

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
Process Framework and Social Assessment

Project Title: Feasibility study for establishment of a community-managed protected area in Xin Man District, Ha Giang Province, Northeastern Vietnam.

Organization: Centre for People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature)

Date: 25th Aug 2014.

A. Project background

The establishment of protected areas by governments are often for conservation purposes. (preservation of endangered species and their habitats). These commonly lack consultation with local communities. The needs and livelihoods of local people are often overlooked, or are considered as a secondary priority. In some cases they have been relocated out of the forest, their home for generations. In addition, due to the strict regime of “no use” of natural resources within protected areas, participation of local communities and households in PA management is simply for patrolling, and fire prevention. A lack of engagement in PA management, and low payment, means that local people are not interested in the management of forest resources, and continue to illegally exploit forest resources through hunting, logging and the conversion of forest land into agricultural land.

In addition, over 80% forest land in Viet Nam is outside the protected area system. These forests house many native and threatened species of animals and plants, provide ecosystem services, support livelihoods (as sources of food, medicine, fuel wood, timber, tourism development, and preventing flash flooding, landslides, and erosion), and are important for maintaining the traditional cultures of local communities, particularly ethnic minority people in remote mountainous areas. However, the biodiversity of these areas is continuously degraded due to a lack of capacity, poor awareness, and low level of interest from local communities and other stakeholders in preserving these areas. In addition, a lack of guidelines and applying ineffective utilization methods against the achievement of goal, objectives and functions of nature conservation and community development agendas.

The concept of supporting the establishment of community-managed protected areas (CPAs), proposed by the Protected Area Working Group of IUCN could be a solution to harmonize the conflict of interests between conservation and development by government and communities. However, this concept has not yet been realized in Viet Nam. This feasibility study for formulation of a community-managed protected area in Na Chi Commune, Xin Man District, Ha Giang Province is designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the barriers and constraints of community-led conservation in Viet Nam, and to propose solutions to overcome them.

This area of approximately 5.000 hectares is home to many endangered species of fauna and flora, of high conservation value. The forest also plays a very important role for local people in supporting their livelihoods, protecting their watershed, and preventing erosion. The local governments are interested in preserving the forest for the purpose of watershed protection. However, the forest land and associated natural resources are faced with threats from deforestation for expanding agricultural land by local communities. Consequently, the unsustainable use of forest land is putting high pressure on biodiversity, and will eventually have an adverse impact on the livelihoods of local communities.

The project will seek to promote relevant agro-forestry models, and the wise use of forest resources in the area, in order to reduce the adverse impacts of logging, hunting, etc. on the livelihoods of local communities. By empowering local communities to manage a CPA, seeking

alternative livelihood practices, the project will not only help improve the conservation of biodiversity, but also sustain ecosystem services and the livelihoods of local communities in the long term.

Project Approach

This project will review the key barriers to successful community-led conservation in Viet Nam, and propose solutions and plans of how these can be overcome. Harmonization of conservation and development could successfully be achieved through the establishment of a CPA. A forest area in Xin Man District could be a good candidate for this. The local communities would have the power of decision-making, and developing action plans for management and utilization of natural resources within the CPA. Various local authorities, scientists, conservation practitioners and other stakeholders will provide technical and financial support, and monitor their progress. The project is designed with following objectives, activities and expected outputs:

Overall objective

Identifying and characterizing constraints, challenges and potential opportunities for promoting conservation of biodiversity outside formal/official protected area and improving livelihoods of local communities through empowering ethnic communities to management of community-managed protected area in Vietnam.

Intermediate objectives

By the end of 2014, the plan and process for promoting and facilitating the establishment of a community-managed protected area, which toward preserving remaining biodiversity and supporting livelihoods of ethnic minority people in Xin Man district, Ha Giang province will be designed, compiled and sent to the governments and potential donor(s).

Expected outputs

- Existing legal framework and related on-going policies being developed supporting to establishment of CPA in Vietnam, local practices is reviewed;
- Stakeholders involving in the formulating and operating CPA in the Xin Man is identified and analyzed
- Awareness on the community-managed protected areas of all stakeholders is assessed;
- Biodiversity and cultural values of Xin Man are assessed for a better planning and facilitating the establishment of a CPA.
- Unsustainable production methods in agriculture and agroforestry and livelihood alternatives of sustainable use of natural resources are identified for development of community-managed protected areas.
- Capacity of all stakeholders on sustainable use and conservation of forest resources are assessed and evaluated.
- Study findings and recommendations are consolidated and options for establishment of a CPA is identified, developed and sent for governments and potential donors for possibility of funding support to piloting a community-managed protected area in Ha Giang Province.

B. Social Analysis

Fieldwork for this study will be conducted mainly in Na Chi Commune, Xin Man District, Ha Giang Province, Viet Nam. This commune is located in the far south-west of Xin Man District, bordering Bac Ha district, Lao Cai Province. Na Chi has a population of approximately 46,500 people, in 969 households. The majority (83%) of the population are Tay ethnic minority people. About 9% of the population are Nung, La Chi, Dao, and Khmer ethnic people, and the remaining 8% are Kinh and Hoa people that have migrated from other parts of Ha Giang Province.

The commune has a high rate of the poverty, with around 24% of households ranked in the 'poor' category of the national poverty line (monthly income less than 400.000VND (~0.6\$/day)). The average income of the population is around 500kg rice per person per year, generated mainly from agriculture and forestry (employment for 82% of its labor force). 'Slash-and-burn' agriculture and illegal hunting and logging are still commonly practiced in this commune, which puts high pressure on biodiversity, and stunts community development.

C. Plans for participatory implementation

PanNature will work closely with local authorities (at provincial, district and communal levels), scientists, and communities in planning and implementing the research and assessment activities of this project. The Forest Protection Department of Ha Giang Province, district and communal authorities in Xin Man District are identified as the main partner for the project, and some staff from those agencies will be involved in the planning, designing, and developing of methodologies and materials, and in conducting the research. Their participation will help to enhancing their knowledge of biodiversity conservation in the area, the need for participation of local communities in management of natural forests, as well as fair benefit sharing mechanisms for stakeholders, for sustainable management of forests and associated resources.

At the outset, an internal meeting for PanNature staff will be organized for stakeholder mapping. This will also help ensure understanding of the project activities, and help to develop better evaluation and monitoring systems.

In order to finalize and consolidate the research, a number of consultation workshops will be organized for implementers and researchers to present the findings of the studies and assessments to scientists, policy makers, and local communities. Participants will help make revisions and corrections of the findings. Comments and feedback from those participants will also be taken into account to propose the most suitable option for establishing a CPA in Xin Man District, Ha Giang Province.

As explained above, this project will be conducted through participatory approaches. All stakeholders will be informed about the objectives and activities of the project, and will be given opportunities to discuss the natural resources, way of utilization/traditional, rights, access, and expectations. Their ideas and views will be truly reported and informed to other rightholders and stakeholders for mutual understanding. The process, then, will help them to decide and proposed solutions that satisfy interests of all stakeholders and meet the needs for both conservation and community development goals.

Tools for Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) be applied with communities which may comprise of stakeholder mapping, "cause and effect tree", Semi-structured interviewing, Focus group discussions, Preference ranking, Mapping and modeling and Seasonal and historical diagramming. A trial for methodology and materials will be carried if necessary and the statistic applications, like Statistical Package for the Social Sciences – SPSS, will be used to process data.

D. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

This study is developed and designed basing upon the information gained from a field visit of PanNature to the Xin Man District and discussions with the Conservation Section of the Forest Ranger Department (FPD) of Ha Giang Province in early 2013. For those, together with the trekking in the forest for rapidly observing forest status, livelihood activities by local people, PanNature have met with local people and other stakeholders (at communal, district and provincial levels) to discuss with them the management of forest in Xin Man and Ha Giang Province. The biodiversity and perception on their roles to the local communities were reported by discussants and respondents and the issues of forest and forest resources management was also raised. All stakeholders are obviously shown their support to the idea of introducing the community-managed protected area in the area.

During developing and designing the project, local authority also supported and providing every required information.

E. Threat Analysis

The results of the project will be used for designing and facilitating the establishment of a community-managed protected area (CPA), covering an area of around 5000 hectares of forest land in Xin Man, Ha Giang Province. Establishment of a CPA will restrict the utilization of natural resources by local people, to some extent. However, through facilitating equitable mechanisms of access and benefit sharing from participation of local communities, they will retain their legal rights in management and utilization of the forest land, and related natural resources. The project will also support local communities and government in harmonizing their interests and building trust - through engaging them in the planning, design and development of the land use and management plans.

Support from stakeholders, particularly the local community and local authorities, is key to the success of a CPA. Therefore, while working with local authorities and communities, PanNature staff will maintain a professional working style as written in PanNature's internal regulations - respect, responsibility, transparency and accountability are the key principles for staff work in the field. In addition, PanNature has extensive experience in facilitating engagement with local communities into the management of protected area and fair benefit sharing among stakeholders through on-job training of implementation of several projects. These experiences will directly benefit the implementation of this project. In addition, with almost 7 years of work in Ha Giang Province, PanNature, will easily get support from local authorities for organizing a consultation process.

H. Monitoring of Safeguards

In case people affected by the project want to complain about PanNature and the project, the contact details of IUCN staff in Ha Noi will be advertised to all people involved in the project. In order to do so, a leaflet describing the project (including objectives, activities, expected results, donor, implementer, total budget, timeframe, beneficiaries and approach) will be developed, printed, and distributed to all stakeholders in the Xin Man and Ha Giang Province by PanNature staff and consultants who come to work in the area. This document will include contact details for IUCN, and the Director of PanNature, as follows (in Vietnamese):

“for more information, or to make a complaint, please contact Mr. Nguyen Duc Tu, Water and Wetlands Coordinator, IUCN Vietnam, Tel: 04 3 726 15 75. Ext. 135, E-mail: tu.nguyenduc@iucn.org, or Mr. Trinh Le Nguyen, Director of PanNature, Tel: 04 3 556 4001 Ext. 102/0912 095 045, Email: nguyen@nature.org.vn.”