

# **Involuntary Restrictions Process Framework**

## **Strengthening community based bird biodiversity conservation and monitoring through local livelihood improvement and capacity building in 3S River Basin, Cambodia**

This process framework was prepared by Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) and provides social safeguard information regarding involuntary restrictions on access and use of natural resources by people during the course of this project, for which RUPP is requesting funding support from the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF). This process framework includes background to the project, social and threat analyses, plans for participatory implementation, explanation of how groups eligible for assistance and vulnerable groups will be identified, planned measures to mitigate impacts and assist affected groups, explanation of a mechanism to monitor safeguard issues, and a grievance mechanism.

### **Background**

The project goal is conservation of threatened bird biodiversity through education and awareness-raising, conservation incentive programs, livelihood improvement, and capacity building of local communities and concerned provincial government agencies to implement participatory monitoring and management interventions in the Sekong and Sesan River. Primary project objectives include: 1) working with local communities to establish and assess the level of payment acceptance for protection of bird nests; 2) implementing the conservation incentive scheme for nest and habitat protection of targeted sandbar-nesting bird and softshell turtle species by developing protection agreements with local communities; 3) establishing community development funds linked to nest and habitat protection agreements; 4) establishing a monitoring program to evaluate trends in bird populations, habitats, and the success of the conservation incentive program under community-based protection agreements; 5) enhance mechanisms for integrating monitoring data and community-based conservation interventions with provincial government conservation management activities; and 6) building local conservation capacity through education and training for local students and communities in bird survey, ecological monitoring, and bird nest protection methods.

This project was developed based on existing project activities that have been conducted by RUPP since 2011, first with support from a CEPF small grant to conduct a pilot study, and continued with support from MacArthur Foundation. Support from CEPF for this project will allow RUPP to continue and expand on its previous activities.

Focal species for conservation include sandbar-nesting birds (River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*, River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelli*, Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*, and Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*) and turtles (Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle *Pelochelys cantorii* and Asiatic Softshell Turtle *Amyda cartilaginea*). Nest protection will be implemented along the Sekong River comprising

the entire Cambodian stretch of river, and the Sesan River between Ta Veng district town in Ratanakiri Province and Ksach Thmei village in Stung Treng Province. Project activities will involve five key sites for wildlife conservation (two on Sekong River and 3 on Sesan River) and will include community participants from eight villages (Nyeun and Nyang Som villages on Sekong River; Koh Pong, Hat Pok, Voen Hoy, Lumphoat, Svay Rieng, and Ksach Thmei villages on Sesan River).

Conservation of key species and habitats will be attained through a participatory, community-based approach to conservation involving voluntary agreements linked to financial incentives for communities to protect nests. This project will not involve involuntary resettlement of people, and the amount of involuntary restriction of resources used by people will be very limited in scope.

The conservation incentives program will consist of enlisting community nest guards who will maintain a permanent protective presence at key sites for conservation for the duration of the breeding season to identify and prevent threats to sandbar-nesting birds and softshell turtles to the extent possible. Bird nesting areas will be demarcated within the previously identified conservation priority areas and we will post signs about the project at these nesting sites. We will also employ roaming community conservation rangers to patrol the entire section of river within community boundaries, and who will conduct conservation awareness-raising, and also monitor and report on issues and activities occurring on these sections of river (any illegal or destructive activities will be reported to the relevant local government authorities). Payments will be made according to the protection agreements and may be made to the individuals employed as community nest guards and rangers, as well as to village funds that will benefit communities more broadly.

### **Proposed Intervention**

The principle threats to biodiversity and livelihoods along the Sekong and Sesan Rivers arise from the conversion of forest for cultivation, over-fishing, unsustainable forestry practices including illegal logging of luxury hardwoods and hunting of wild animals for consumption and trade (among them rare and endangered species), gold mining, and hydropower development. The activities engaged in by local inhabitants of these rivers are conducted on both a non-customary commercial scale and also for subsistence livelihood purposes. In order to respond to these threats, RUPP will support collaborative site-based conservation activities on the Sekong and Sesan Rivers. The project activities that may limit local access to natural resources include:

- Implementing community-based sandbar-nesting bird and softshell turtle nest protection schemes at key breeding sites. Although the nest protection program will involve voluntary agreements and conservation incentives for project participants, non-participants may be minimally restricted from access to natural resources in the immediate vicinity of nests.

- Establishing and deploying roaming community rangers to patrol larger sections of river in order to monitor and report on illegal, destructive, and/or unsustainable activities. Community rangers will not seek to prevent natural resource use that is legal, non-destructive, and sustainable.
- Work with communities, relevant NGOs, and provincial government agencies to integrate monitoring data and community-based conservation interventions with NGO conservation activities and government conservation management plans.

### **Social and Threat Analysis**

In discussing the safeguards here, it should be considered that by definition wildlife and habitat conservation could affect customary use by local communities. This reduction in use is essential in some cases and places if species are to avoid extinction. In Cambodia, previous assessments show that, due to low abundance of sandbar-nesting bird species such as River Tern, Great Thick-knee, and River Lapwing, customary use and the value in society is minimal because of the low return per effort spent to harvest eggs. Based on previous interviews with local people, egg harvest for these species is opportunistic, and communities on the Sekong, and Sesan Rivers do not rely on egg collection as a significant customary protein source. Little Ringed Plover and Small Pratincole have higher abundances making it easier to harvest eggs, especially of Small Pratincole which nests colonially. However, the latter two species have small clutches (1-3 eggs) and very small eggs (six Pratincole or Plover eggs are the equivalent volume of about one chicken egg), and previous experience of project staff indicates that egg collection is primarily a past-time of local children and provides only a minimal contribution to household nutritional intake.

Turtle nests may be easier for people to locate than bird nests, because turtles leave obvious and easily recognizable tracks that may lead to nests. Although rarer than most of the sandbar-nesting bird species, softshell turtles have nests containing large clutches (generally 30-40 eggs), and provide a potentially higher return for local people to harvest nests. However, because of their rarity, harvesting turtle eggs is more of a windfall situation than a regular, customary food resource for people. Unlike sandbar birds, which are not customarily eaten by local people, softshell turtles also have higher value for consumption and trade and are thus somewhat sought after (people sometimes set hooks and lines for turtles). Because Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle is Globally Endangered and Asiatic Softshell Turtle is Globally Threatened-Vulnerable, all exploitation of softshell turtles or their nests, either for consumption or trade should be prevented, and not considered a limitation of local communities' rights and access to natural resources.

However, except in the case of endangered turtles, restrictions on egg collection will be voluntary, and the project will provide financial incentives to compensate people who voluntarily choose to protect nests rather than harvesting the eggs for their personal consumption. Financial compensation of protecting bird and turtle nests will greatly outweigh the value of the eggs for personal consumption. Other resource use will only be restricted in areas of immediate vicinity to nests. Otherwise, the project will not seek to

limit resource use or subsistence activities on sandbars, unless the activities are obviously illegal and destructive (e.g. illegal hunting, logging, fishing, gold mining). As stated in the previous section, non-participating resource-users are likely to experience some reduction in access to natural resources. However, loss of access to resources is expected to be limited in scope, and restrictions on resource use will be imposed only at specific sites used for breeding by sandbar bird and turtle species, and only for a specific timeframe covering the peak of the breeding period (approximately 3 months).

In addition to community nest guards who will be permanently stationed at key breeding sites, the project will enlist roaming community rangers who will patrol larger sections of river. Roaming community patrols will not seek to limit customary sustainable resource use, except in very limited areas in the immediate vicinity of nests. Rather, roaming community patrols will monitor and report activities (both customary and non-customary uses) that are obviously illegal, destructive, or unsustainable (e.g. gold mining, illegal hunting, using sandbars as staging areas during transportation of illegal timber) to project staff, as well as to the relevant provincial authorities. Roaming community patrols will also conduct awareness-raising for their communities and other people encountered on the rivers and sandbars.

One potential risk associated with this project is that people who participate in the project will become dependent on external support and financial incentives for nest protection, and may have trouble readjusting in the event that funding for nest protection ceases. However, restrictions on legal, non-harmful customary subsistence activities regarding use of natural resources will be very limited in scope; the project will only restrict subsistence activities such as agriculture and fishing in areas immediately adjacent to nesting sites, but will not restrict people from these activities in areas that are an adequate distance away from nests to not cause undue disturbance to nesting birds. Therefore, even in the event of loss of financial support for nest production, livelihoods are not expected to be greatly impacted.

In recent years, local communities have experienced a significant loss of access and availability of natural resources. Natural forest and aquatic resources that communities have traditionally and customarily relied on have become scarcer; forests are disappearing due to illegal and commercial logging and agricultural expansion, and fisheries have been negatively impacted by upstream hydropower dams and overfishing. There is a distinct need for alternative livelihood support to communities in the project areas that have already experienced decreases in natural resources customarily relied on for their livelihoods. This project will provide communities with immediate livelihood benefits, while also empowering them to have a role in conservation decision-making regarding natural resources that support their livelihoods.

While the project will seek to enforce law and regulation relating to unsustainable and illegal resource use, the project also seeks to preserve subsistence livelihood activities that are legal and sustainable. The project also seeks to provide opportunities for people, who are reliant on unsustainable and/or illegal practices to maintain subsistence livelihoods, to reduce their dependency on illegal and/or unsustainable natural resource

activities through participation in community-based conservation and alternative livelihoods schemes.

The project will seek to ensure sustainability of the project's goals and objectives through awareness and education activities, and will also seek additional future funding to continue nest protection, as well as other expand into other potential activities such as developing additional alternative livelihood strategies or opportunities for ecotourism. Additionally, we are collaborating with established community groups, relevant NGOs working in these areas such as BirdLife International, 3SPN, and CEPA, and provincial government agencies such as provincial Forestry and Fisheries Cantonments and provincial Departments of Environment to ensure long-term sustainability of project goals towards supporting wildlife conservation and non-harmful livelihood activities by local communities, while reducing illegal or destructive activities within project areas.

### **Participatory Implementation**

The primary focus of the project is to utilize participatory community-based approaches to conservation to protect bird nests on the Sekong River and Sesan Rivers that have been implemented by RUPP since 2011. All aspects of the project will maintain a participatory focus, through consultations with the communities and relevant stakeholders, so that communities can make informed decisions and can be empowered to have active roles in the decision-making processes regarding natural resource use and conservation. The RUPP project team members have extensive experience with conducting community consultations and implementing participatory methodologies, as well as in education, awareness-raising, and capacity building. On the Sekong and Sesan Rivers, RUPP has already conducted some awareness-raising activities and participatory consultations with eight communities prior to and during bird nest protection program activities. The community meetings are structured to be informative and participatory with discussions on bird status and conservation context, local opinions regarding project goals and design, combined with a short presentations and/or video.

RUPP will seek to ensure that opinions and input are sought from a diversity of groups (regarding age, gender, ethnicity, income level, etc.) during community consultations and during the participatory processes, and that the distinct priorities of each group are taken into account during project implementation.

### **Identification of Vulnerability and Eligibility for Assistance**

All the communities with which this project will work are subsistence agricultural communities and as such can be considered vulnerable. These communities experience poverty, dependence on natural resources, lack of access to services, and lack of clear resource and land tenure arrangements. Communities holding customary title are vulnerable to non-customary resource exploitation that depletes their customary resource base. All communities are vulnerable to unpredictable impacts arising from national and regional economic development including land conflict, and hydrological changes

stemming from the current and proposed construction of hydropower dams upstream and at the confluence of the Sesan and Srepok Rivers.

There is a significant population of Indigenous people in the target area who may be subject to specific vulnerabilities. This is discussed further in the Social Assessment and Indigenous People's Plan. The project strengthens Indigenous communities' ability to protect their customary lands, while the participatory consultation process will seek to identify and respond to issues specific to Indigenous people.

The goal of the project is to provide opportunities for communities to value and protect biodiversity and participate in conservation activities. The project will seek to identify the most vulnerable groups (poor, indigenous, women, etc.) and provide assistance to these groups through direct employment of community members and establishment of an incentive-based conservation scheme to protect breeding sites of sandbar-nesting birds.

### **Measures to Mitigate Impacts and Assist Affected Groups**

The project does not have provisions to provide direct compensation or "one-for-one" mitigation measures for involuntary restriction on livelihood activities. However, voluntary agreements for bird nest protection will be established with as many resource users as possible, and the accompanying financial incentives are expected to be equal or greater to the limited voluntary restrictions on livelihood activities in order to ensure protection of key nesting sites. If, through community consultations, the project finds that there are opportunity costs due to loss of access to resources at nest sites under protection, we will make every effort to include resource users who lost opportunities in the project so that they can participate in conservation activities and receive financial benefits for nest protection.

### **Monitoring Safeguard Issues**

Monitoring safeguard issues will be an ongoing process throughout the project, through interviews with project participants and non-participating resource users (e.g. fishermen), and through community consultations. We will ensure social safeguards through comprehensive and participatory consultation so that communities can make informed decisions. We will hold regular feedback sessions with community participants to assess the community response to the project, including encouraging community members to share any negative aspects of the project, such as regarding restrictions on access to natural resources. Ensuring social safeguards are a high priority for RUPP and we will make assessments at least monthly, based on the ongoing monitoring of social safeguard issues.

### **Conflict Resolution and Grievance Mechanism**

RUPP will ensure that community members receive contact information for all RUPP field personnel, as well as for key partner organization personnel, and the CEPF Regional Implementation Team at IUCN. Community members will be encouraged to contact

RUPP, our partner organizations or the RIT immediately if project-related conflicts or grievances arise. Before, during, and after project implementation, we will consult with community members to discuss their suggestions, misgivings or concerns about the project. We will use an adaptive management approach to project implementation to make adjustments as needed according to conservation needs of bird species, to incorporate community members' suggestions, and to reduce the likelihood of potential conflicts or grievances arising from the project. If grievances arise, we will work with the community members involved, with participation from other organizations where appropriate, to resolve conflicts and reach mutual agreements between all parties. Any grievances raised will be brought to the attention of CEPF and the RIT within 30 days, together with a plan for remedial action.