million local community people, who have depended and still depend on the forests (RECOFTC 2012). The forest monks, nonetheless, who were not the targeted group forced to move out at the earlier stage, have unavoidably been affected by the enactment of legislation in the later years.

No matter the existence of legislation, which sees local people as aliens to nature, the number of temples and monasteries in the protected areas is dramatically increasing. Fleeing themselves from the ripples of urbanization spheres, forest monks have moved deeper and deeper in the forest. As revealed by the 2009 survey, the RFD was challenged by the 5,529 cases of Buddhist temples and monasteries located within the protected areas (SSCT 2009), covering approximately 308.42 sq.km. of forest lands as referred to in the Committee for Prevention and Resolution of Monks in Forest Areas Meeting. Borrowing the concept of human out of nature, those forest monks were accused of encroaching, deforesting, and degrading the environment; and were told they would be forced to move out of the protected forests. The accusation was absolutely contradicted by the monks' environmental friendly lifestyle, and the monks' precepts. Just plucking a leaf is wrong according to the precepts, said a monk.

Despite the environmentally friendly lifestyle of the monks, which has been widely perceived, the accusation of forest encroachment has stemmed from the concept of centralized authoritative forest management by the state's offices. Since forest and forest resources belong to the state, the monks who live in there are encroachers by law. Regrettably, the state with the absolute control over the country's forest resources has known too little of the local characteristics in terms of forest management. In the traditional way of conduct in the rural community, local people and monks live peacefully inter-dependent. The monks, living close to the community and depending on alms offered by the local people, usually being sought for spiritual guidance, are invited to stay in the forest monasteries to protect the forest by the spiritual virtue of Buddhism. In practice, the monks, in many cases, led the community people to fight against illegal logging cases or the grey forest land clearing for agricultural plantation. Tree ordination is an outstanding example of local forest conservation developed through the local context and circumstances (Darlington 1998; 2005). It is a Buddhist ritual adopted from the ordination of Buddhist monks performed by binding a saffron robe around the big trees to mark that those trees were ordained and became a part of the Buddhist monastic compound. The tree ordination discussed in Morrow (2011) is an invented tradition and spread to other ecological sites. Its performance by non-Buddhist minorities or hill tribes in Thailand does not demonstrate a religious commitment but rather a political one. See also (Taylor 1997; Tannenbaum 2000; Delcore 2004). Binding the big trees with saffron monastic robes symbolized the lives sanctuary, and reminded the illegal loggers or hunters of the Buddhist moral. Having the monks in the community forests could keep the forest until today, according to the local people, because the illegal loggers and wildlife hunters feel uneasy or fear to do wrong in the monastic compound and surroundings.

Despite the fact that lots of the forest monks have saved the forests from the illegal logging and land clearing for agriculture, some conservationist NGOs supported the clear restricted zones for monasteries out of the protected forest areas. Explaining that the monks and the lay people directly and indirectly exploit the forests and ecosystems, the example of *Dhutanga* or monk's wandering was given (Chantian 2009). The *Dhutanga* described in Buddha's teaching was the monks stay isolated and simple in a forest; sit under a tree; stay in the outdoors, in a cemetery, or in the place offered. The intention was for the monks to stay harmoniously with nature and create the least disturbance to nature, or the villagers, or with wildlife nearby; to survive on only what is offered on alms round once a day. These ways, step by step, will wash away the greed and demand intrinsic in the human mind. In the past, a monk might wander the *Dhutanga* alone or with one or two of his followers. The monastic activities were gracefully acceptable and respectful. The *Dhutanga*, nowadays, varies from the tradition; it may comprise a group of two to three people, or a parade of hundreds of people of monks and followers. In the deep forests, there is a risk that wanderers might lose the way, or be attacked by wild animals. The DNP has spent lots of manpower and money to find and rescue monks lost in the forests annually, and the cases are continuously happening. Wandering into protected areas in a big group of people, on the other hand, creates noise and nuisance to the wildlife, as well as pollutes the ecological habitats one way or another.

Gradually developed, the conflict over the rights to live in the protected forest between the RFD and the monks attached to different guidance increased in 2009 – 2010. The RFD, with the aim to protect and increase the forest conservation areas to reach 25 per cent of the country's areas set forth in the 1992 National Forestry Policy, wanted to confiscate the forest lands. On the other hand, the provisions of the 1997 Constitution, the first

issuance, recognized the rights of local people to protect the forests in the community conforming to the local conditions, culture, beliefs, and traditional knowledge. The conflicts have been brought into discussions as a mechanism to solve the issues. The solution, legislative exception, of the joint project with monks for forest conservation and reforestation or '*Buddha Utayan*' has been initiated.

### **'Middle path' resolution: Between the lines in legislative provisions**

Started in the late nineteenth century, the history of the country's forest management and conservation had changed by the enforcement of forest laws to give the state centralized control over forest areas, logging, collection of forest products, reforestation, wildlife habitats, wildlife species, and watershed areas (Kaiyoorawong 2005). Influenced by the western concept of forest management to exclude people from nature, the 1964 National Forest Reserve Act does not allow people in the forest areas, except for study or research purposes. Section 14 of the act says '*Within the national reserved forest, no person shall hold or possess land, make a construction, destruct or burn forest, do logging, collect forest product, or do any matter what so ever with purport to harm or decay a condition of national reserved forest, ...*' A person, according to section 12, may claim right over or utilize land in the national reserved forest area before an effective date of the Ministerial Regulation determining a national reserved forest, but shall be forced to move out, according to section 13 by receiving a compensation. In summary, no people, except the authorized government officials, are allowed in the forest.

Examining the provisions of the 1964 National Forest Reserve Act, it does not give exemption to the forest monks as a person, nor religious activities as a purpose, to stay or conduct activities in the forest. The result is that the monks in the forest areas have been considered as forest encroachers. The RFD, as the law custodian, however, did not enforce the act against the forest monks in particular until 2009, when the 5,529 cases of monasteries in the forest challenged the controlling power of the office. Some monastic temples have been found not following the Buddhist simple and environmental friendly tradition, but instead focusing on construction of buildings and expansion in the forest areas, which had gradually brought the monks into a conflict with the RFD. Dealing with the sensitive issue concerning a nationwide religious institution and locally respected figures is not easy. However, the longer RFD, with the centralized conservation of the state's resource in mind, has neglected this conflict, the more cases of monasteries in the forest have occurred, and large areas of forest lands and resources have been degraded directly and indirectly. Hence, in 2010 there was a ministerial attempt to resolve this chronic issue by enforcing the legislative provisions. In the nationwide survey conducted by the RFD 5,529 cases of monasteries not complying with the laws were found. As the authorized office to oversee all monks in the country, the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand joined the coordination meeting with the RFD to find solutions; and additional meetings with concerned parties, for example, community-rights advocacy NGOs, conservationist NGOs, academia on different platforms were held. The Ministry of National Resources and Environment (MNRE) minister announced cooperation with the monks on forest conservation and management. The monasteries in the forest areas would be a part of *Buddha Utayan* or Buddhist Park project. Each monastery was required to register to participate in the project and work plan of the Buddhist Park project, within their original demarcation.

Given the provisions of section 19 in the 1964 National Forest Reserve Act, accompanied by section 19 of the 1961 National Parks Act, and section 38 of the Act of Wildlife Preservation and Protection, the monks are able to remain in the forest areas by participation in the cooperative project *Buddha Uthayan* with the purpose of forest conservation, and the monastic compounds are considered the project areas. Focusing on section 19 under the 1964 National Forest Reserve Act, it says '*for the purpose of control, supervision or conservation of a national reserved forest, the Director-General may order in writing a competence officer or officer of the Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant to act in any manner whatsoever in a national reserved forest*'. Joining Buddhist Park project is probably seen as trade-off measure instead of moving the monks out of the forests. However, the solution had softened the conflict between the RFD and the monks in the compromised manner, referred to the Buddhist term of the 'middle path'.

Referred to as the golden mean to achievement, the 'middle path' or the moderate practice was the Buddha's true wisdom adopted from natural rules. Proper watering is the best for the tree, as a tree cannot tolerate too much watering, as well as too little. The RFD's strict legislative enforcement is at one extreme. Ignoring the increasing number of monasteries violating the laws is at the other extreme. The policy to allow the monks and monasteries in the protected forest areas with conditions is a compromise and hopefully good for all parties. It is presumably adopted the 'middle path' from the Buddhist way of conduct.



### **'Buddha Utayan': National park for the mind**

The joint project with monks for forest conservation and reforestation '*Buddha Utayan*' or the Buddhist Park project has been set up under the provision of Section 19 in the 1964 National Forest Reserve Act, accompanied by Section 19 of the 1961 National Parks Act, and Section 38 of the Act of Wildlife Preservation and Protection. For the conservation purposes, MNRE has been able to permit forest monks to stay in the designated forest areas with the restrictions of not building additional construction, and not expanding the monastic areas beyond the original demarcation. There is a long process for project registration. The abbot of each monastery located within the forest areas shall submit the form clearly describing the boundary and demarcation of the monastery, together with the forest conservation work plan in agreement with the community assembly and village head, the regional offices of forest resource management or forest coordination centers, and the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand or its designated regional offices. In project management, the monks will work hand in hand with the local forest officers and community people on forest management and conservation within the original monastic boundary.

The Buddhist Park project was initiated with the strategic objectives: mitigate the chronic conflict between the RFD and the monks on the utilization of the forest areas; promote the local rights recognition in forest management and conservation; and stop the expanding encroachment of the forest temples and monasteries by referring to the list of all registered monasteries in the forests and the boundary. The first objective has brought the forest monks and the RFD in harmonious reconciliation. The monks were even happier, when the MNRE unveiled the idea of the Buddhist World Park construction within 21.75 sq.km. area of national reserved forests in Prachinburi Province (MNRE 2009). Planning to be a new landmark for Buddhist lay people around the world under the theme '*Dhamma for Nature*'; the concept of less building in nature has been adopted. As naturally isolated and quiet, it was designated to be the place monks and laypeople can come for meditation, *Dhudanga* wandering, and other religious activities. In contradiction, copies of the Four Holy Places of Buddhism were included in the construction plan with the welcome to all Buddhist countries to build a temple within the Buddhist world park area. In the 2010 World Fellowship of Buddhists in Bangkok the idea of the Buddhist world park had been agreed and supported by the monks and lay people, with the question asking for the rational concept of less building in the nature by forest conservationists (Chantian 2010).

Contrasting the national agenda of the Buddhist world park, the *Buddha Utayan* has a loose policy framework with the following activities: 1) RFD officers provide knowledge on natural resources and forest conservation to forest monks; 2) Forest monks as mediators to make nearby villagers understand the forest and natural resource conservation; 3) Technically restore or reforest in the degraded and deforested or appropriate areas; 4) Adhere signs of plant name, and Buddhist proverbs raising forest conservative awareness; and 5) RFD officers together with forest monks prevent new encroachment into the forest areas (SSCT 2009). Other activities depending on the local traditions, culture, and beliefs may be proposed. Looking closely, the policy has been framed in parallel with the national park concept given expression by Legakul (1992) that the national park should be '*food for eyes, for ears, and for the brain*' Additional to the national park, the framework of *Buddha Utayan* project has involved the participation of the monks and community people in the project, which recognized participatory forest management by the local people. Being one of the good projects in respect of participatory forest management and rehabilitated monks in the forest, the *Buddha Utayan* can provide food for eyes, for ears, for the brain, and for the mind.

The *Buddha Utayan* project has gone far in reconciling the RFD and the monks, in addition, the policy and activities designed have reflected the local realities. The Buddhist world park project, however, has not gone much beyond the traditional national parks, where the buildings are '*within the protected areas system, natural ecosystems are assessed not for their ecological significance but for their constructed aesthetic and economic value*' (Laungaramsri 2005), known as today's term 'eco-tourism', or 'eco-Buddhism' in this respect.

The Buddhist Park project has been very welcomed with 6,084 monasteries registered up to the present. However, the project objective to stop the expanding encroachment of the forest temples and monasteries in the forest areas seems ideal. For about 4,000 newly built monasteries without legal approval, the RFD (2013) determined to enforce the forest acts against them after the nationwide survey is completed. This means the monks shall move out of the forests and return to the original monastery where they used to stay. Within four years from the last reconciliation, the second confiscation of the forest lands will repeat, and it will test the RFD whether this time the objectives are successfully met.

### **Role of forest conservator: Right job to the 'local champion'**

Wandering in the Dongyai forest in Buriram province in the northeastern Thailand, the conservationist monk Phra Prajak Khuttajitto in 1990s learned that the state's concession for land clearing for Eucalyptus plantations

was given to a private sector organization. He, with the support from villagers, performed the tree ordination in the Dongyai forest, and led the protest against the state's unhealthy forest concession until he was arrested and forced to leave the monkhood. The case of Phra Prajak was not only fighting for the conservation of the Dongyai forests, that the villagers depended on, but also fighting against politics, military influences, and the injustice and corrupted state's program. Although the long fight ended with the loss to Phra Prajak and the villagers, with the consequence of the loss of the Dongyai forest to the Eucalyptus plantation business, in every discussion about forest conservationist, Phra Prajak Khuttajitto would be one of the big names.

Credited to be the first monk who publicly organized and performed the tree ordination in Payao province in 1988 (Delcore 2004), Phra Khru Manas initiated the ritual mixed from Buddhism, animism and local beliefs with his concerns about deforestation and illegal logging. With the intention to discourage loggers from cutting down trees, the Buddhist symbolic saffron robe was bound around the big trees, and it marked the Buddhist boundary where lives sanctuary should be conducted. How much the invented Buddhist ritual has been effective, in terms of forest conservation, can be illustrated by the cross-community influences throughout Thailand's local Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities, as well as cross-bordered transferring to other Buddhist countries in the southeast Asia, for instance, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, etc. The tree ordination has been used as a tool for raising awareness on forest conservation, and for protests. Even in the urban Bangkok early this year, Kasetsart University has adopted the ritual in order to protest the clearing of some university land and big trees for express way construction. Besides the sense of protest, the tree ordinations during 1996-1997 were symbolized as making merit celebrating the King Rama IX's Golden Jubilee in the reign, in which every sector had fully participated. Since then tree ordination has been brought into one of the activities concerning forest conservation. The former rich examples illustrated Limsuwat's work (1983) that the monks in the rural villages are usually involve in the community development work, besides being spiritual leaders and giving guidance to the people's daily life. Despite the monk's rules and the Thai cultural values to separate Buddhism and monks from worldly activities, she explained in her thesis the reasons monks take part in the rural community activities are 1) following Lord Buddha's teaching that every monk shall serve the community as needed; and 2) maintaining the good relationship and harmony between the monks and villagers. The participation in rural development is to maintain recognition of monk's status in the community. Monk's participation can be divided into two categories: freely carrying out the activities corresponding with the needs and conditions of each locality, and formulating the community development programs with financial support and cooperation from the government or outside sources.

In the author's field visit in 2013 to Lopburi province in the central Thailand, forest monks initiated the rural villages' participation in community forestry projects. Some monks led the local villagers to suppress forest fires, as well as construct forest fire breaks. As practical forest conservators, in some communities forest monks were used as a 'moral buffer' by the community people. In the forest areas with severe illegal logging and hunting, monks would usually be invited to stay close to the area to protect the forest and wildlife with the Buddhist virtue. The monks have been able to protect and restore some forest land because their views and wishes are far more likely to be honored than laws and demands of state officials (Lyndon & Yongvanit 2005). Linking the monk to the role of forest conservator in the Buddhist park project is nothing new or different from the way of rural reality. It is only an official acknowledgement by the state to use monks to connect to the community, as the manpower and the beneficiary from the forest conservation.

## Conclusion

Following Theravada Buddhist tradition, monks stay in the forest to study their mind and practice meditation. The environmental friendly lifestyle and inter-dependence has woven the good relations between the monks and the local people: monks are not only spiritual leaders and preachers but also are involved in the development work as needed by the community; local people support the monks on their daily alms round, and other necessities, for example, medicines, monk's robes, basic groceries, and so on. The conflict between the monks and the RFD over the rights to live in the forest gradually developed but sparked recently, because of the different attachments of each party: the monks to the Buddha's teaching to stay in the forest, and the RFD to the series of forest legislation with the concept of excluding people from the forest.

The state's conciliation initiative '*Buddha Utayan*' project or the joint project with monks for forest conservation and reforestation made use of the provision of the 1964 National Forest Reserve Act. With the conservation purpose, monks are permitted to stay in the forest by participating in the Buddhist park project. With a commendable framework to delegate some forest conservation aspects to the monks, Buddhist parks have served as a platform for ecological education, tourism, meditation practices, as well as community participation, and bring the rural lives into harmony again. Outstandingly, the forest encroachment cases by forest monks are

unexpectedly increasing after the implementation of the project. The reasons for the new 4,000 forest encroachment cases should be carefully studied and discussed with multi-parties to set the right policy. Lastly, contradictory legislative provisions of the forest acts and the Constitution on the rights of community people should be amended to be consistent. Applying the law consistently will put all parties on the same page in respect of their rights, liberty, and duty on the country's forest management and conservation.

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