

**Social Assessment
&
Cultural Heritage Plan**

15 May 2023

CEPF Grant 113648

Fauna & Flora International

Community-based conservation of karst KBAs in Myanmar

Myanmar: 14 Karst Key Biodiversity Areas in Kayin State and Mon State, Myanmar.

Grant Summary

1. **Grantee organization:**
Fauna & Flora International (FFI)
2. **Project title:**
Community-based conservation of karst KBAs in Myanmar
3. **Grant number:**
CEPF 113648
4. **Grant amount (US dollars):**
USD 199,989.66
5. **Proposed dates of grant:**
1 Oct 2023 to 30 Sep 2025
6. **Countries where activities will be undertaken:**
Myanmar
7. **Summary of the project:**
Karst ecosystems throughout Southeast Asia, and in Myanmar in particular, have been the most neglected ecosystems, despite their outstanding biodiversity and endemism. Myanmar's karst and cave ecosystems are threatened by cement mining and unsustainable pilgrimage tourism.

Through the CEPF-funded project 'Mainstreaming karst biodiversity conservation into Policies, Plans and Business Practices in Ayeyarwaddy Basin', Fauna & Flora has been able to undertake comprehensive karst and cave biodiversity surveys throughout Myanmar, identifying and registering 21 karst KBAs. We have been able to address the serious threats to the karst ecosystem by mainstreaming karst biodiversity into limestone quarrying concession of major national cement companies as well as piloting sustainable cave tourism models with local community-based cave management committees.

This project will enable upscaling of the community-based cave and karst KBA management model to 14 karst KBAs in Mon and Kayin States. These sites have been selected based on assessing all potential risks related to the current political situation. The 14 sites are considered safe and without armed or ethnic conflicts, enabling a successful implementation of a community-based karst KBA conservation program.

The project will empower local communities in the 14 karst KBAs to manage the cave and karst KBAs in collaboration with local monasteries and monks. Local cave/karst KBA committees will be trained in sustainable cave tourism management planning, zonation and guiding to reduce the environmental impacts of pilgrimage tourism while increasing local income opportunities from sustainable karst and cave tourism for local villagers. The project will also train local citizens to monitor karst biodiversity, rare and threatened species and continue to raise awareness for karst conservation among local communities. The project will ensure both men and women have an equal opportunity to

participate in the development process of karst KBA community-based management plans, trainings and karst conservation events. The project will facilitate that a minimum of one woman is selected in each cave/karst KBA committee and plan that trainings and meetings are at least 30% women.

Strong commitment from the local Buddhist communities and monks has been an effective deterrent to mining in the karst KBAs. Training and capacity building of local cave management committees have proven successful in reducing the environmental impacts of pilgrimage tourism. Upscaling this approach to a majority of the karst KBAs in Myanmar will provide a very significant contribution to the karst ecosystem and biodiversity conservation. Continued support for local communities and civil society organizations in Myanmar during this difficult political situation is essential to safeguard karst biodiversity in Myanmar.

Together with our partner Community Observer Association (COA), we will:

Facilitate the establishment and adoption of locally managed, sustainable karst and cave KBA management systems by local village/Buddhist communities and local monasteries. This will be achieved through:

- a) Undertaking additional biodiversity surveys, focusing on plants, bats and bird species, at karst KBAs in Kayin and Mon States to fill the remaining knowledge gaps;
- b) providing on-the-job training for local community/citizen scientists and COA members in biodiversity monitoring, including species identification and conservation;
- c) facilitating local stakeholder/community consent to extend the management mandate of existing Buddhist/village cave management committees beyond the cave/sub-surface ecosystem, including the above-ground karst ecosystem of the KBA;
- d) capacity building of local management committees in sustainable management of tourism caves and karst KBAs, and;
- e) supporting cave/karst KBA management committees in the development/implementation of community-based management plans of karst KBAs based on the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

Through awareness raising and engagement with cave tourism actors (cave management committees, monasteries/monks, tour operators and guides), we will promote sustainable cave tourism by:

- a) facilitating the establishment of a network of locally-managed pilgrimage/tourist-cave/KBA operations, in Kayin and Mon States, to share lessons in sustainable karst and cave management and practice, in particular sustainable cave/geo-tourism in karst KBAs, and;
- b) supporting cave management committees to develop at least two additional 'best practice' show-caves with cave tourism management and zonation plans, and biodiversity/cave ecosystem-friendly lighting and visitor pathways designed to safeguard cave biodiversity.

We will share lessons learned through a township-level cave management network meeting. We will build the capacity of show-cave management committees to manage cave tourism according to best practices and support them to develop a marketing strategy for sustainable cave/geo-tourism development.

We will improve the awareness of Buddhist communities and the public, building on our experiences working with religious groups to encourage respect for, and interest in, the biodiversity of caves amongst Buddhist communities, with temples in or adjacent to caves, and encourage monks to become guardians of the caves. We will improve cave conservation through training and empowering local citizen scientists to prepare species checklists and monitor cave and karst biodiversity and threats.

Objectives and key activities:

1. Capacities of local site-based community cave/KBA management committees are improved to protect karst biodiversity and manage caves and KBAs sustainably.
 - 1.1 Facilitate local stakeholder consultation to ensure that the community-based cave management committees have free, prior and informed consent of local non-state stakeholders to protect both cave and above-ground karst eco-systems covering the entire KBA;
 - 1.2 Training workshops for development of community-based management plan for cave/karst KBAs
 - 1.3 Organize a series of trainings on organizational development for the 14 karst KBA management committees
 - 1.4 Organize karst KBA management training for 14 management committees
 - 1.5 Develop a community-managed karst KBA network in Mon and Kayin States for sharing knowledge and lessons learned between sites.
 - 1.6 Organize training in sustainable guano harvesting for at least three guano caves in the karst KBAs

2. Develop community-based management plans for 14 karst KBAs in Kayin and Mon States,
 - 2.2 Additional biodiversity surveys (e.g., birds, bats, plants, invertebrates) to identify species distribution and estimate abundances
 - 2.3 Participatory community natural resource and cultural-use assessment and mapping
 - 2.4 Community consultations following FPIC procedures
 - 2.5 Participatory development of KBA zonation, including rules and regulations of each zone.
 - 2.6 Prepare community-based management plans
 - 2.7 Facilitate the local management committee, including representatives from the local monastery, to prepare the application for either a Community Protected Area, or a religious land title.

3. Karst ecosystem conservation awareness increased among communities in the local villages and surrounding region through a community outreach program, and at least 14 citizen scientists with improved ability to monitor and protect karst dwelling species.
 - 3.1 Baseline KAP survey at project start at 14 Karst KBAs.
 - 3.2 End of project KAP survey at least 14 Karst KBAs.
 - 3.3 Develop karst ecosystem conservation Information, Education, Communication (IEC) materials (posters, signboards and leaflets) to erect/distribute at the karst KBA sites.

3.4 Karst conservation campaign, including village talks, media, social media, throughout the project period.

3.5 Provide classroom and on-the-job training for at least 14 citizen scientists for species identification and conservation interventions for rare and threatened species

4. Pilot sustainable karst eco-tourism in at least three show-caves located in the karst KBAs, including caving and climbing tourism, targeting young visitors.

4.1 Conduct training for the management committees, local guides and tour operators on show-cave tourism management guidelines at three show-caves

4.2 Conduct training on cave documentation and exploration, including climbing and caving, and health and safety, for at least 20 locals

4.3 Conduct training for show-cave tourist guiding at three sites and for at least 15 locals

4.4 Develop marketing plans for show-cave tourism at three sites and promote sustainable show-cave tourism, including climbing and caving, for domestic tourists.

Potential risks: The restrictions related to current political and military tensions could have impacts on the project due to possible travel restrictions for technical staff from Yangon. However, since the projects are implemented by on-site project teams with local partners, the risk is limited.

8. **Date of preparation of this document:**

15 May 2023

9. **Indigenous People affected:**

The project will be implemented at the 14 Karst KBAs in Kayin and Mon States. Seven of the 14 Karst KBAs are located in Kayin State and the rest of the karst KBAs are in Mon State. The majority of the people who live in surrounding areas of the karst KBAs in Kayin State and Mon State are indigenous Kayin ethnic group and indigenous Mon ethnic group respectively. Farming for paddy and rubber tree plantations is the main livelihood of the local people in both states. Since tourism has already developed in Kayin State and the number of visitors increased to visit show-caves in the previous years before the military coup, local communities who live nearby the show-caves operated food stalls for visitors for additional income.

10. **Potential impacts on Indigenous People:**

The project will facilitate development of community-based management plans of karst KBAs as well as provide trainings to the local community/citizen scientists for additional biodiversity surveys, and local management committees for sustainable management of tourism caves and karst KBAs. The project will promote sustainable cave tourism through the establishment of locally-managed pilgrimage/tourist cave/KBA networks and the development of best practice show-caves with cave tourism management and zonation plans.

Potential negative impacts:

- Reduced access to karst KBAs for unsustainable natural resources extraction such as collecting of orchids, medicinal plants, etc.

Potential positive impacts:

- Increased capacity of local community/citizen scientists for biodiversity conservation
- Increased capacity of local management committees on organizational development and sustainable management of tourism caves and karst KBAs.
- Reduced extraction of natural resources such as collecting of orchids, medicinal plants, etc. by non-indigenous outsiders through community-based protection.
- Increased livelihoods of local communities through the development of sustainable cave tourism.

11. Participatory preparation:

Fauna & Flora and a partner organization, Community Observer Association (COA) developed the project design together. Meeting with the member of management committees of eight caves/KBAs; Bayin Nyi, Dhammata, Mt. Zwegapin (sadan cave/Hpan An), Kayin Linno, Kayon, Pharbaung, Weibyan, and Yathae Pyan was organized by COA to discuss the development of community-based karst KBAs management plan as well as the sustainable cave tourism development. The discussion included biodiversity surveys and conservation training for local people, additional biodiversity surveys for identifying priority conservation zones and species, and the development of a local network for sustainable cave tourism in the region. Meetings with three local tour operators from Hpa-An were conducted separately by Fauna & Flora to discuss potential collaboration on the development of sustainable cave tourism in Hpa-An area.

The project will plan to follow the FPIC process at each step along the development of the community-based management plan of karst KBAs through community meetings.

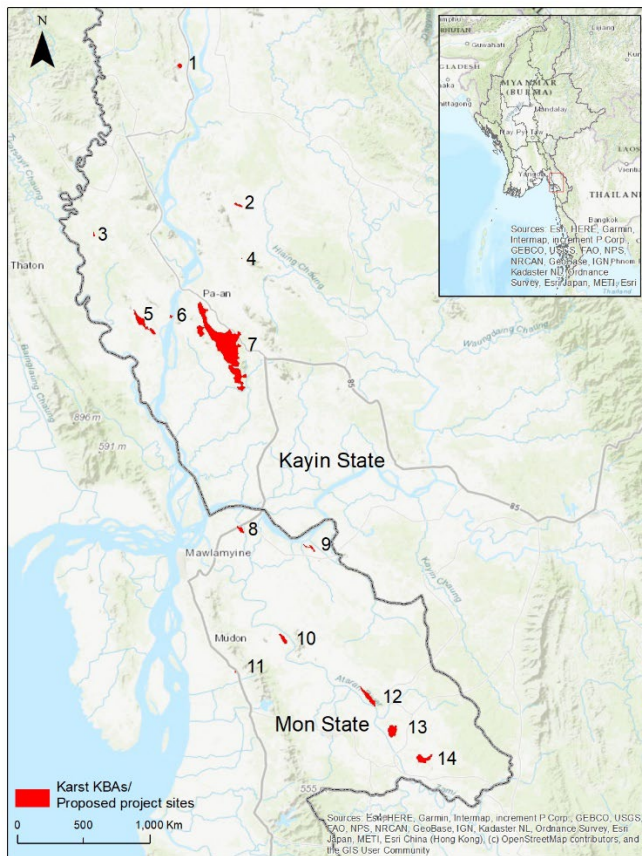
12. Mitigation measures:

Access restrictions only apply for illegal or unsustainable extraction of natural resources, such as hunting and trade of protected species, or illegal logging in the karst KBAs. This project will reduce the dependence of communities on the natural resources. Therefore, there are no negative impacts expected on the livelihoods of indigenous people at any of the karst KBAs. The project will promote the development of sustainable cave/geo-tourism in the karst KBAs. This activity will provide an opportunity for local people to receive additional income from tourism. However, following the Fauna & Flora Social Safeguards Framework, the project will conduct social safeguard screening and assessment of social impacts, and develop a mitigation plan and stakeholder engagement plan.

13. Status of area to be impacted:

The project will be implemented at 14 karst Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in Kayin and Mon States. Each state has seven sites. Of 14 sites, four are located within the Reserve Forest which is managed by Forest Department and the rest are within unclassified land. The below table shows their designation status, and the below map shows their locations.

Sr.	Name of KBAs	State	Designation status
1	Weibyan Karst	Kayin	Unclassified land
2	Naung Ka Myaing Karst	Kayin	Unclassified land
3	Bayin Nyi Karst	Kayin	Unclassified land
4	Waiponla Karst	Kayin	Unclassified land
5	Yathae Pyan Karst	Kayin	Unclassified land
6	Kayin Linno Karst	Kayin	Unclassified land
7	Hpa-an (Mt. Zwegapin karst (sadan cave))	Kayin	Reserve Forest
8	Kayon Karst	Mon	Unclassified land
9	Dhammata Karst	Mon	Reserve Forest
10	Sabel Karst	Mon	Unclassified land
11	Himeinkanein Karst	Mon	Reserve Forest
12	Pharbaung Karst	Mon	Reserve Forest
13	Pathein Karst	Mon	Unclassified land
14	Ataran Taung Karst	Mon	Unclassified land



14. Cultural heritage present:

The project sites include areas of cultural and historical significance, including Buddhist shrines, temples and monasteries. These are significant to both local communities and as sites for pilgrimage for tourists from elsewhere in Myanmar.

None of the sites currently have any legal protection status based on their cultural significance, however, as part of this project, we will support local communities to apply for government recognition/designation as either a community-protected area or a religious area.

15. Potential risks and impacts:

There is a risk that restricting access to core areas of the cave/karst systems in order to protect areas of high biodiversity and endemism will prevent local communities and pilgrims from freely continuing their cultural heritage practices.

16. Measures to preserve cultural heritage:

Strict Free, Prior and Informed Consent procedures will be followed through the consultation process with local stakeholders, to make sure that access is maintained to important cultural/religious sites and objects, and the areas which are designated as core zones and therefore have restricted access, are only undeveloped areas.

17. Timeline and resources for Social Assessment and Cultural Heritage Plan:

During the first two months of the project, the project team will undertake social safeguard screening and assessment of social impact at the inception meeting with the communities at 14 karst KBAs with the support of the Fauna & Flora Social Equity & Rights team. This will include discussion and revision of the Cultural Heritage Plan to make sure there is Free, Prior, and Informed Consent around the restriction of access to cultural sites. Following this, the mitigation plan and stakeholder engagement plan will be developed. The project intends to complete the preparation of mitigation measures within the first quarter of the project.

18. Monitoring and evaluation:

The project will develop a stakeholder engagement plan for the development of karst KBAs management plans at the village level. Stakeholder consultations will be undertaken according to the plan and all engagement with community stakeholders (including issues discussed, who is present, date, agreed outcomes, etc.) will be recorded. All trainings and meetings on sustainable tourism development will be documented through minutes of meetings and training reports. The results of the meetings and training sessions will be included in the technical progress reports to CEPF and/or the Regional Implementation Team.

19. Consultation for Cultural Heritage Plan:

The project will follow the FPIC process at each step along the development of the community-based management plan of karst KBAs through community meetings, including for the restriction of access to areas of cultural importance. Meetings with communities at the 14 karst KBAs will take place during the first quarter of the project to adapt and update the Cultural Heritage Plan in a participatory way.

20. **Chance find procedure:**

The likelihood of chance finds will be limited by the selection of the sites developed as show-caves, and the areas chosen within them for lighting and visitor pathways to be installed. In the unlikely event that an item of cultural heritage is found, the following procedure will take place:

- Work in the proximate area will be paused and the finds protected from further disturbance.
- Relevant authorities will be notified of found objects or sites.
- Consult with the community cave/KBA management committees to manage the finds.

All project workers will be trained on this procedure.

21. **Disclosure:**

The project will disclose and explain the Social Assessments and Cultural Heritage Plans during the inception meeting with each community at 14 karst KBAs at the beginning of the project. This will provide an opportunity for the community to provide further input for the assessment and express any concerns that may not have been considered.