

CERD - Creating conservation leaders for the West Nghe An Biosphere Reserve

Social Assessment

1. Background Indigenous Peoples in the project area

This project will work around the protected areas of Pu Mat and Pu Huong, Nghe An province, Viet Nam. At both PAs, most forest users belong to the Thai ethnic group, and some to the related Thanh group. The Dan Lai and Hmong peoples are also important users who are likely to be more dependent on forest resources on average and are also perhaps at greater risk of marginalization.

2. Expected impacts of this project on indigenous peoples

Given that this project aims to develop institutional capacity, gather knowledge, and develop strategies, we do not expect any significant impact on participating indigenous peoples, positive or negative, during the project term.

We intend to focus on those villages where past projects are most likely to have made an impact. Because of the distribution of project activities. These are all likely to be villages near to roads and with very regular contact with the town. They are also likely to be of the ethnic Thai group and our staff staying in the villages will be ethnic Thai themselves and aware of cultural norms. As part of their recruitment by CERD, these staff members will be required to sign a "code of conduct" for work in the field and with communities.

We will be asking people for information about forest use which will certainly include illegal use in many cases. The most important thing to ensure is anonymity. Based on our previous work, we will draw up a protocol for research which ensures that no names of individual informants are recorded or passed on to us and will ensure that potential informants are informed of this.

Ensuring the anonymity of villages is less easy; our community mapping work could reveal extensive use of protected areas by local people which might provoke a response from the authorities. Our experience in the area, and in Vietnam more widely, suggests that such a response is extremely unlikely. Protected area staff are already well aware of the extensive use of the protected area by local people as are relevant authorities at all levels of government. Maintaining good relationships with these authorities and with the local people themselves is critical to our own organization's future. We also have a long experience of working with the provincial and national media and doubt there will be any destructively negative coverage of our results.

We will prepare an information sheet about our Center and this project, which will outline our history, and funding sources as well as our immediate aims and hopes for longer-term work. We will use this to introduce ourselves in group meetings in all villages where we work.

Individual informants will be informed of the anonymity of our results and that they are under no obligation to answer. We will point out that we would prefer an honest refusal to answer than a dishonest response.

We do not expect to be collecting any information which it would be culturally inappropriate to share. Our interest in traditional forest use concerns systems of resource management and, on the basis of our current experience, Thai people are happy for such information to be shared.

Information obtained by the project, (such as traditional knowledge relating to the use of plant resources) will be handled and safeguarded in line with international Access and Benefit Sharing best practices.

3. Free, prior and informed consent

Consultations with communities were not conducted during the development of this proposal; rather such consultation is one of the projects objectives. As explained in the project proposal, we aim to develop strategies for future conservation work through consultation with local communities. Because our staff will spend considerable time (months) in focal villages, we will be working on a realistic timetable for gaining truly informed consent. Work will be facilitated by our staff who will be ethnic Thai people from the area and the work will build on existing strong relationships with these communities. We therefore expect any proposed measures to be locally and culturally appropriate. We note that the UN-REDD programme has issued a factsheet on gaining FPIC in Vietnam and that government guidelines may be issued soon. We will keep abreast of any developments in this regard.

If this consultation process does produce a strategy for a new project, we will also facilitate decisions on a monitoring system and grievance mechanism. The main potential challenges to FPIC will lie in taking account of the opinions of less powerful members of the village communities, including the views of women and in working with ethnic groups other than the Thai.

For work to be undertaken under this project; a question asking consent will be a part of any formal interview procedures. Anonymity will be assured. Community mapping groups will be told, at the beginning of each group interview, that questions will be asked about areas of forest product use and that findings will be published. Anonymity of the village is not practical in this situation (as it can be deduced from the map). They will be given the option of declining participation in the process, or to refuse to answer questions about any particular forest product.

4. Grievance mechanism

Villagers can appeal the project through local NGO (such as Wildlife Management Club in Pu Huong NR), through newspapers or local People's Committees. Consultations with local communities will include providing them with the contact details of the CEPF RIT National Coordinator in Hanoi.