

Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden
“Building capacity for environmental education and conservation
in Xishuangbanna, Southwest China”
Social Assessment

1. Indigenous Peoples in the Project Area

Multiple ethnic minority groups are found in the region, of which only the Dai are a truly indigenous group. Other ethnic groups, such as the Yao, Hani, and Yi, migrated to Xishuangbanna in the last two centuries. This project will primarily work with the Yao and Hani, and secondarily with the Dai.

2. Expected Project Impacts (both Positive and Negative) on Them

We do not anticipate any negative impacts on local communities to be produced by this project.

Positive impacts on local communities will include greater negotiating power with local regulatory agencies, and improved relationships with the local university and conservation organizations. Specifically, by working directly with villagers, and most importantly, the village committees, there will be:

- (1) Greater familiarity between the different parties. To date, many villagers and their representatives in each village's committee only know forestry rangers and have never met or heard of officials at higher levels of management. Moreover, there has been, to date, no partnership between these communities and our civil society partners;
- (2) Dialogue identifying salient areas of interest for the villagers; and
- (3) Enhanced capacity among the villagers and civil society organization members to enact rigorous scientific protocols in order to meet their own aims and interests. This could lead to future beneficial partnerships.

3. How Have Free, Prior and Informed Consultations Been Carried out With Affected Communities During Design of the Project?

This project has been designed to respect local customs and reflect the aspirations of local communities, following 3 years of fieldwork with these communities, completed by Project Officer Charlotte Chang. Using qualitative and quantitative survey techniques, Chang worked with 50 hunter informants, 20 village committees, and 200 villagers across 20 villages, encompassing the Dai, Yao, Hani, and less numerous ethnicities such as the Lahu, Jinuo, Wa, and Yi. She (1) identified topics of conservation concern for the local communities, (2) evaluated barriers to villager engagement in conservation outreach, and (3) assessed areas where villagers felt that they were inadequately represented.

All of these interviews received human subjects ethical approval (Princeton University IRB 6682 & 7274, XTBG 2015.52). Each interviewee provided informed consent using a consent document. Note that the villagers surveyed all indicated a deep respect for their local committee. Committee members comprise villagers who are elected on a 3-5 year term in village-wide election. Even the hunter informants (the most stigmatized conservation topic) felt that their committees were respectful and trustworthy. Moreover, the committee structure permits for conflicts within and between villages to be resolved in a structured and unambiguous manner.

4. Measures to Avoid Adverse Impacts and Provide Culturally Appropriate Benefits

Throughout the project, Yao, Hani, and Dai communities will be involved with identifying, prioritizing, and designing the project implementation. All projects will be formed based on dialogue between all parties. Specifically, we will set up a series of meetings for committee members, civil society

partners, and XTBG personnel to engage in discussion. For each topic, we will all work in tandem to assess whether potential adverse impacts exist, and if so, how to mitigate against them. These discussions will then directly lead into project planning sessions.

5. How Will These Measures be Monitored?

Village committee members' approval and support will be sought for the projects and the committees will perform oversight. At each step of the process, from dialogue to identifying salient topics, to enacting the proposed projects, village committees will have the power to alter or terminate their engagement. As the members are elected by each village, the committee must keep the best interests of their community in mind. Moreover, XTBG is a well-respected entity locally, and periodic consultations (once every 5-6 months) will be performed with the human resources division.

6. Grievance Mechanism.

Village committees can voice their disapproval at any point, and terminate the partnership if they wish. Villagers will be provided with contact information for Dr. Mingxia Zhang, project officer Charlotte Chang, XTBG human resources personnel, KFBG (the CEPF National Coordinator), and the IUCN Asia Regional Office in Bangkok (the CEPF RIT). The contact information will be printed in Chinese and shared with the village committees. All the village directors can read Chinese, and can help the villagers if necessary. However, we anticipate that should villagers feel unhappy with any of the work, they will most likely communicate their feelings directly to their committee.