

The Process Framework and Social Assessment for Avoidance of the Adverse Impacts on Indigenous People

Project title: Conservation initiative of Indochinese Silvered Leaf Monkey or Silver Langur (*Trachypithecus germaini*) in Dong Phouvieng National Protected Area of Savannakhet, the central Lao PDR.

Organization: The Lao Wildlife Conservation Association (Lao WCA)

1. Project background

This project seeks to conserve the priority population of the Critical Endangered Indochinese Silver Langur (*Trachypithecus garmaini*), literally known as “*Ta Loung*” in the Lao language, in the Dong Phouvieng National Protected Area (NPA), with particular reference to the Dong Sakee Sacred Forest at Ban Vongsikeo and Alao villages, located at the southern province of Savannakhet. Dong stands for the “Jungle” while Sakee refers to the name of the place. The Dong Sakee is a patch of approximately 180,000 ha of semi-evergreen forest that is surrounded by dry dipterocarp forest. Approximately 1,500 people from three villages (including Ban Vongsikeo, Ban Alaodong and Alaokhoke) traditionally use parts of the Dong Sakee forest, e.g., for NTFP and timber harvest for house construction. Those inhabitants belong predominantly to the Katang ethnic minority group, largely practicing agriculture (e.g., rice paddy field and livestock) for food and income. The langur and their habitat have been traditionally protected for years as they believed that the forest is home to sacred spirits, if someone cut any trees or shoot animals, he/she may bring bad luck to their family and also to the village.

However, due to changing beliefs from animist to Christian in a local village (e.g., at Ban Alaokhok), some villagers are commencing to cut trees and also hunt the animals in the sacred forest as they feel safe by Christian. Additionally, together with rapidly increased marketing needs, poaching of wildlife and timbers in this area by outsiders seems to be increasing. If the current threats continue (together with rapidly increased human population), the endangered langurs and their habitat may disappear shortly. Therefore, it requires immediate attention to strengthen the local institution and legal framework to sufficiently address those threats and thus ensure effective conservation of the species on the ground, while also fostering the sustainability for local livelihoods through enhanced sustainable use of natural resources.

▪ The project approach

This project initiative continues on the first on-ground conservation activities aiming at supplementing the existing traditional believes of forest and animal spirit. This project will focus its activities to achieve these following objectives;

(i) Obtaining reliable information on population of Indochina Silvered Leaf Monkey and its important habitat in Dong Sakee and other remaining nearby forest blocks.

✓ Proposed strategy and actions

- Conducting a refreshed-training for staff or team on basic conservation concepts and field survey techniques for the silvered leaf monkey
- Conduct field survey using line transects to assess population abundance of monkey in Dong Sakee and nearby forest patches.

- Conduct assessment of remaining habitat in locality (nearby Dong Sakee forest) to allow identification of important areas for monkey needs.
- Mapping a distribution of leaf monkey and identified priority areas for conservation importance
- Writing up a technical report of survey findings

(ii) Raising conservation awareness about conservation significance of leaf monkey for local villagers at both inside and outside villages and boundary demarcation of the Dong Sakee.

✓ Proposed strategy and actions for objective 2

- Meeting with villagers at Ban Vongsikeo village and nearby villages to inform the protect initiatives.
- Produce some education and outreach materials (e.g., posters) for awareness campaign and distribute to relevant villages, and district offices
- Produce some board signs to post at key entrance to the silvered leaf monkey conservation forest area.
- Conduct awareness campaign in Ban Vongsikeo and Ban Alao villages for adults and kids at schools.

(iii) Strengthening the coordination and cooperation between local villagers and government protected area staff (i.e., military) to effectively protect the endangered silvered leaf monkey.

✓ Proposed strategy and actions

- Organize a series of meetings at Ban Vongsikeo village by involving provincial and district officials, and key villagers to discuss challenges, resolutions and ways of how to work together effectively to protect the endangered silvered leaf monkey in natural habitat.
- Develop a regulation or agreement to specifically address the conservation of silvered leaf monkey in Dong Sakee and nearby forested areas. The agreement will be signed off by a district governor to serve as a legal backup for villagers to take effective conservation initiatives for protecting monkeys.
- **Expected outputs**
 - Improved understanding on population status of the endangered Silver Langur
 - Increased local support and capacity for conservation of silvered langur in natural habitat
 - Reduced threats to the silvered langur and its natural habitat including poaching and habitat destruction

2. Status of indigenous people in the area

This project works in two villages, namely Ban Vongsikeo, and Ban Alao (i.e., Alao kao and Alao Khok), the first is a focal village in implementing project activities as it is close proximity to the Dong Sakee forest, while the second is quite far distant from Dong Sakee forest but it is included for raising awareness activity as they use resources to some extent in areas nearby this secret forest area. People in these villages are Katang ethnic minority. The Katang people traditionally live in upland areas (classified as Lao Teung by the Lao Government) and are the sixth largest ethnic group in Lao PDR. Most Katang people follow old ethnic beliefs combining this with Buddhism in many areas. Traditionally Katang people are forest dwellers practicing long rotation upland rice. From studies in Savannakhet and Salavan provinces, they rely heavily on forest resources

collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for local use and sale and surviving fish, wild tubers and forest plants during times of rice shortage. Forest resource use is generally open access and people collect resources such as fish, frogs, mushrooms, bamboo shoots and damar resin. Despite traditional systems there are increasing disputes over open access resources and the need for management regulations and rights negotiations is becoming increasingly evident.

Table 1. Baseline data of target villages

Village	No. Family	No. Households	Population	Female	Ethnic	Religion/ belief	Employment
Vongsikeo	142	92	705	335	Katang	Animism	Farmer
Alaokao	45	42	250	170	Katang	Animism	Farmer

Remarks: Ban Alao has two hamlets now as Alaokao and Alao Dong, the Alao Dong changed their belief from Animism to Christian.

3. Assessment on the adverse impacts on indigenous people

It is unlikely that this project will adversely impact local indigenous people as most activities are limited in scope to participatory assessment of baseline data on abundance and distribution of the endangered Silvered Langur, and participatory conservation awareness campaign. The latter will ensure strong consultation with local communities and decision-making is made by local communities on voluntary basis. However, anticipated impacts of project activities are outlined below.

1. Obtaining reliable information on population of Indochina Silvered Leaf Monkey - *Positive*: Villagers are requested (or hired) to participate in field surveys, their knowledge and experience gained through participation in training and field survey will enable them to better understand about animal ecology, and thus encourage them to protect the Silver langur. *Negative*: Presence of outsiders (researchers) in the area may make villagers feel their secret forest is less respectful.
2. Raising conservation awareness about conservation significance of leaf monkey for local villagers at both inside and outside villages and boundary demarcation of the Dong Sakee - *Positive*: Villagers are consulted and educated, which this will help to raise local awareness on species conservation significance and needs, and thus supports the participatory conservation that secure the save of the endangered Silvered Leaf Monkey from extinct. *Negative*: Few villagers may worry at the beginning about restricted access to forest resources as a result of lack clear understanding between conservation and preservation, especially for those people who just experience the laws or regulations.
3. Strengthening the coordination and cooperation between local villagers and government protected area staff (i.e., military) to effectively protect the endangered silvered leaf monkey - *Positive*: Villagers and government officials are invited to work together so that knowledge and experience gained through participation in training and practices will enable them to replicate awareness

activities, and also create a platform that facilitate better communication and discussion among themselves, and thus bring their attention and encourage them together to protect the species and ecosystem, which, in turn, support long-term good and services that impact on development local livelihood. At present, it appears that most poaching (timbers and wildlife) is not by local villagers, but by outsiders who live far away from NPA. So, this project will strengthen local institution and legal framework to reduce further encroachment by outsiders into the area. This means that most economic impact may occur from this project will not be on local communities but on outsiders. Alternatively, local villagers will gain long-term economic benefits through sustainable use of resources by means of enhanced ecotourism. *Negative:* secrete forest (that used to be open access) are more restricted and benefits from them minimized. This may change their livelihood of some people to some extent.

4. Plans for free, prior and informed consultations with affected communities

This project is built on the past CEPF-supported work of Lao WCA in this secret forest area by continuing on the existing traditional conservation practices to ensure long-term survival of the endangered silver langur and its habitat. The development of the concept and proposal for this project was built upon the results of significant consultancy made between villagers, government officers, academic institution, and Lao WCA. Local villagers from three villages (i.e., Ban Dong Sakee, Alaodong and Alaokhoke), either male or females, were equally given opportunities to participate in process of participatory consultation on voluntariness, which allowed them to play roles in critical thinking, making decision, implementing, taking responsibility, and sharing benefits.

In the consultation meeting, villagers and government staff has developed a conceptual model by identifying goal and objectives, major challenges or threats to survival of species, and then together determined what conservation measures to be immediately taken to secure long-term survival of the Silver langur. The proposed activities for this project are based on suggestions that need to address emerging devastating threats (i.e., illegal hunting and timber harvests) to species and habitat, which may put great impacts on their livelihood and economic benefit if they are not properly solved.

5. Measures to avoid the adverse impacts, and for mitigation

The success of this project depends on the understanding and voluntariness. Prior to commencement of each project activity, the Lao WCA staff will organize a meeting with villagers to conduct an introductory session in local languages where the project activities will be explained and get approval by them. The work processes will be explained to villagers, and they will be adjusted to meet the needs of the communities. Local villagers from two villages (i.e., Ban Dong Sakee and Alaos - Alaodong and Alaokhoke hamlets), as well as government staff at the provincial and district levels, will be first consulted and clearly explained its goal and objectives. Should potential participants have questions or concerns, they will be invited to seek clarification and either receives immediate verbal or written replies (as requested). Consent by stakeholder participants will be documented for each activity. Participants who offer their consent and wish to continue participation will be requested to sign a consent form that clearly outlines the activity they will be participating in and state that they clearly understand and willingly participate from an informed position. If participants are not familiar with Lao language, efforts will be made to ensure that the consent form is explained in the person's relevant ethnic language. Further, this document will also

include information on the communication channel they should follow if they are satisfied with the project for any reason.

Local communities will be encouraged to freely discuss how the project can or is affecting their livelihoods with WCA throughout its implementation, so that mitigation strategies can be developed in close collaboration with persons (i.e., individuals, communities) and implemented accordingly. In order to achieve above consultation, a conceptual model (tool) will be developed together with local villagers to identify what are direct and indirect threats to animals, and also to find proper ways to address such threats, which create little adverse impact on local communities, but enhance conservation of the species. Participatory mapping process will provide substantial information on patterns of resource use of local communities, which then inform as group of people to be affected most by restrictions on resources. Then, those affected people will be consulted and appropriate measures will be together identified to have a minimal impact. They will be also requested to involve voluntarily in field activities so that employment are provided through participating in field surveys. However, given the household's income is not primarily from the hunted animals and collected of timbers or NTFPs in this secrete forest, it is anticipated that there is very little adverse impact on local people.

Although the field survey techniques are designed by the project team, the ground-truth field surveys will require close cooperation and consultation with local villagers to ensure field activities are compatible with village norms. A traditional ceremony will be organized prior to entering into the forest to show respectful of local belief. Some affected people will be trained on field survey and conservation techniques, therefore it provides future opportunity for them to engage in long-term monitoring, other conservation activities, nature-based tourism etc.. Of most important, it is strongly envisaged that villagers' experiences and knowledge gained through participatory implementation of conservation activities will strengthen their existing beliefs and practices by integrating better understanding about the status of animals, needs for conservation, and key issues to be urgently addressed into local practical system

5. Participatory implementation

This project is considered as community-based conservation project, continuing on the existing traditional conservation practices to ensure long-term survival of the endangered silver langur and its habitat, which in turn create greater impacts on local livelihood and economy improvement in the long-term. In this regard, local people are central to implementation of the project. All local villagers (either male or females) are equally given opportunities to participate in process of project implementation and management, i.e., in critical thinking, making decision, implementing, taking responsibility, and sharing benefits. Of most important, all people are invited based on voluntariness and own decision.

In addition to villagers, the local government authority and academic institution will be invited to participate in implementation of activities. All government staff and villagers will be provided trainings on technical skill to enable their capacity based on their voluntariness to conduct all project activities, i.e., field ground survey and awareness raising. We will organize a meeting with village committees and villagers, and government authority if there is a problem to be solved.

6. Monitoring avoidance of adverse impacts

Monitoring to avoid adverse impacts will be conducted continuously throughout the duration of the project by project committee comprised of villagers, government authority, academic institution, and Lao WCA to;

- Regular visits to project villagers to meet with those target groups to find out and document any concerns that may occur and (if any) then consulted on mitigation measures. We will organize a meeting with village committees and villagers if there is a problem to be solved
- Work with government partners and other conservation/development agencies on project initiatives and share information that can be used as baseline for project design that enhance conservation while cause little adverse impact on local communities.
- Employment of affected villagers to assist in project activities will be regularly checked to ensure full support from local villagers.

6. Conflict resolution and grievance/complaint mechanism

Due to the relatively small size and short duration of project activities, monitoring will occur on an activity by activity basis by the Lao WCA project manager in collaboration with WCA' staff and local commune staff. In particular involvement of the local commune to assist in the identification of sources of conflict, respond to affected persons and report on results is essential as this is often the most appropriate level to address local areas of conflict. Reports will be provided to project partners, and project staff will follow-up on any reported issues with affected persons directly in the field. Where relevant, the project will support affected persons to contact CEPF RIT.

Complaint Communication Channel/Mechanism.

Should participants or other local people express their dissatisfaction with the project for any reason; the project will provide opportunities for them to communicate their dissatisfaction to one or all of the following: project staff, Lao WCA and the CEPF-RIT team. This channel/mechanism will be communicated to communities through a single-page hand-out that summarizes the project, provides the contact details of the WCA and CEPF-RIT staff in Bangkok, Thailand. The Lao WCA will ensure that copies of this complaint communication channel/mechanism will be kept with Commune Authorities, placed on Commune notice boards, made available during the course of project activities and upon request.