

**Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions**

CEPF Grant 112465

Aga Khan Agency for Habitat

Improved Management of the Corridor Connecting Zorkul Natural Reserve and Tajik National  
Park

Tajikistan

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## 8. Project background

We will work inside the two state reserves (Tajik National Park/KBA 35), Zorkul Nature Reserve/KBA33), with the local government agencies formally responsible for the management of land between those reserves, and with the hunters and pastoralists who use that land and are the de facto land managers. This is reflected in the four Components and associated Deliverables, shown in the separate section of this proposal. By improving management of the two reserves, by changing the behavior of pastoralists and hunters, and by promoting adoption of better local land management policies by government, we will improve the overall management of at least part of the Pamir-Alai and Wakhan Mountains corridor (CEPF priority Corridor 15).

Although significant efforts from the government have been made in the recent years to protect vulnerable species in the Zorkul natural reserve, recent trends observed by the association of hunters of Tajikistan, show that several areas which were previously highly populated with Marco Polo Sheep and Pamirian Ibex, are getting significantly less populated every year since 2009 and less and less species are observed in these areas. This is largely due to the factor that the governor of GBAO gave permission to herders to let their livestock graze in the protected area, due to lack of grazing land in Ishkashim district. It is estimated that currently there are approximately 6000 Marco Polo sheeps in the area, and their numbers are expected to significantly decline with the depletion of resources and degradation of land by the 45,000 livestock that graze in the areas. Due to the competition over the limited resources and trophy hunting, Marco Polo Sheep and Pamirian Ibex are gradually changing their migration routes to transition through Afghanistan to China. These species historically entered Zorkul during the month of September and then crossed the border to China, however, currently the animals are crossing the border from Afghanistan, straight to China. The absence of these species is the result of an issue; the main issue would be the imbalance of ecosystem as a result of the migration of these animals, so this is a symptom of a problem. If this continues, the local ecosystem might be ruined eventually as a result of this imbalance. The main issue in the project area is not only the grazing lands, but rather the indiscriminate nature of grazing in this area. This is a clear case of inadequate corridor management, lack of zoning, and poor arrangements to revitalize the grazing grounds. It is therefore the target area needs proper ecosystem-friendly land use planning, enabling policies for stakeholders to manage the local ecosystem and engagement of local CSO's with public sector entities for long-term and sustainable management of the targeted ecosystems. Scientific data and evidence would certainly help build our case and support the achievement of the objective.

There is a land management issue in the project target area, and this issue is seen across large area. AKAH is focusing on this specific area because there are limited resources and limited CSO's that work there. The fragile equilibrium of Marco polo sheep and Pamirian Ibex are at the moment are just getting close to the required balance. AKAH would work on keeping this balance intact and consolidated, so that

it does not go back to the previous situation, which was disturbing the ecosystem in the high-altitude area. While the communities living in this area are cognizant of the situation, they do not have the required technical, financial and policy support to maintain this balance. This is the reason that AKAH is proposing to enhance the capacities of the stakeholders, including communities and CSO's and public sector entities to bring in enabling policy framework, which is substantiated by empirical data and applicable practices.

The work within the project will be ongoing in GBAO region of Tajikistan, since the project area is located in this region. The main government body to be contacted initially is the government of GBAO, as they will be giving permission for the project to be initiated in the target area. The project will also work closely with the Committee for Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (CEP). There will be two structures that would be involved from CEP. These are CEP itself and the Tajik National Park.

Given the large size of the area of GBAO, the population is thinly spread across the entire region. Most of the population density is centered around areas that are relatively accessible and have some kind of basic amenities. These communities mostly comprise of local shepherds and families, whose livelihoods are mainly dependent on livestock and other related businesses. In Murghab area in particular, there are very few agriculture opportunities. Given that their livelihood depends on livestock, their reliance on natural resources and ecosystem is very critical. Living in this environment, these communities are quite aware of the importance of natural resources and maintenance of their habitat. It is only because they don't have the required technical and financial resources and the government support, that they are helpless against the environmental degradation. If these communities are organized, and the public departments are aware of the gravity of the situation, and scientific data is available to show the correlation between the deteriorating biodiversity and its direct effect on the declining state of ecosystem and the livelihood of the local communities, it is expected that the public sector entities would bring in policies which are favorable to maintain the balance in the ecosystem and the biodiversity. The communities and CSOs are ready to act, given that they have relevant support and favorable public policies.

There are two areas that the project intends to work in: some parts of the project lands are located under the Tajik National Park and some territories of land that are under long-term rent condition by companies, which are also members of Association of hunters of Tajikistan.

Marco Polo Sheep is included in the Red Book of the Republic of Tajikistan and included in the second appendix of the CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) convention. However, based on counts and recommendations of the Academy of Sciences, the Government annually approves a quota for hunting of Marco Polo sheep. Currently, the quota is 110 heads. The Pamirian ibex (Siberian ibex) has no conservation status. Its hunting is regulated on the basis of counts and Tajikistan laws on hunting and wildlife. The proposal, however, aims to maintain this status, and improve upon the situation.

Every five years, a total count of the Marco Polo sheep is carried out in the country. Currently, its number ranges from 26,000 to 28,000 heads. In addition, hunting farms annually conduct internal registration of the number of Marco Polo sheep in their territories. This makes it possible to trace the dynamics of changes in the number in the period between total counts. Both local and international

specialists take part in total counts. Employees of environmental and scientific organizations of the Republic of Tajikistan take part in internal accounting.

The project will work with the Tajik National Park and Association of hunters of Tajikistan. Within its previous and current projects, AKAH has conducted and continues to carry out capacity building of local communities, CSOs and government entities. This includes capacity building in the sphere of natural resources management and land management, trainings on camera trapping for snow leopard tracking, establishment of database on snow leopard conflict in the villages/rural areas for the Department on Environmental Protection in GBAO, supporting the Hunting Association of Tajikistan to equip their research and scientific house/center on conducting research in the Murghab, Ishkashim districts or GBAO in general. AKAH has also conducted numerous awareness raising sessions for local communities on topics related to disaster risk reduction, village development, snow leopard conflict and awareness about snow leopard and other important biodiversity and etc.

At the initiative of the Government of Tajikistan, the Association of hunters of Tajikistan organized recreation for children from low-income families from the Murghab district in the Madagascar camp in Romit gorge in 2018. The Aga Khan Agency for Habitat and the Center for Biodiversity Conservation supported the initiative. This recreation was directed at raising awareness among local population of Murghab on endangered species. As these children are the future, the action aimed to increase their knowledge on importance of ecosystem for humans and society. The initiative revealed that there is a need to further increase the knowledge on importance of biodiversity among local communities.

Currently livestock grazing is allowed both on the territory of the Zorkul reserve and on the migration routes of the Marco Polo sheep.

The primary public entities responsible for formalizing policies in this area are the Government of GBAO, Ministry of Agriculture, Center for Biodiversity Conservation.

**Specifically, this project may lead to restrictions on access to resources in the following ways:**

- Strengthening the management of Tajik National Park and Zorkul Nature Reserve may limit the activities of hunters and pastoralists. Technically, hunting and grazing are not allowed inside these reserves, so “strengthening” will not mean imposition of new rules or limitations, but will mean enforcement of existing rules.
- Engagements with pastoralists in the areas between the two reserves, promoting better grazing practices. All adoption of such practices will be voluntary, as currently envisioned by the project, but laws may result, in the future, formally controlling such grazing.
- Engagements with hunters in the areas between the two reserves, promoting better hunting practices. All adoption of such practices will be voluntary, as currently envisioned by the project, but laws may result, in the future, formally controlling such activities.

**9. Participatory implementation**

AKAH will work in the GBAO region based on its ongoing relationships with regional government agencies, local governments, and communities. We have an ongoing MoU with the Biological Institute

of Pamir under the Tajik Academy of Sciences to protect snow leopard habitat, and a MoU with the Association of Hunters of Tajikistan to promote sustainable hunting practices.

Separately, we will formally engage the superintendents of Tajik National Park and Zorkul Nature Reserve and with community leaders between these reserves to secure their commitment to stakeholder engagement.

AKAH will work with regional authorities and community members in Shughnon, Roshtqala, Ishkoshim, and Murghob and relevant villages, to be determined.

As noted above, AKAH may make recommendations to protected area authorities to limit grazing and hunting within park boundaries. AKAH may also make recommendations to local government on grazing and hunting regulations outside of park boundaries. Such recommendations could lead to new regulations or new impositions of existing regulations. AKAH will conduct consultations with requisite stakeholders to ensure their understanding and agreement.

Specifically, this will include detailed consultations with local stakeholders to understand:

- Current land use requirements (e.g., for grazing, hunting, other).
- Possibilities for alternative zones of land use, if restrictions were put in place.
- The varying needs of different “classes” of users, such as men, women, old versus young, hunters, livestock owners, livestock herders, nearby residents, further distanced users and owners, etc.
- Economic, social, legal, or other constraints pushing people toward [or away from] a particular land area or land use.

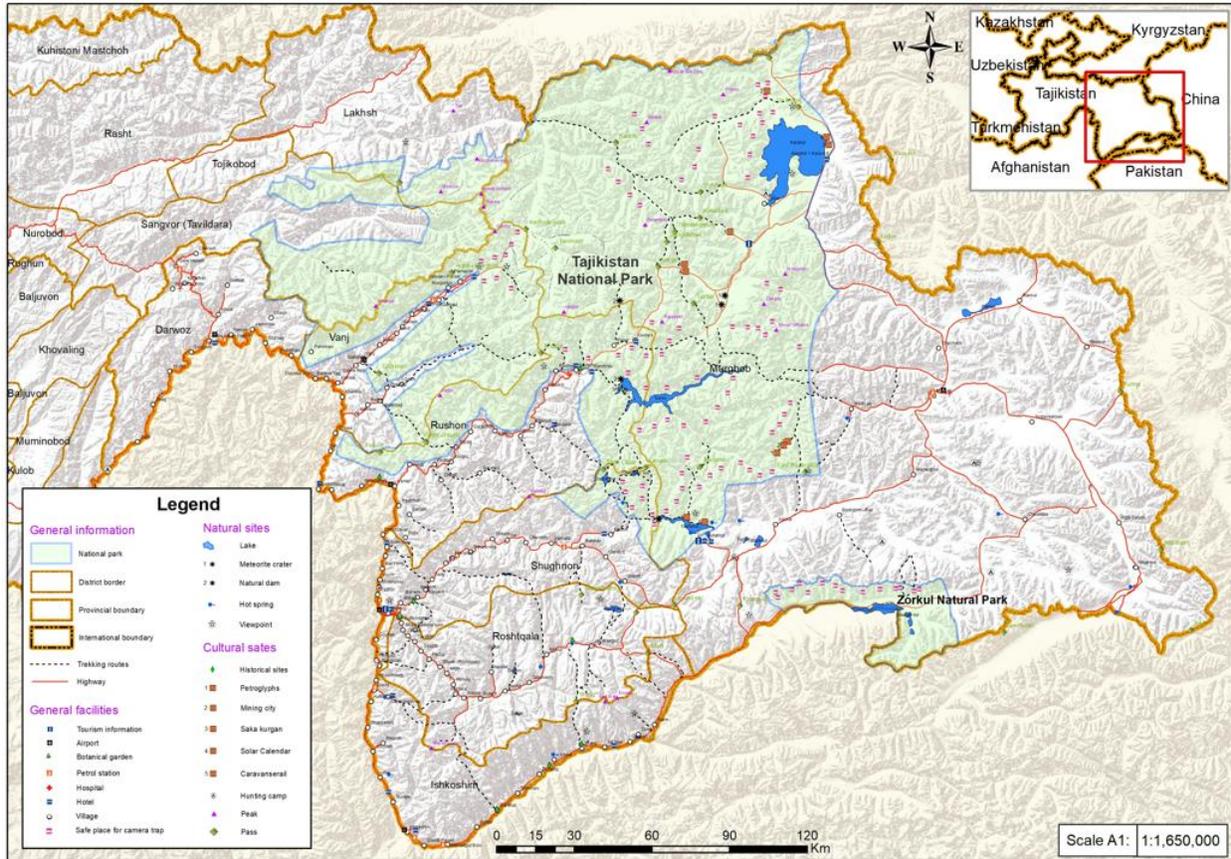
As any plan develops, these “classes” of stakeholders will be engaged:

- At the input stage prior to drafting of plans.
- At the review stage to comments on drafts.
- As allowed by local administrative procedures, to “endorse” final drafts before they are formally approved by the government.

There will also be outreach activities to schools and a local awareness campaign to improve people’s understanding of the importance of the reserves to local human well-being.

## **10. Criteria for eligibility of affected persons**

Eligible “affected” persons include the people living between the two reserves that engage in hunting or pasturing of livestock. This area is indicated in the figure below.



**11. Measures to assist the affected persons**

Anticipated “effects” are largely about denying people the ability to do things they are already not supposed to be doing: no further grazing of livestock in reserve boundaries, no hunting within reserve boundaries or without permits or outside of designated seasons.

Measures to assist these people will be via two mechanisms.

The first is in the form of ensuring consultation and input into any pasture management plan or hunting regime. In this sense, anyone engaged in this work will do so voluntarily from the start. By example, pasture management plans will address issues such as:

- Location of pasture
- Number of animals
- Seasonal movements of livestock
- Best practice on watering and feeding of animals
- Conservancy of productivity of pastures

We do not anticipate completion of such plans during the project period, but in the future, development of these plans will be done in a way that maximizes transparency and knowledge-sharing and that builds on both farmers deep understanding of sustainable practice. Ultimately, the Pasture Management plans

must be approved by District Authorities and implemented by relevant Village Authorities; thus, by rule, these authorities will ensure that AKAH followed a consultative process.

The second mitigation measure will be by facilitating connections between affected people and AKAH's ongoing work in the region, including various small enterprise support and community/household health projects. Restrictions on grazing and hunting will be offset by the benefits from these projects.

Further, AKAH will facilitate discussions with reserve managers and local government to explore mitigation measures. These could include, by example, identifying alternative locations for grazing or alternative locations or methods for waste disposal, such that no "harm" comes to these stakeholders.

## **12. Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism**

AKAH will ensure that local stakeholders are aware of the work and understand how to voice complaints if any. We will:

- Post information in Tajik and local languages in relevant district offices, reserve offices, and at our own offices in Khorog.
- Explain our activities at all stakeholder meetings.
- Create fliers about the project's objectives and planned activities. These fliers will include contact information for AKAH staff. We will distribute these fliers at all stakeholder meetings.

During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, AKAH personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with AKAH, local authorities, nature reserve personnel, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project. Before starting the project implementation, local communities will be informed of the objectives of the grant. They will be given telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons at AKAH, the reserve, and CEPF. This information will also be put on all education materials that will be produced during this project implementation including posters, brochures, and booklets. Contact information of the Regional Implementation Team and CEPF will be made publicly available in Tajik, local languages, or Russian, as appropriate. If AKAH receives a grievance, it will communicate the grievance, together with a proposed response, to CEPF and the RIT within 15 days.

We will inform stakeholders that grievances should proceed in the following order below. If the stakeholder is unsatisfied with the response at any step, they may proceed further.

- Akobir Abdurakhimov, Project Supervisor, AKAH, Tajikistan [akobir.abdurakhimov@akdn.org](mailto:akobir.abdurakhimov@akdn.org);
- Ahmed Saeed Shaikh, Manager, Recourse Mobilization, AKAH, Tajikistan [ahmed.shaikh@akdn.org](mailto:ahmed.shaikh@akdn.org),
- Khisrav Shermatov, RIT country coordinator, [shermatov.khisrav@gmail.com](mailto:shermatov.khisrav@gmail.com)
- Lizza Protas, RIT Team Leader, WWF-Russia, [lprotas@wwf.ru](mailto:lprotas@wwf.ru)
- CEPF Executive Director: [cepfexecutive@conservation.org](mailto:cepfexecutive@conservation.org)

## **13. Implementation Arrangements**

The project will be coordinated from AKAH offices in Khorog, with support from headquarters in Dushanbe, with staff traveling to the field several weeks per year to engage with stakeholders and reserve authorities. The primary field-facing personnel will be:

- Akobir Abdurakhimov, Project Manager
- Sino Yusupov, Botanist
- Andam Khanjarov, Pasture Specialist
- Zarina Kambarova, Monitoring and Evaluation