



**Process Framework  
for restrictions on access to natural resources**

**Date 3 January 2023**

**CEPF Grant 113604**

**Rising Phoenix Co. Ltd.**

***Securing a self-sustaining population of Siamese crocodile in Cambodia”***

**Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary, Siem Pang District, Stung Treng Province, Cambodia**



## **Grant Summary**

1. **Grantee organization:** Rising Phoenix Co. Ltd.
2. **Project title:** Securing a self-sustaining population of Siamese crocodile in Cambodia
3. **Grant number:** CEPF-113604
4. **Grant amount** (US dollars): 178,000.00
5. **Proposed dates of grant:** 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025
6. **Countries where activities will be undertaken:** Cambodia and Laos

### **7. Summary of the project**

The Siamese crocodile was listed as Critically Endangered in 2018 due to severe decline in numbers and area, and a >80% decline over three generations. This decline has been driven by many decades of habitat loss, hunting and collection for crocodile farms across Asia which has put the species at a very high risk of extinction. Cambodia holds the biggest known wild population of Siamese crocodile (up to 250 adults reported in 2012), although this population is severely fragmented and still faces many threats from accidental drowning in fishing nets and the loss of habitat through clearance and hydropower dams.

The Cambodian National Crocodile Conservation Network produced a Siamese crocodile reintroduction and reinforcement strategy and action plan for the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia covering the period 2012 to 2031. The goal of which is "To establish a fully viable wild population of at least 10,000 Siamese crocodiles for the benefit of this species, its environment and the people of Cambodia". The action plan sets out to achieve this goal through supporting the establishment of viable breeding populations of Siamese crocodiles in Cambodia through utilizing both reintroductions and reinforcement (adding crocodiles to existing remnant populations). In this document Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary (SPWS) is identified as a site supporting Siamese crocodile.

Rising Phoenix has now completed the implementation of CEPF 110291, Siamese crocodile: icon for the restoration of the Sekong River, Cambodia project at Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary. This project saw the rediscovery of a remnant population of Siamese crocodile at SPWS. A reintroduction feasibility assessment was completed and actions taken linked with enforcement, community livelihood development and awareness raising to develop a management regime appropriate for a population reinforcement of Siamese crocodile to occur. In the dry season of 2021/2022 Rising Phoenix undertook a pilot soft release of 19 adult (5 years old) Siamese crocodiles into SPWS. This marked the start of rewilding efforts for the Siamese crocodile at SPWS, with Rising Phoenix goal of establishing a self-sustaining wild population of the Siamese crocodile at SPWS, of at least 100 adults, in line with the government endorsed Siamese crocodile reintroduction and reinforcement strategy.

Siamese crocodiles are a keystone species, at the top of the aquatic ecosystem and generating benefits including restoration of balance including within fish populations, keeping waterways open and preventing wetlands from silting up. At Siem Pang they hold cultural beliefs for local communities which can be used as a lever for support for conservation action. The restoration of a Siamese crocodile population is consistent with the re-wilding vision of Rising Phoenix which sees mega-fauna restoration as a foundation for ecotourism and local economic development.

If the project was not implemented the investment that CEPF and Rising Phoenix have made under CEPF 110291 will be wasted and an opportunity lost. The number of Siamese crocodiles released as part of the previous project is an insufficient number to establish a viable population within SPWS. The progress Rising Phoenix has made in raising awareness about crocodile and fisheries management, and the investment in strengthening community-lead fisheries and habitat management along the O'Khampa, would be lost. Also lost will be an opportunity to document this approach as best practice.

The project will promote a self-sustaining population of Siamese crocodile at SPWS through three objectives. The first objective will see the release of at least 40 five-year old Siamese crocodiles, bringing the released population to a threshold of 80, and sufficient to enable a viable Siamese crocodile population. The second is to strengthen fisheries and habitat management along the O'Khampa at SPWS. The final objective will raise the profile of this ecological restoration demonstration project of SPWS, to allow the replication of the activities at other sites. Taking into consideration the fact that other Siamese crocodile projects in Cambodia have not used farm-raised animals but rather head-starting of wild collected eggs our experience at SPWS is unique. We will use the protocols and experiences acquired from CEPF 110291 to undertake the following.

#### 1. 40 Siamese crocodiles released at SPWS

Working with partners (Fauna and Flora International [FFI] and Angkor Wildlife and Aquarium) from CEPF 110291, we will source 45 Siamese crocodile phenotypes from farms in Siem Riep. These will then be subject to DNA testing to ensure their genetic purity as Siamese crocodiles. Crocodiles failing the genetic purity tests will be rejected for release. As previously these crocodiles will be quarantined at Angkor Wildlife and Aquarium outside Siem Riep under the stewardship of an experienced reptile curator. We will survey and identify two new Siamese crocodile sites within SPWS. Our preference is for suitable sites along the O'Khampa and Stung Tinh Hieng rivers as these sites have been previously identified as suitable by experts from FFI and WCS. If necessary one of these sites will be restored to ensure it has the features suitable for crocodile nesting and loafing. Soft release enclosures will be built to facilitate acclimatization to promote site fidelity post release. Following this the soft release will occur, in compliance IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations. Our aim is to hold an event with local stakeholders, including local villagers and their leaders, local government and Buddhist clergy. Post release monitoring will be implemented utilizing tracking tags. Supplementary feeding will be provided while the crocodiles are in the soft release enclosure, and this will be gradually reduced and then stopped completing the soft release procedure for the Siamese crocodile. During the project two soft releases will occur in 2024 and 2025.

#### 2. Strengthen fisheries and habitat management along the O'Khampa River

Since the end of CEPF 110291 we continue to work with local civil society partner YEA Catalyst to raise awareness about the SPWS and the need for sustainable fisheries management along the O'Khampa River. Under this new project we will conduct community outreach events quarterly with support from YEA Catalyst to maintain local community support. We have also introduced a pilot fish farming initiative amongst ten households in Khampourk village to promote food security and to offset any potential loss of fish protein as a result of the future fisheries byelaws. This fish farming programme will be

expanded over the timeframe of the project to benefit sixty further families utilizing matched funding. We will continue to hold quarterly stakeholder and village forums with agenda points link to fish conservation zone management and address issues arising. We will complete the fish conservation zone establishment and agree byelaws with stakeholders and initiate regular joint patrols by Rising Phoenix Scouts together with law enforcement personnel. Rising Phoenix Scouts are recruited from Khampourk and other villages surrounding the SPWS. We have recently completed training for 20 additional scouts including females and we are aiming for 50% female representation. We will construct and deploy a floating checkpoint to support the effective management of the fish conservation zone. Fish monitoring will be undertaken twice a year to measure project impact following trainings by FishBio.

### 3. Raise the profile of Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary as a demonstration site for ecological restoration

A goal of Rising Phoenix is the ecological restoration of SPWS as a foundation for economic development using ecotourism. In 2022 we produced a promotional film, The Siamese crocodile: Totem of healthy wetlands. We propose to produce a Khmer language version of this film and commission and produce a second film on the work of this project, both for wider screening. Rising Phoenix will expand on the protocols produced in the previous project and develop additional protocols on crocodile rewilding, especially in relation to habitat management and release of farm bred crocodiles, which will be shared widely amongst relevant partners in Cambodia and importantly the National Cambodian Crocodile Network on updating the Siamese crocodile action plan. Together with WCS we will continue a programme of regional exchange between stakeholders at the Xe Champhone Wetlands in Savannakhet Province, Laos and Cambodia, raising the profile of the demonstration site on a regional level.

### 8. **Date of preparation of this document:** 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023

### 9. **Restrictions on access to natural resources:**

The project will establish a Fish Conservation Zone within Khampourk sustainable use zone, and additional focus on applying the existing rules around fishing in the conservation zone of Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary specifically focusing on the stretch of the O'Khampa River.

These actions may result in a reduction in accessible fishing grounds for local communities surrounding Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary, and a reduction in times they can access waterways and the equipment they can use. The most effected village will be Khampourk village (the only village within Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary). Although other villages surrounding Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary may be impacted at a lower level.

Villagers from Khampourk village will participate in the design and by-law creation for the Fish Conservation Zone in Khampourk sustainable use zone. Other villagers will be able to participate in the discussion on the implementation of the existing rules of the conservation zone through village forums held each quarter in 11 villages, and in the stakeholder forum held in Siem Pang District hall.

#### **10. Participatory implementation:**

In the development of the Fish Conservation Zone, a series of meetings will be held with key village members and the village chief of Khampourk village. It will be a participatory process where the community member can select the location of their Fish Conservation Zone and decide on the by-laws. The process will ensure prior informed consent for the community members.

Once they have agreed the location and by-laws for the Fish Conservation Zone, this will be taken to the stakeholder forum to gain approval from the district governor. Once the Fish Conservation Zone is approved, signboards will be erected in the area to ensure people are fully aware of the location and rules.

#### **11. Measures to assist affected persons:**

Rising Phoenix has piloted fish farming with 10 households in Khampourk village. The goal of this intervention is to increase the available fish protein in the village to counter the potential reduction in fish protein from the reduction in accessible fishing grounds.

Over the course of this project, Rising Phoenix will expand the fish farming to 20 additional households in Khampourk village. In addition to starting fish farming with 20 households in two additional villages in the south of Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary.

The opportunity to participate in fish farming will be made accessible to all households in Khampourk village. Rising Phoenix will engage with those households that are interested and are able to implement the fish farming. The fish grown in Khampourk village, will only supply the local market, therefore increasing fish availability for the whole village.

#### **12. Timeline and resources:**

Fish farming will be expanded to an additional 20 households in Khampourk village in 2023, this will cost \$11,700.

Fish farming will be expanded to 40 households in two additional villages in the south of Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary in 2024, this will cost \$28,400.

#### **13. Monitoring and evaluation:**

Fish and habitat monitoring will be implemented twice a year, in the fish conservation zone and conservation zone of Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary. This will provide an indicator of the impact of the Fish Conservation Zone on the fish species diversity and population size, as well as changes to the habitat.

Rising Phoenix scouts recruited from Khampourk village, will implement regular joint patrols with law enforcement officials along the Conservation Zone of Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary and the Fish Conservation Zone. This will monitor how the compliance on the rules are being followed for each area.

Rising Phoenix Community Development Unit, will provide continuous follow up and support for the households engaged in fish farming intervention. This will allow them to monitor how much fish is grown, and sold within Khampourk village. While also providing additional support to counter any problems which may arise to maintain the community's engagement in the fish farming.

**14. Disclosure:**

This plan will be disclosed to the members of Khampourk village through the village forum held at Khampourk village in the first quarter of the project. In addition, to be shared at the stakeholder forum in the first quarter of the project.

**15. Grievance redress mechanism:**

A grievance mechanism will be developed for the project in English, Khmer and Laotian. This will include a description of the project, as well as the contact information of Rising Phoenix and CEPF regional implementation team. The grievance mechanism will include the exact text "We will share all grievances — and a proposed response — with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance via the CI Ethics Hotline (toll-free telephone line: +1-866-294-8674 / secure web portal: <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/10680/index.html> )."

A project launch workshop will be held as part of a stakeholder forum at the Siem Pang District Hall. The project and grievance mechanism will be presented to the attendants, and a copy of the grievance mechanism provided to them. The stakeholder forum includes representative from Stung Treng Provincial government, Siem Pang District government, Provincial Department of Environment, commune and village chiefs, and law enforcement agencies in Siem Pang District.

In addition, the Grievance mechanism in all 3 languages will be posted in seven focal villages around SPWS comprising Khes Sway, Khes Krom, Pong Kriel, Nhang Sum, Lakay, Phabang and Kham Pouk Village in key locations. A letter box was installed in the three commune halls which cover the 7 target villages, with the new grievance mechanism posted above. These letter boxes will be regularly checked for any written grievances which may be deposited in this manner.