Social Assessment

Project: Promoting Community Conserved Areas and Civil Society's Involvement in Development Planning in the Mountains of Southwest China Hotspot

Implementer: Shan Shui Conservation Center

Date: October 31, 2011

Indigenous Peoples in the project area

The indigenous people in the project area we propose are mainly Tibetans, especially in 2 of the 3 demonstration CCAs, namely Nianbaoyuze and Tangjiao – Gexigou. The main people living in Gonggashan are also Tibetans but mixed with Yi Nationality and Han Chinese. Another demonstration site, Liziba CCA is lived by all Han Chinese. As a quick and dirty figure, 80% of indigenous people this project targeted are Tibetans, 10% are Han Chinese and another 10% are Yi People, which is rather representative of Mountains of Southwest China where more than 80 % land are classified as Tibetan areas.

Different nationalities have different culture and traditions. In general Tibetans are more Buddhists, which are characterized by respecting lives, spiritual worship, awing the nature, and moderation life style and the livelihood. In our project area we usually don't have to explain why we protect wildlife to Tibetans like other places in China, instead, Tibetan herders and farmers are usually pleased with conservation objectives. Because most of our project staffs are Han Chinese, in many cases in term of communication, Process is more important than Outcome, since most Tibetans already deeply appreciate to conservation while it is difficult to make them believe you (and the project) are a real conservationist and not easy to establish trust.

Tibetan people has accumulated abundant practical experience on conservation and managing protected areas. Based on surveys conducted in Phase I CEPF, we found Sacred Land and Holly Lake are wildly distributed in Tibetan areas, a figure of 25% - 40% of whole territory estimated by a scholar of Peking University. We also found most (more than 70%) of Sacred Land and Holly Lake with two kinds of protection from local communities: 1) zoning which regulating some areas forbidden for economic uses even human-being's access; 2) patrolling. One can make a conclusion that if interpreted well, CCA is not strange to Tibetans.

Tibetan people are also more organized than any other nationalities living in the hotspot. Community-based conservation calls for collective actions of the whole

communities. However, due to comprehensive reasons like urbanization and de-collectivization policy in China, the traditional organizational structure of rural China is disappearing, which is seen as a big challenge by us. One fact is that out-migration and off-farm employment is still not a common phenomenon in our demonstration sites. Many young people choose to back to hometown when they finish their high education in university, even as remote as Nianbaoyuze CCA. Public affairs like patrolling are easily got participation of more than 20 men aged 20 – 40 in a village with 500 – 800 people. Monasteries play critical roles in engaging Tibetans to do conservation, in term of motivation (through Buddhism propaganda), funding, technology and skill training. In many cases in the demonstration CCAs, monks like Lama Tashi and Living Buddha of Zhaga Monastery, are also leaders of patrolling and monitoring.

While we do observed the diminish monasteries' influence to communities. On one hand conservation in Tibetan areas needs monastery's contributions but on the other hand, monastery might be interested in intensifying its influence through leading conservation. We believe this is a positive impact but difficult to share.

Another way to distinguish indigenous people in our project is herders, who living in highland grassland, and farmers who living in forest areas. Nianbaoyuze CCA is the only demonstration CCA that people live in a pure pasture lifestyle. There herders are comparatively have more production leisure to participate in collective actions. Highland grassland system is highly sensitive to climate changes so herders in Nianbaoyuze CCA face to more uncertainty. Correspondently, traditions and religious are still strongly kept in Nianbaoyuze CCA.

The major of indigenous people in this project live in forest, no matter Tibetans, Yi or Han Chinese. Household economy is more developed and diversified in this area. From previous experiences made in Tangjiao – Gexigou CCA, Liziba CCA and Gonggashan CCA, conflicts between household economy and collective conservation actions, in term of timing and natural resource collection, occur more frequently than Nianbaoyuze. Natural disasters like flood, land slide, earthquake are frequently visited forest areas of the hotspot. Unlike herders, people living in forest areas are more active to cope with natural disasters, which is a big motivation to be organized and work collectively for conservation. Besides, people here are more sensitive to market mechanism which is good to pilot Payment for Ecosystem Service on CCA construction.

Anticipated project impacts (both positive and negative) on Indigenous Peoples

The proposed project will support indigenous people to set up CCA, if they have a desire to conserve their land. Through implementing this project, we believe we can provide the following positive impacts to the indigenous people identified above.

- Value & dignity realization. Conservation is not simply a natural resource management for communities. People, no matter herders or farmers, do conservation usually because of comprehensive motivations. Conserving Sacred Land is also a process of practicing Buddhism. Even for Han Chinese in Liziba CCA, that villagers organized patrolling team in 2003 spontaneously was greatly for safeguarding their dignity when many outsiders coming into village aggressively. This project is designed to help communities to set up their own CCA, empower them to manage their own resource, mainly employing their own approach, and respecting their own traditional knowledge, we think the project is a tool for indigenous people to realize their value and dignity.
- Public affair management enhanced. Building leadership and intensified organization of demonstration is critical to a good management of CCA. However, communities are benefited more from strong leadership and organization. Environmental conservation and natural resource management is only a part, or maybe a little part, of communities' public affairs. That management capacities of public affairs are weakening is a big issue in China, no matter Tibetan, Yi and Han Chinese communities. At least this project is designed to address the issue, if we make some progress, the demonstration CCAs will greatly be benefited and we think it is a sustainable positive impact.
- Approach to outsides and social capital increased. A community, no matter how remote it is, sooner or later it have to be exposed to outside. The key is to broaden communities' view and diversify their experiences when making decisions. During the process of CCA establishment and management, we try to provide various opportunities for communities to communicate with government, private sectors, media, scientific institutions and NGOs. Besides, we will also provide opportunities of community exchanges since how to deal with outsiders is usually a hot issue among communities. From our previous experiences, one important and practical project outcome is partnership and trust between communities and the project stakeholders and experts etc, which could not be evaluated as deliverables but really make sense after the end of a project. The partnership established from this project will provide consultations to communities when they have problems on how to deal with outsides and when they have something both opportunities and threats.
- Sustainable development. CCA is not an area thoroughly limits natural resource utilization like a natural reserve. One important exploration in the demonstration CCA is to establish a linkage between communities' spontaneous conservation and long-term outside funding mechanism, particular through market mechanism, e.g. carbon credit in Liziba CCA. Another example is to link villagers' not killing wildlife affecting their crops and funds of freeing captive animal for practicing Buddhism in Liziba. One purpose of developing threatened plant strategy in Gonggashan is to study the possibility of communities' planting threatened plants for commercial use. We will not bring this topic to Nianbaoyuze CCA because we still are not confidence to people's willingness and capacities of entering markets there.

- Natural disasters prevented. Liziba CCA and Tangjiao – Gexigou CCA are established to prevent natural disaster. Villagers in Liziba are suffered from flood every summer. The low carbon planning we proposed and follow-up activities aim to reduce fuel-wood collection which causes erosion. A compensation mechanism to people who suffered from wildlife attacks will be in placed in Tangjiao – Gexigou CCA. These two projects will directly solve indigenous people's worries.

Although we are familiar with all the demonstration CCAs since Phase I CEPF and have accumulated abundant experience to work together with the communities, we still identify the following negative impacts that might affect people living in the demonstration CCAs.

- Timing: CCA management might be a labor –intensive works, especially for community leaders. There are probable conflicts between their own household economy development and CCA management.
- Pressure: We find that many people conduct conservation in a part-time pattern and as a hobby. However, one will realize when managing a CCA seriously might meet many problems that never have before, which will impose big pressures to CCA leaders and even the whole community.
- Dispute: a CCA usually on one hand will limit villagers' certain behaviors and on the other hand, managing CCA needs contribution from communities. Given effect of externality, not all the community members are willing to conservation CCA but would like to take a free ride. If the leadership within CCA is not strong enough, a community might be split when a CCA established.

Plans for free, prior and informed consultations with communities

All local communities will be informed of the project activities prior to their inception and have the opportunity to discuss local community involvement and the implications of the project on. Local communities will be encouraged to freely discuss how the project can or is affecting their livelihoods with us throughout its implementation. Nearly all the Indigenous People in the project site speak Mandarin and Tibetan language, so the meetings will be held in both in Mandarin and Tibetan. If there is a need to translate the discussions into an indigenous language we will do so.

Meetings will typically be held with the full community through the form of village meeting where all the local stakeholders will participant. Special efforts will be made to insure the participation of Indigenous People. Proposed management designations and management activities will be discussed with the community and the consent of the community will be obtained before any designations and activities are implemented. We will keep the minutes of the meetings, and also the copies of the minutes will be filed and distributed. Any actions that require the consent of the

community will be clearly described in the minutes and consent will be recorded in the minutes. For those who do not want to participant in this project, individual household visits will be made to hear the reasons why they do not want to participate, how we can both agree on specific issue and necessary tradeoff will be made. And finally we will reach an understanding with the whole community.

Although we have more than 16-years experience of conducting conservation projects in Tibetan areas, maybe Shanshui is one of the most experienced environment NGOs still active in the hotspot, the more we worked in communities, the more we understood how comprehensive communities are. Therefore, even working with long-term partners with more than 5 – 8 years partnership, we still are very careful and sensitive to different villager group' opining and feedback in a community.

For each demonstration CCA, firstly we should make our conservation objective transparent to at least 70% of all people in the communities. Given that reasons such as migration and off-farm employment, the figure is not low. We will employ different approaches to make the project information available to villagers. For example, we will hold whole village meeting if possible, work together with local primary school and pass information through students, etc.

Usually one main information barrier between a project and indigenous people is that most people in communities could not understand technical terms used by the project. For example, Community Conserved Area is a term not easily understood by communities. At the beginning of project for each demonstration CCA, we will send experienced staffs to give in-situ technical training to villagers.

Furthermore, addressed to the communication issue, we will send one long-term volunteer to each demonstration CCA and they will stay at least one year to facilitate indigenous people's understanding and studying. Long-term volunteers are also expected to bring questions and concerns from communities to us and then answers and suggestions back.

Lastly, we will organize community exchange. Usually this kind of activities will invite experienced community leaders. One mission for them is to identify issues and complains from the CCA they visited and discuss the reasons and solution to the issues together with us at the end of each study tour.

<u>Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits</u>

We think the adverse impacts we analyzed above mainly come from conflicts between that we should achieve project progress on time but it takes indigenous people a comparatively long time to understand of the project ideas fully and to format real collective actions.

There is not a standard on how to manage a CCA well. Different people have different expectation. Firstly we will employ tools of Expectation Management to make sure most people in a CCA have same objectives or at least know each other what are the same objectives agreed and what are not. We will facilitate communities to develop several objectives with high, medium and low outcomes and help them to select one mostly accepted.

In our experience, a community leader of CCA might be aggressive to push to achieve deliverables quickly, and some of them might get frustrated when the progress is slow. However, it is common that community people's attitudes toward to CCA and willing to contribute to CCA are changed again and again. How to format and maintain common understanding among community and how to deal with lurches are included in leadership training provided to CCA leaders.

Many community-based conservation projects only work directly with a strong community leader for the reason of project efficiency. Actually this is not a good strategy since it will pose big pressure and much workload to the community leaders, which is again not good for them. If the leaders leave community, all the on-going works have to be stopped or heavily delayed. In this project we emphasize on a core team to implement project activities rather than a individual leader. Of course there is still a community leader to lead the team but we will pay more attentions to build the team capacities rather than focus on only one person.

Monitoring system

Our volunteers on the demonstration CCAs will submit monthly report to us to reflect their observations and villagers' feedback. Our volunteers are usually young and not formal staffs of Shanshui. Community people think them objective and like to share or even teach them their thoughts. We believe this is important monitoring mechanism helping us to understand whether or not the issues have been happened or how serious they are.

Another monitoring system will come from Shanshui's Monitoring and Evaluation Team under our Field Program. The team will direct contact with our main stokeholds on quarterly-base. Social issues might happen to communities is one of our monitoring system's focus.

We will also engage experienced experts to CCAs and their missions are not only to provide technical service but also collect indigenous people's feedbacks, which is not systematical but quite effective.

Grievance mechanism

Actually the grievance mechanism is partly overlapped with the monitoring system because we seriously want to know their grievance and then make relevant adjustment. While one advantage of this project is that there is a informal network established in Phase I CEPF, with those who are interested in conservation or sustainable development of the hotspot. Although the hotspot is a big area but the network is not big and with good communication effectiveness. For example, Zhaxi Duojie was the grantee of Green Community Network which started the partnership between Lama Tashi and Shanshui. Although not being involved in the project, Zhaxi still keep close contacts with Lama Tashi and share with us his observation and suggestions on how to help Lama Tashi and what is his grievance. In general, we have confidence to greatly understood indigenous people' grievance and with great enthusiasm, flexibility and patience to work together with communities to solve the grievance.