

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions and Social Assessment

Project Title: Strengthen Co-Management Measures at Nam Xuan Lac SHCA and establish forest benefit-sharing on its Ban Thi extension
Organization: People Resources and Conservation Foundation (PRCF)
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I. Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions

1. Project background

The Nam Xuan Lac Species and Habitat Conservation Area (XLCA) comprises a small remnant of a karst limestone forest that once covered most of northern Vietnam and southern China. The protected area is located within a conservation landscape commonly referred to as the 'Ba Be / Na Hang Limestone Forest Complex', comprising the close-by Ba Be National Park in Bac Kan province and the adjacent Na Hang Nature Reserve in Tuyen Quang province. The conservation landscape holds high global biodiversity significance, particularly of primates, birds, and conifer species, with a wide variety of other endemic taxa.

Established in 2004, XLCA is a small 4000-ha protected area that is still the only protected in Vietnam with village representatives officially appointed as members of the protected area management board. This institutional situation shows recognition by the Bac Kan Provincial Peoples Committee of the need for local community involvement in the management of protected areas. It also provides an opportunity to help local people engage into collaborative and sustainable management of natural resources within their habitual landscape.

The site is in Cho Don district, Bac Kan province; one of Vietnam's poorest mountainous regions. The protected area landscape comprises 12 villages of mainly Tay, Dao, and Mong ethnic minorities with 670 households (2754 people) at the time of writing. The project targets seven of the 12 villages, three within Xuan Lac commune (Na Da, Ban Eng, Ban Khang) and four within Ban Thi commune (Phia Khao, Khuoi Ken, Keo Nang, Hop Tien). The other five villages corresponding to Don Lac commune (Coc Toc, Na Ang, Cho Dieng) and Quang Bac commune (Bo Pe, Khuoi Dam) are located far from the target forests and therefore are not direct stakeholders to the project. Notwithstanding, the project will measure socioeconomic changes in all villages and will try to avoid any negative impact on these communities. See Table 1 for village names and a general description of ethnicity, population, literacy, and economics.

The Xuan Lac forest area has been included in previous PRCF conservation initiatives entailing conservation of the endangered White-earned Night Heron, supported through several private donors and institutions, particularly the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. All grant interventions have supported components of the PRCF 'Biodiversity and Livelihoods

Program' in Bac Kan province, of which a component targets community-based and led conservation in the Xuan Lan/ Ban Thi landscape.

Building on past and present work, the project will benefit biodiversity, forest conservation, and sustainable forest resource use in target areas of the conservation landscape. The project will promote a form of community-based sustainable use of forest resources, particularly non-timber forest products and strengthen the collaborative conservation model at Xuan Lac.

Local communities living in the XLCA landscape are highly dependent on the forest for their livelihoods, yet the government restricts their access to forest resources within protected area. The project proposes to change this situation by strengthening villager's voice in the decision-making processes taking place in conservation area management board. The project also proposes to enable controlled and sustainable harvests of selected non-timber forest products from the recent extension to the XLCA in Ban Thi commune. This will maintain access to forest resources, and empower villagers to take part in livelihoods development that is linked to forest protection and biodiversity conservation. The project will create community representation by establishing local stakeholder management groups to support decision-making processes for the reserve, itself already holding community representation within its management board. It will promote an innovative approach to forest management by linking livelihood development and support for conservation actions. The innovative action is to grant access and control to the harvesting of forest resources for local community members, specifically targeting non-timber forest products previously exploited with no measure of sustainability. This will be achieved through the establishment of a multiple-use zone in the proposed Ban Thi extension to the XLCA, for benefit sharing, co-management, and sustainable use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

Project Approach

As external pressures and demands on resource extraction continue to rise, and resources decrease in quantity and quality, the longer-term viability of XLCA forests to support local communities will greatly diminish. Discussions in seven villages of the Nam Xuan Lac surrounding Buffer Zone have revealed a general villager desire for assistance, particularly to strengthen their voice into the decision-making process regarding conservation of resources in the landscape, and their more active engagement in management of the protected area and its natural resources.

A multiple-use area within the XLCA reserve is in process of establishment and extension into the Ban Thi commune. This extension area is approximately 2,500 ha and through the project herein be been zoned for a multiple-use function, securing the rights of local communities to traditional forest usage, while maintaining the resource base and contained biodiversity. The project will outline objectives and actions for the sustainable use of the area. It will strengthen co-management measures to consolidate, solidify, and intensify, local community involvement in biodiversity conservation and management, while establishing sustainable mechanisms for sustainable extraction of non-timber forest products from in the protected area landscape.

The project will develop the livelihoods of ethnic minority communities living in the buffer zone of the XLCA, by securing their rights to manage and sustainably use forest resources

within a designated multiple-use zone of the protected area, supporting biodiversity conservation in the entire landscape. It uses a bottom-up participatory approach to build local capacity at all target villages, and adopts the approach of building the capacity of rural institutions for social change and economic progress. The project is supportive PRCF's long-term conservation commitment and innovative approach to community-based management in the Ba Be/ Ha Hang Conservation Complex, which includes the XLCA and its Ban Thi extension, and the PRCF-proposed Francois' Langur Community-based Conservation Area in the Lam Binh/Sinh Long areas in northern Tuyen Quang province. It is also a step forward into PRCF's emerging policy support for community co-management of biodiversity through pilots, working models, and policy dialogue with partners and decision-makers in Vietnam.

2. Social and threat analyses

Land use in the Xuan Lac/Ban Thi landscape is mainly for subsistence cultivation of rice, maize, and cassava, supplemented with limited livestock breeding, mining—often illegally, and non-timber forest extraction. Household agricultural activity is limited to relatively small areas, in which flat-lands are used for seasonal flooded rice cultivation and lower sloped hills are used for hill rice cultivation. The principle forest resources used are timber (for house construction and fuelwood for cooking), wildlife, and seasonal extraction of non-timber forest products, particularly *Amomum xanthioides* and *Alpinia malaccensis* / *Alpinia latilabris*. The project proposes to retain access and use of landscape resources by local communities, particularly in the Ban Thi extension area. A multiple-use area for controlled and sustainable extractions of Amomum and Alpinia will be established, although protection and sustainable use measures will fall on these forest areas.

The main source of livelihoods at the site is agriculture and collection of forestry, none of which will be impaired by project activities. The project does not include a community development component, given the low budget and that complementary community development work will be proposed for funding by other donors to PRCF at the site. Complementary measures in the program will include village self-help groups with revolving funds, agricultural modelling and intensification, and forest rehabilitation and development. Although the project proposes to increase the decision-making power of local communities into management of biodiversity and natural resources in the target XLCA landscape, possible resource restrictions are thought to be of two types: (i) Restrictions that relate to voluntary illegal, un-sustainable, and destructive activities, and (ii) Restrictions that are involuntary in nature and relate to non-damaging access to resources.

Restrictions to damaging activities

Through strengthening local community representation and involvement in the protected area management board, the project will result in increased conservation measures that will restrict access to forest areas for wildlife hunting and trapping, timber logging, and unsustainable harvest of non-timber forest products. In effect, these activities are already prohibited by law, given that the site is already a national protected area, and that some of the species within, such as the White-eared Night Heron, are protected by Vietnam law.

Restrictions to non-damaging activities

The proposed strengthening of local community participation in conservation management will result in an increase of collaborative management for resources in the conservation landscape, although with likely little additional impact to villagers because of restrictions to access. Notwithstanding, some non-damaging extractions that currently take place in the protected area, particularly for non-timber forest products and hunting of animals not strictly protected by Vietnamese law, will be restricted. Stiffening management measures, although to include stronger village representation, will result in restrictions of access to some of these forest products.

The project will measure the impact of both types of restrictions upon the local community, by establishing a baseline on present 'legal' and 'illegal' benefits from the Xuan Lac/Ban Thi forest, and measuring changes over a six-month period. Further, information collected from assessments and meetings will be collated and presented in the annual participatory social monitoring workshop to review the situation, sort out solutions, and to assess compliance to CEPF social safeguard policies.

3. Plans for participatory implementation

Through PRCF's 'Biodiversity and Livelihoods Program' activities in Vietnam, all project activities are carried out through the direct involvement of local stakeholder communities. Villagers pretty much carry out project implementation, with project staff facilitating and providing technical advice and direction as needed. For this project, regular meetings with local village leaders and institutions will update on the status of activities, prompting their further involvement and involvement of other villagers as needed. Every six months, PRCF will conduct monitoring of 'village livelihoods' and 'social safeguards', mimicking similar and ongoing monitoring at other CEPF-funded projects in neighbouring Tuyen Quang province.

4. How groups eligible for assistance and vulnerable groups will be identified

A baseline assessment of the community, including a guided random survey of representative households in the seven target villagers, and a socioeconomic questionnaire to village leaders and elders will help identify those households most dependent on forest resources to be restricted. Based on initial survey results, a more in-depth socioeconomic survey of these most vulnerable households will be conducted to establish a baseline and to measure the impact of restrictions upon these households, measuring changes on a six months' basis.

5. Planned measures to mitigate impacts and assist affected groups

Proposed 'multiple-use areas' within the conservation area will retain access by local communities to local forests, except for those critical for the survival of the endangered species. Proposed projects funded by other donors within the PRCF Conservation and Development Program in Bac Kan will prompt sustainable agriculture and forest activities, and establish village self-help groups fitted with savings and loans schemes, to benefit villages (including those not targeted under this CEPF project).

6. Mechanism to monitor safeguard issues

Monitoring of social safeguard issues will be included in regular field visits to the project site, and through monthly reporting by project field staff, including a summary of issues brought forth by the local communities through monthly village meetings and consultations by project staff, taking place to listen and annotate the concerns of villagers who may have limited literacy or understanding of Vietnamese Language.

Further to the above, the project will produce a series of posters (as funding is available under different donors to CEPF) explaining the project goals and objectives and providing direct contact details with project offices in Hanoi, and with offices of CEPF Regional Implementation Team in Hanoi and Bangkok. Posters will be produced in both Kinh and major local languages to ensure that all villagers in the Xuan Lan/ Ban Thi landscape will understand. These will also be presented and explained periodically during village meetings to ensure understanding by Dao stakeholders.

Participatory discussions on social safeguard issues will take place regularly, resulting in a six-month safeguard monitoring report submitted to CEPF. Further, on an annual basis, the project will conduct a participatory social monitoring workshop to assess project compliance to CEPF social safeguard policies. Any grievance surfacing or raised from the above communications will be communicated to CEPF directly within 15 days, together with a participatory plan for remedial action.

II Social Assessment

1. Indigenous peoples in the project area

Most villages are near the border of the Nam Xuan Lac SHCA, and comprise mainly two ethnic minorities: Tay and Dao with very few households of Kinh majority. The majority of villages hold only one ethnic group, it being either Tay (five villages) or Dao (four), with two villages holding a few Kinh families. There are 12 villages in the Xuan Lac/ Ban Thi area. The project targets seven of these villages that are closer to the conservation area, with a population of 1,636 people (418 households). Population figures, ethnic composition, and literacy are included in Table 1, below.

Villages households commonly practice rice paddy cultivation in lowland flats and hill rice—mostly on a single year rotation, on lower mountain slopes. Agriculture is mixed with livestock breeding, fishing, and collection of forest resources, including medicinal plants, nuts, fruits, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and hunting. Most Tay communities hold inundated rice plots, while Dao communities practice swidden hill rice. Villagers in the Ban Thi region also carry out mining activities, both legal and illegal. Legal mining is dominated by several mining companies extracting bauxite and similar metals, while illegal mining includes gold excavation and river panning.

The rate of literacy is reported to be exceptionally low (figures will need to be checked), and show eight villages with a below 10% literacy, while the highest reported literacy only reaches 50% at Cho Dien village of 100% Tay people. In terms of poverty, all villages were reported households in poverty, although reports showed between 02% (in Ban Khang) and 100% in Khuoi Ken).

Tay ethnic minority

Tay are the largest ethnic minority group in Vietnam. The Tay are the earliest known minority in Vietnam, who are thought to have arrived from inland South East Asia about 500 BC. Tay language belongs to the Tay – Thai language group. Their alphabet is based on the Latin alphabet devised in 1960, like the Viet alphabet. The Tay worship ancestors, the house spirit, kitchen spirit, and the midwife. The Tay are farmers who have a tradition of wet rice cultivation, and a long history of intensive cultivation and irrigation methods like digging irrigation canals. They also maintain the custom of harvesting the rice and thrashing the grains out on wooden racks, while still in the fields, then carrying the threshed rice home in baskets. In addition to cultivating wet fields, the Tay also plant rice on terraced fields along with the other crops and fruit trees. Cattle and poultry raising are well-developed, but a free-range style of animal husbandry is still popular. The market is also an important economic activity. The Tay social system used to resemble a feudal society. One man in each village owned the land, forest and rivers. He ruled over the people living on that land. Tay now live in villages of mixed ethnic groups, enter mixed marriages and leave their traditional settlements to work in other areas. They have adopted other elements of Kinh culture, are therefore considered the most integrated into main stream Vietnamese culture.

Dao ethnic minority

The Dao are the ninth largest ethnic group in Vietnam. They belong to the H'mong Dao language group and are believed to have started migrating as very small groups from China in the 13th century. The Dao writing is based on Chinese characters adjusted to accommodate their own spelling. The Red Dao men play a dominant role in the family, community and the economy. They also play a major role in ceremonies such as marriages, funerals, and building new houses. The Dao people have many different family names. Each lineage has its own system of different middle names to distinguish people of different generations.

Dao households subsist on terraced rice fields and adopt advanced methods of wet rice cultivation. They have switched from their former nomadic way of life, to that of sedentary farming. The Dao mainly live from rice cultivation either on burnt-over land and in submerged fields. They also grow subsidiary crops. They still use rudimentary farm tools but apply many progressive techniques in cultivation. Sideline occupations are developed including weaving, carpentry, black smiting, paper-making and vegetable oil-pressure. Relationships among members of the same lineage are always very close and the Dao can identify people of the same lineage by their middleman's and his or her position in that lineage. The Dao social structure is based on the family unit, with men heads of household ruling the family and acting as village leaders. As other ethnic minorities living within larger ethnic groups, the Dao gradually adopt elements of these larger groups, which in the case of the Xuan Lac/Ban Thi area would be Tay cultural elements. In the project landscape, Dao are a real minority groups, living in the most mountainous areas, accessing forests to collect medicinal plants, hunt, and harvest of timber products as needed for home construction and reparations.

Table 1. Village socioeconomic information

Village	Ethnic	Households	Population	Self-help Group Households	Livelihood sources	Literacy	Poor ratio
<i>Xuan Lac commune (477 HH, 2281 PP)</i>							
Na Da	Dao = 100%	57	270	None	Hill rice, paddy rice, hill agriculture with manioc, maize, livestock, forest resource collection	~10% Write and read in Vietnamese	23 of 57 40 %
Ban Eng	Tay = 100%	47	230	None	Hill rice, paddy rice, hill agriculture with manioc, maize, livestock, forest resource collection	~00% Write and read in Vietnamese	8 of 47 17 %
Ban Khang	Tay = 100%	35	160	None	Hill rice, paddy rice, hill agriculture with manioc, maize, livestock, forest resource collection	~00% Write and read in Vietnamese	7 of 35 2 %
<i>Ban Thi commune</i>							
Phia Khao	Dao = 100%	43	145	None	Maize, vegetables, mining, forest resource collection	~20% Write and read in Vietnamese	23 of 34 68 %
Khuoi Ken	Dao = 100%	16	76	None	Maize, manioc, forest resource collection	~20% Write and read in Vietnamese	16 of 16 100 %
Keo Nang	Dao = 100%	52	240	None	Paddy rice, livestock, forest resource collection	~07% Write and read in Vietnamese	21 of 52 40 %
Hop Tien	Dao = 80%	168	575	None	Livestock, mining, worker maize, forest resource collection	~02% Write and read in Vietnamese	43 of 168 26 %
	Tay = 15%						
	King = 5%						
<i>Don Lac commune</i>							
Coc Toc	Tay = 100%	47	186	None	Hill rice, hill agriculture and livestock, fishing, forest resource collection, mining	~05% Write and read in Vietnamese	6/47 12 %
Na Ang	Tay = 100%	35	175	None	Hill rice, hill agriculture and livestock, forest resource collection, mining	~02% Write and read in Vietnamese	4/45 98%
Cho	Tay = 100%	45	190	None	Hill rice, hill agriculture and	~50%	1/45

Dieng					livestock, forest resource collection, mining	Write and read in Vietnamese	02 %
Quang Bac commune							
Bo Pe	Dao = 80%	43	245	None	Hill rice, hill agriculture and livestock, forest resource collection, mining	~00% Write and read in Vietnamese	16/43 37 %
	King = 20%						
Khuoi Dam	97% Dao/ 03% Kinh	82	352	None	Hill rice, hill agriculture and livestock, forest resource collection, mining	~00% Write and read in Vietnamese	19/82 23 %
Totals:		418	1636	Direct stakeholders			
		668	2784	All villages			

2. Expected project impacts (both positive and negative)

Other than the potentially negative impact brought in from restrictions to illegal harvests, the project is expected to bring positive impact to the local communities in the landscape, by legitimizing their sustainable extractions in the proposed multiple use zone of the protected areas. Through the project and its proposed results, villages nearby the XLCA who have over the years extracted medicinal plants Amomum and Alpinia will continue to do so under controlled measures to ensure sustainability of the resource. The project will measure these areas for controlled extraction and management by the stakeholder communities under monitoring and supervision by the protected area management board.

3. Describe how free, prior and informed consultations have been carried out with affected communities during project design

Project design was discussed with village leaders of the target seven villages and the project proponent (PRCF), in liaison with the Bac Kan Forest Protection Department, during planning sessions at the site back in 2016, when the project was submitted to CEPF as a concept for funding. Meetings took place with local community representatives, Xuan Lac and Ban Thi commune representatives, Bac Kan Forest Protection Department, and PRCF staff. Meetings were carried out in Vietnamese language, as all participants understood Vietnamese. There was no written document on consent to the project, but a general no objection and endorsement of it by the participants. As the project unfolds, as additional meetings with local stakeholder communities will take place to secure their thorough understanding and support for project activities.

4. Outline measures to avoid adverse impacts and culturally appropriate benefits

- Periodical village meetings and consultations to learn about emerging socioeconomic issues or otherwise surfacing concerns from local communities regarding project impact to their socioeconomic standing.
- Periodical assessment of changes in socioeconomic standing of vulnerable households from a set baseline (see above in Process Framework Involuntary restrictions).
- Quarterly dedicated social assessment meetings, and yearly workshops to discuss and resolve grievances through offset mechanisms such as inputs into forest livelihoods, agriculture livelihoods, or small-scale business development activities

5. Explain how these measures will be monitored (see above in Process Framework Involuntary restrictions).

6. Detail a grievance mechanism (see above in Process Framework Involuntary restrictions).