

Social Assessment and Indigenous Peoples' Plan

Community-based Conservation of Sandbar-nesting Birds in Cambodia

This Social Assessment was prepared by University of Minnesota (UMN) and incorporates an Indigenous People's Plan for this project, for which UMN is requesting funding support from the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF). This social assessment includes background to the project, identifies Indigenous Peoples in the project area, assesses expected positive and negative project impacts on Indigenous Peoples, describes how free, prior and informed consultations have been carried out with affected communities, outlines measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits, explains how these measures will be monitored, and details a grievance mechanism.

Background

This project was developed based on existing project activities that have been conducted by UMN over the past 5 years to implement community-based nest protection for sandbar-nesting bird species. This work has been conducted in collaboration with existing nest protection and participatory, community-based conservation activities of Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) – Cambodia country program, and Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). Focal species for conservation include River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*, River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelli*, Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*, and Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*. Community-based conservation activities will focus primarily on River Tern, the species of foremost conservation concern, and will include the additional species as time and funds allow. Additionally, project activities will strive to support Conservation International's (CI) efforts to protect nesting sites of the Critically-endangered Mekong Giant Softshell Turtle *Pelochelys cantorii*.

Community-based nest protection will be implemented along the Mekong River between Kratie and Stung Treng towns, as well as on the Sesan and Sekong Rivers. Mekong River project sites are within the "Mekong Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation and Management Area", a stretch of the Mekong River between Stung Treng and Kratie, Cambodia recently designated as a protected area by the Cambodian Fisheries Administration (FiA). The Sekong River project area will include the entire Cambodian stretch of river, and the Sesan River project area will include the stretch between Ta Veng district town in Ratanakiri Province and Ksach Thmei village in Stung Treng Province.

Activities that could affect indigenous peoples include the implementation of a direct-incentives scheme for bird nest protection. As discussed in the Process Framework for this project, participation in the nest protection activities will be through voluntary agreements. To ensure that effects on indigenous people are identified, accounted for and mitigated during these activities a number of measures will be taken. Meetings will be held in indigenous areas for which important bird nesting areas are identified, consultations will be held to explain the need for conservation and broader benefits of

protecting bird nesting sites. Strategies to assist affected communities will be developed where necessary and will involve community participation to ensure site specific variables and needs are considered.

Identification of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous ethnic groups inhabiting the project areas on the Mekong, Sekong, and Sesan Rivers include Koy, Phnong, Brao, Charay, Tampuen, Kavet, and Kreung. Additionally, the area is inhabited by ethnic Khmer and lowland Lao, as well as Chinese and Vietnamese. The primary villages in which we will work, and their ethnicities, are listed in Table 1 below; these villages are located nearest to key breeding sites for sandbar-nesting bird species.

Table 1: Project focal villages.

River	Village	Province	Ethnic Group
Mekong	Koh Preah	Stung Treng	Khmer
Mekong	O Chralang	Stung Treng	Phnong, Koy, Charay
Mekong	Koh Dambong	Stung Treng	Khmer
Mekong	Koh Khnear	Kratie	Koy
Sekong	Nyang Som	Stung Treng	Lao
Sekong	Nyeun	Stung Treng	Khmer
Sesan	Koh Pong	Ratanakiri	Brao
Sesan	Hat Pok	Ratanakiri	Lao
Sesan	Voen Hoy	Ratanakiri	Lao
Sesan	Lumphoat	Stung Treng	Brao
Sesan	Svay Rieng	Stung Treng	Lao
Sesan	Ksach Thmei	Stung Treng	Khmer

Potential Negative Impacts on Indigenous Peoples

There are a variety of possible threats to Indigenous Peoples through conservation interventions that will be implemented as part of this project.

- **Infringement on customary rights.** Through community consultations, the project will assess the level of infringement on customary rights. As described in the Process Framework, involuntary restriction on access to natural resources will likely be minimal. The project will implement conservation activities through voluntary agreements with communities.
- **Loss of culture and social cohesion.** Loss of culture and social cohesion is a threat from any type of development intervention with respect to Indigenous communities and culture. By including culture and traditional resource use practices as part of the planning process the project will make every attempt to record and maintain culture and social cohesion. It should be noted that Indigenous and Non-indigenous communities that we will work with have previous experience working with partner organizations WWF and RUPP, as well

as other organizations (e.g. Community Rural Development Team, 3S River Protection Network).

- **Dependency on external support.** Dependency on external support and financial incentives for nest protection is a potential threat, and people may have trouble readjusting in the event that funding for nest protection ceases. However, as described in the Process Framework, restrictions on customary subsistence activities regarding use of natural resources will be very limited in scope. Therefore, even in the event of loss of financial support for nest production, livelihoods are not expected to be greatly impacted. The project will seek to ensure sustainability through awareness and education activities, and will also seek additional future funding to continue nest protection, as well as other expand into other potential activities such as developing alternative livelihood strategies. Additionally, we are collaborating with WWF, RUPP, and government agencies such as the Cambodian Forestry (FA) and Fisheries (FiA) Administrations to ensure long-term sustainability of project goals towards supporting wildlife conservation and non-harmful livelihood activities by local communities, while reducing illegal or destructive activities within project areas.
- **Inequitable participation.** UMN recognizes that all members of society are involved in resource use and collection. The project seeks to include all levels of community membership (in particular women and lower income groups within a village) and will be designed to build upon local decision-making structures.

Positive Impacts on Indigenous Peoples

The project will have positive impacts Indigenous communities within the project area by providing benefits through conservation incentives for protecting bird nests. The financial incentives will provide livelihood support to Indigenous Peoples, who may be disadvantaged socioeconomically, and may experience greater poverty compared to non-indigenous peoples within the project area. Additionally, the project will benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples by assisting communities to protect natural resources that support their livelihoods, and to prevent illegal and unsustainable activities that threaten natural resources and local livelihoods within the project area.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consultations

Community meetings will be held in priority areas for key bird species following interview and field surveys to present information to local communities and seek input, support and suggestions on project developments. Community meetings have already been developed and undertaken in a number of communities on the Mekong, Sekong, and Sesan Rivers. These previous community meetings have been primarily led by project partners WWF and RUPP, with some joint discussion and presentation of issues to communities by UMN. The community meetings are structured to be informative and participatory with discussions on bird status and conservation context, local opinions regarding project goals and design, combined with a short presentation and/or video. We will further adapt and develop these presentations for Indigenous communities in priority areas. If necessary these would include discussions on possible restrictions for local communities to explain clearly how our activities may negatively and positively impact

local livelihoods. If necessary, community meetings will be translated into the local language.

Measures to Mitigate Impacts and Provide Culturally Appropriate Benefits

The project does not have provisions to provide direct compensation or “one-for-one” mitigation measures for involuntary restriction on livelihood activities. However, voluntary agreements for bird nest protection will be established with as many resource users as possible, and the accompanying financial incentives are expected to be equal or greater to the limited voluntary restrictions on livelihood activities in order to ensure protection of key nesting sites. If, through interviews and community consultations, the project finds that there are opportunity costs due to loss of access to resources at nest sites under protection, we will make every effort to include resource users who lost opportunities in the project so that they can participate in conservation activities and receive financial benefits for nest protection. The financial incentives for nest protection will provide alternative livelihood support and aid in poverty reduction, and will benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and mitigate the impacts of reduced access to the resources in the project area. We reiterate, as describe in the Process Framework, that reduced access to resources will primarily be voluntary. Through interviews and community consultations we will seek to better understand whether project activities will cause any adverse impacts specific to Indigenous Peoples, and whether project benefits from the conservation incentives scheme are culturally appropriate to Indigenous Peoples. We will operate under an adaptive management approach, and will make any necessary adjustments to project design and implementation possible to reduce and mitigate any negative impacts to Indigenous Peoples and to ensure that benefits provided by the project are culturally appropriate to Indigenous communities within the project area.

Monitoring Safeguard Issues

Monitoring safeguard issues related to this Indigenous Peoples’ Plan will be an ongoing process throughout the project, through interviews with project participants and non-participating resource users (e.g. fishermen), and through community consultations. Community consultations on the Mekong River will be led primarily by our partner organization WWF. Community consultations on the Sekong and Sesan Rivers will be led jointly by UMN and our partner organization RUPP. Ensuring social safeguards, especially as they relate to Indigenous Peoples, are a high priority for UMN and we will make assessments at least monthly, based on the ongoing monitoring activities.

Conflict Resolution and Grievance Mechanism

UMN will ensure that community members receive contact information for all UMN field personnel, as well as for key partner organization personnel. Community members will be encouraged to contact UMN or partner organizations immediately if project-related conflicts or grievances arise. Likewise, we will encourage community members to contact UMN field staff if any conflicts or grievances arise pertaining to our partner

organizations. Before, during, and after project implementation, we will hold informal discussions with community members to discuss their suggestions, misgivings or concerns about the project. We will publicize the grievance mechanism during the informal discussions with community members, and also prior to the signing of any voluntary nest protection agreements with individuals and communities, and will provide contact information of a third party who can help with grievances if necessary. If necessary, we will translate discussions into the local language, to ensure that non-Khmer speaking Indigenous Peoples in the project area understand the grievance mechanism and know who to contact regarding grievances. We will use an adaptive management approach to project implementation to make adjustments as needed according to conservation needs of bird species, to incorporate community members' suggestions, and to reduce the likelihood of potential conflicts or grievances arising from the project. If grievances arise, we will work with the community members involved, with participation from other organizations where appropriate, to resolve conflicts and reach mutual agreements between all parties.