



**Social Assessment and Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions on Access to Resources**

CEPF Grant 110808

Wildlife Conservation Society

Building Multi-Stakeholder Capacity for Co-Management of Wakhan National Park, Afghanistan

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## 8. Project background

The Wakhan landscape (10,950 km<sup>2</sup>) is a CEPF priority KBA (AFG 1) falling within the Pamir-Alai and Wakhan Mountains Priority Corridor (#15), according to MCA profile. The landscape provides critical habitats for two of the five priority mammal species listed in the MCA profile: the snow leopard (VU) and urial (VU). It also supports the only population of Marco Polo sheep (NT) in Afghanistan. These rare species are at risk from a range of threats including poaching, competition with livestock, disease, and the compounding effect of climate change, which is of particular concern across the MCA. Considering the scale of the area, the diversity of threats and ecosystems, and the complexities and interdependence of human societies living in the area, only a holistic multi-stakeholder approach is likely to ensure an effective and sustainable conservation of biodiversity in Wakhan

In 2014, the entire Wakhan District was designated Afghanistan's second, and to-date largest, protected area (PA), which offers a real landscape-scale opportunity to address threats in the KBA and improve its management. At the heart of the proposed project is the fact that enshrined in both national PA policy and legislation is the concept of co-management and equitable benefit sharing, with a particular emphasis on engaging local communities in decision-making. The Wakhan National Park (WNP) Management Plan is currently in the final stages of approval and requires the establishment of a Protected Area Committee (PAC), which is the principal management body for implementing co-management of the landscape for both conservation and sustainable development in Afghan PAs. The formal establishment of the PAC and the official signing of the WNP Management Plan will be completed on the 23rd October 2020 (International Snow Leopard Day). Although the whole of Wakhan District has been declared a National Park, the reality is a number of zoned strict protected areas embedded in a production landscape with a significant and rapidly growing population. An integrated landscape management approach is therefore needed to address the broad themes of (1) protected areas, (2) sustainable management of landscape, and (3) the illegal and unsustainable trade (Larger than Tigers - see below).

There are, however, significant challenges to be overcome if the new PAC is to grow into a strong and effective instrument. The main challenge is to address the overlapping jurisdictions between the WNP and Wakhan District that share the same boundaries through co-management, and to ensure that the WNP Management Plan and the Provincial/District Development Plans are effectively coordinated in order to balance terrestrial biodiversity conservation with other sustainable development goals. Co-management requires that communities, both men and women, have a fair and equitable voice in decision-making. Since the landscape is the traditional home for two minority ethnic groups, the Wakhi and the Kyrgyz which coexist peacefully but are divided by their socio-cultural backgrounds, it is important that the PAC is inclusive and addresses in priority and in a balanced way issues of both ethnic groups.

Several International NGOs (notably the Aga Khan Development Network and WCS) have had long-standing involvement in Wakhan, and are regarded as partners by both local authorities and communities. These NGOs will continue to serve as important facilitators for conservation and sustainable development in the landscape, and can support the PAC, Ministry of Agriculture, district governments and communities in the establishment of an effective governance system for the landscape. There are also many private sector actors operating in the landscape in construction, transportation, telecommunications, electricity supply, eco-cultural tourism, and trading in goods and services linked to agriculture who have strong interests in the development of the landscape and need to have a voice on the PAC.

The geopolitical importance of Wakhan Corridor (WNP and Wakhan District) is growing, with China taking a greater interest in Afghanistan as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. The Wakhan Corridor is viewed as an important development corridor for the Belt and Road Initiative with potential for road, railway, pipeline and fiber optic connections through the corridor, which would impact both conservation and development in WNP. With good and coordinated planning the impact of this initiative can be positive (opportunity for cross-border conservation and development along priority corridors), but without good planning and coordination the impact could be negative for both local people and wildlife.

To successfully overcome threats and management challenges, these disparate elements will be brought together using an integrated landscape management approach, with the PAC effectively functioning as a multi-stakeholder platform and co-management governance system. The main aim of the project is to build and operationalize the PAC with appropriate structures, composition and the required levels of capacity to effectively lead co-management for WNP.

This will be done by:

- Establishing and facilitating meetings of the WNP Landscape Forum and Protected Area Committee
- Establishing and facilitating meetings of working groups
- Building the capacity of the District Development Assembly and district government to participate in integrated landscape management and co-management of WNP
- Building the capacity of local civil society organizations

In Afghanistan, it is a legal requirement under the Environment Law that all protected areas must be identified, designed, justified, declared and managed under a system of collaborative management between communities and government (represented mainly by NEPA and MAIL). It is envisaged as a bottom-up process starting with communities themselves. Government cannot unilaterally declare a protected area and enforce any type of resettlement or restrictions on access to natural resources. The declaration of WNP followed a request by the communities to the government. The WNP Park Management Plan was prepared using a participatory and collaborative approach. It took nearly 3 years.

The by-laws outlined in the Management Plan were prepared with communities and have now been officially signed by the official Protected Area Committee (representatives elected by communities). Annual Operation Plans must be in line with the Management Plan and approved by the PAC. The PAC can recommend and pass changes to by-laws. Thus, in Afghanistan, protected areas like Wakhan

National Park, resemble what IUCN calls Indigenous and Community Conservation Areas. For this reason, it is important that the PAC is inclusive and has the capacity to represent marginalized groups such as the poor, women, and youth (the focus of this project). The PAC comprises members from the local Wakhi and Krygyz ethnic group who are national ethnic minorities, but are the majority (nearly 100%) within Wakhan National Park

## **9. Indigenous or historically marginalized people affected by project**

WNP is occupied by two ethnic groups: the Wakhi and the Krygyz. The Krygyz are semi-nomadic and live year round in the Little Pamir and eastern Big Pamir, while the Wakhi have permanent villages in the Wakhan Valley with summer camps traditionally in the Western Big Pamir and Hindu Kush Mountains. The Wakhi population in Wakhan numbers about 14,000, and the Krygyz population numbers less than 1,000 individuals. Wakhi people are mainly Ismaili and the spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, promotes gender equality and the equal participation of women. However, many villages are still dominated by traditional elders who dominate decision-making. Krygyz people are Sunni Moslems and men dominate decision-making.

The population of Wakhan is about 15,000, while the population of Ishkashim is 12,600 and Zebak is 26,500. Ishkashim and Zebak have mixed populations with several ethnic groups represented, including migrants from outside these two districts. The population growth rate is over 3, which means that the population is rapidly increasing. The sex ratio is 105 males to 100 females. This indicates a large number of missing women in the population, which reflects the fact that Afghanistan is the 2nd most dangerous country in the world for women. Wakhan also has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Women tend to have more mobility than women in other parts of Afghanistan and generally move freely both within villages and within the wider landscape. They are, however, largely marginalized in decision-making in this patriarchal society. Women-specific issues are seldom given priority. Spiritual leaders and women themselves are demanding change, and they all understand that change will only come with education, formal and informal.

There is a youth bubble like in the rest of Afghanistan with 43% of the population 14 years of age or younger. Another 22% of the population are aged 15-24. Thus, 65% of the population are 24 years of age or under. This age group is largely marginalized from decision-making with village elders dominating decision-making at the village and district level. There is growing discontent amongst marginalized children, adolescents and youth.

Badakhshan is one of the poorest provinces in Afghanistan with over 65% of the population living in multi-dimensional and monetary poverty. Most households depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. The fact that more than 65% of the population are living below the poverty line strongly suggests that the carry capacity of Wakhan and buffer zone Districts has been exceeded, and that people cannot meet their basic needs from agriculture, livestock raising and harvesting of biofuel. Any increase in use of natural resources is unsustainable and will lead to further ecosystem degradation. There is a growing demand for development and jobs, and growing pressure for youth to migrate in order to find jobs and provide remittances for their family.

## **10. Potential impacts on indigenous or historically marginalized people**

- Better land management, afforestation of floodplains, and improved and more diversified farming practices are expected to reduce the need to expand cultivation on unsuitable hillsides.
- Afforestation and flood control measures on flood plains are expected to reduce the negative impact of floods and deposition of rocks and sand on irrigated farmland near rivers.
- Nation-wide restrictions on hunting limits community access to meat from wildlife. This is compensated for by vaccination of livestock which reduces annual losses, thereby, making more meat and dairy products available to households.
- Retaliatory killing of predators threatening livestock is discouraged. Compensation/Insurance systems are being piloted to compensate for livestock killed by predator. This is combined with a rapid response unit tasked with the capture and removal of predators from areas with concentrations of livestock.
- Forest guards patrol, monitor and report on infractions to WNP by-laws on hunting and extraction of natural resources. Tradition religious leaders mediate in such cases and encourage behavioral change rather than punishment. There is little local trust in outside law enforcement.

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

Eligibility for compensation is limited to local people living in Wakhan District/WNP, mainly Wakhi and Krygyz. All villages are now governed by Community Development Councils which are the lowest level of subnational government in Afghanistan. These are democratically elected institutions. Therefore, all legal residents have equal rights. Grazing in upland pastures is largely limited to the Krygyz in the Little Pamir and eastern Big Pamir, and the Wakhi in western Big Pamir and the Hindu Kush Mountains.

In settlement areas, villages form associations registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and prepare their own land use plans for lands within their village or village clusters. These plans are submitted to MAIL where they are legally recognized. Registered natural resources associations are legal entities and have a bank account through which they can receive project funding from government. They also qualify for training and extension services, where available.

## **12. Free, prior, and informed consent**

In Afghanistan, government cannot unilaterally declare a protected area and enforce any type of resettlement or restrictions on access to natural resources. The declaration of WNP followed a request by the communities to the government. The declaration and creation of the park was, in effect, the statement of popular will by the people of the Wakhan, including the historically marginalized groups named above. The justification document for the protected area was prepared during period 2011-2016, and a draft Protected Area Management Plan was prepared in March 2017 to cover the period 2018-2022. Consultations and final negotiations took another 3 years. A Protected Area Committee (PAC) was formally established in October 2020 and the WNP Management Plan was formally signed by the PAC, Provincial Government and National Government in October 2020, on International Snow Leopard Day. The process ensured Free, Prior and Informed Consent by all communities within Wakhan District/WNP.

In turn, the engagement by WCS reflects:

- The MoU of 18 December 2013 between WCS and the National Environmental Protection Agency.
- The MoU of 18 May 2014 between WCS and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock.
- The letter of support of 14 June 2020 to WCS for this project from the Wakhan National Park District Governor.
- The letter of support of 15 June 2020 to WCS for this project from the Wakhan District Development Assembly Chairman.
- The letter of support of 15 June 2020 to WCS for this project from the Wakhan Pamir Association, a community-based organization.

### **13. Measure to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits**

The Protected Area Committee, working groups, the composition of these, and the public and internal meetings they hold, are all designed to ensure feedback is received from multiple channels. There will be working groups on, among others:

- One Health/Livestock
- Women-Specific Working Groups
- Youth and Adolescent Working Group

Further, WCS will conduct socio-economic studies to assess vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups, whether they be identified by ethnicity, religion, language, gender, age, or any relevant measure.

### **14. Measures to assist the affected persons**

All people living within Wakhan National Park are affected by the establishment of the National Park. There is a consensus that the people will benefit more from being part of a protected area than not. This is consistent with recent global studies. Being part of a National Park has attracted more government and international donor funding than non-protected areas. Also, under the National Park, local communities, mainly traditional ethnic groups, have gained legal control over their traditional lands. As members of the PAC, they make and approve all decisions affecting WNP (their traditional lands).

Wakhan National Park and the people living within the park are highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change. WCS is working with partners to develop a climate model and vulnerability assessment tool which will identify the most vulnerable communities and ecosystem. Climate change adaptation activities will then be targeted to the most vulnerable communities, groups and ecosystems. The aim is to build resilience to climate change.

This grant is about the process of creating a functioning park, including creating various committees and groups that facilitate stakeholder input for co-management that is defined as acceptable and beneficial to all. The grant does not include work typically included as compensatory (e.g., support for livestock rearing, small enterprise, local agriculture). However, if institutionalization of Wakhan National Park does lead to negatively affected persons that come to the attention of WCS, WCS will work with partner organizations to address these negative impacts. This includes directing them to the most appropriate government agency, or to the most appropriate NGO working in WNP.

Government development efforts are supported by international NGOs including WCS, Rupani Foundation, and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). These NGOs coordinate their activities to avoid duplication.

WCS provides support related to wildlife conservation, construction of predator proof corrals, afforestation, sustainable rangeland management, environmental education, and community awareness related to climate change adaptation. These activities provide both short-term and long-term incomes for participating households. WCS provides training and capacity building for government agencies, the National Park Authority, the WNP Protected Area Committee, Community Development Councils, and natural resource management associations at the community level.

AKDN is improving infrastructure and services: construction of health centers, schools, electric grid, and telecommunication network. The Aga Khan Foundation, WCS's partner for the EU Funded Climate Change Project, also provides veterinarian services, agriculture and livestock extension, small business development, support for village savings and loan groups, and reforestation and afforestation.

RUPANI (US-Based) NGO provides cash and food for work related to afforestation and irrigation channels. They also are doing early childhood education. Their activities depend on donor-funding. WCS works with a number of local Afghan NGOs including OESA which has been working to develop market system for medicinal plants, SALEHO which has been carrying out health, agriculture, education and community development projects in Badakhshan including Zebak, Ishkashim and Wakhan, and HHWO which has been addressing women's rights and GBV through their Badakhshan Women's Focal Point.

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

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

- Work with the authorities of the WNP to post information in local languages in each village, at our own office in Khandud (District Capital) and at WCS's community ranger stations, WNP offices, and key government offices for Wakhan District.
- Hold public meetings explaining our activities. This will include meetings of the WNP Stakeholder Forum (Annually starting in 2021, probably March or April), the meetings of the Wakhan National Park Protected Area Committee (bi-annually starting in 2021), and during each of the Working Group meetings.
- WCS supports 30 community rangers who are embedded in more isolated and strategic villages, and these community rangers will provide contact information for communities where they work.

During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, WCS personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with WCS, WNP personnel, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project.

WCS will post telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons at WCS, WNP, 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 local languages. WCS will respond to grievances raised in writing within 10 working days of receipt and communicated to CEPF 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.

- Wakhan Team Leader, WCS. Khuroosh Sahel  
Email: [ksahel@wcs.org](mailto:ksahel@wcs.org)  
Phone Number: +93 (0) 797 087 954
- Wakhan National Park District Governor. Mr. Nasratullah Naeil  
Email: [nasratullah.naeil2121@gmail.com](mailto:nasratullah.naeil2121@gmail.com)  
Phone Number: +93 (0) 700 709 975
- Lizza Protas, RIT Team Leader, WWF-Russia, [lprotas@wwf.ru](mailto:lprotas@wwf.ru)
- CEPF Executive Director: [cepfexecutive@conservation.org](mailto:cepfexecutive@conservation.org)

WCS provides support to WNP including government agencies and communities (members of the WNP PAC). WCS is not a decision-making when it comes to the implementation of policy and programs within WNP, and therefore is not responsible for everything WNP does and is not responsible for every grievance that comes to the park. WCS will directly address complaints and issues related the WCS's work in WNP and will direct more general complaints to the WNP PAC and/or the appropriate government agency.

## 16. Implementation Arrangements

Khuroosh Sahel is the Team Leader for WCS's Team in Wakhan. He is on the frontline for all activities being implemented by WCS in Wakhan. Khuroosh and his team will ensure that WCS's complaints management system is known and understood by the stakeholders in Wakhan. He is supported and supervised by WCS's Field Project Manager (Ibrahim Abrar). Technical support will be provided by WCS's Policy and Public Relations Manager (Mujtaba Bashari), WCS Conservation Manager (Sorosh Poya Faryadi), WCS's GIS and IT Specialist (Rohullah Sanger), and WCS's Ecology Specialist (Dr. Zalmi Moheb). Mujtaba, the GEF/UNDP Project Manager, will use information provided by CEPF to guide future interventions funded under GEF/UNDP, while Sorosh will do the same for the EU-Funded Climate Change Project.

WCS's Gender and Environment Specialist (Zarifa Sabet), under the guidance of the Country Director, will work with WCS's technical specialists to development socio-economic assessments, gender analysis, and market system assessments, and will lead these field activities. To ensure gender equality/equity, Zarifa will train and work with WCS's EEP Team Leader (Fatema Roshan) and EEP Assistants (Asli Gul and Susan Gul), as well as technical and field logistic staff. She will also train staff from sub-grant CSOs.

The Operation and Compliance Director (Qais Sadar) will work with WCS's Finance Manager (Zabihullah Ejiasi) and WCS's Administrative Manager (Arif Rahimi) to provide operation support and ensure good administration of the project. Qais is the national lead for compliance and will ensure all activities are carried out in line with CEPF requirements. He will ensure that social and environmental safeguards are being followed.

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Officer (Ayub Alavi) will ensure that the project is routinely monitored and reported for CEPF. This will include any complaints arising during project implementation.

Stakeholders will be made aware of WCS's complaints management system or mechanism, and will be able to lodge their complaints through the formal complaint system and personally through any WCS staff both in the field and in the office. All WCS staff are responsible to ensure the integrity of the system.

Qais (WCS's Operation and Compliance Director) will provide training for sub-grant CSOs OESA, SALEHO and HHWO in all aspects of project management and administration. This will include training related to the complaints management system. The grant agreements for sub-grant CSOs will include a requirement to implement the same complaints management system in Wakhan, Ishkashim and Zebak. WCS will provide field level training and supervision to ensure that the complaints management system is being implemented by the sub-grant CSOs.