

The Process Framework for Avoidance of the Adverse Impacts on Involuntary Restriction

(Compliance with CEPF⁷ Social Safeguard Policy)

Project title: Mitigation of devastating threats to the CEPF⁷ priority globally threatened species in the far north Annamite range in the Nam Mo-Nam Thong provincial protected area through raising awareness campaign and strengthen a strong partnership with local communities

Organization: The Lao Wildlife Conservation Association (Lao WCA)

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1. Project background

This project seeks to conserve populations of the CEPF⁷ priority globally threatened species in the far north Annamite mountain range, with preference to the Northern White-Cheeked Gibbon (*Nomascus leucogenys*) and Saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) in the Nam Mo-Nam Thong (NMT) provincial protected area (PPA) of Xiengkhouang province, north-eastern Lao PDR. They are both now listed as critically endangered (IUCN Red List 2013). The Saola is restricted to the northern and central portions of the Annamite mountain range along Lao-Vietnam border. The NMT PPA is probably the northern-most portion of Saola's potential range in the country. The area was identified as one of 10 priority sites in the *Saola Conservation Action Plan for Lao PDR* (Robichaud, 1999) called for conservation actions. The Northern White-cheeked Gibbon occurs in Southern China, northern Lao PDR and northern Vietnam. It was believed that the species has declined by at least 80% over the past 45 years due primarily to hunting and habitat loss. At present, the species is known from few localities in the north-west and north-central parts of Vietnam and might no longer survive in the southernmost Yunnan province of China. In Lao PDR, the occurrence of White-cheeked gibbon ranges from the far north east of the country to the vicinity of Nam Kading river in Nam Kading national protected area (MAF 2011). The species is now recorded in few national protected areas, but little is known about its population status.

Nam Mo-Nam Thong covers approximately 53,000 ha, lies between a longitude: 103° 31' 54" and latitude: 104° 16' 44" and 19° 07' 20" and 19° 17' 20", with elevation range from 1200-1800 m asl, under political administration of Mokmai district, Xiengkhouang province. The PPA shares borders with the Vietnam to the north and Viengthong district (Bolikhamxai province) to the east. The PPA has been now proposed to the central government to upgrade it as national protected area, and the process of approval is ongoing. The first ground wildlife survey and conservation initiative was introduced to the Nam Mo PPA as well as to the province in large by the Lao WCA in 2012 given a financial support from the CEPF small grant. The project focused its efforts on investigation of Saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) and other wildlife species in partnership with local government authorities and communities.

Findings clearly show the Nam Mo PPA still remains important habitats that support key populations of several species of global conservation concerns. Most notably, confirmed reports and field evidence of the critically endangered Saola and the northern white-cheeked gibbon. In light of these findings, the study strongly suggests that a priority of important conservation activities at the present should focus on building better understanding for local government officials and villagers about conservation need and significance of those endangered species.

2. The project approach

This project continues on recent conservation initiatives, which aims largely at mitigating threats to those endangered wildlife species through conducting public conservation awareness. This project will focus its activities to achieve these following objectives;

- (i) Raising conservation awareness about conservation significance of endangered wildlife species, with preference to the northern white-cheeked gibbon and Saola, and other Annamite endemic species for local villagers nearby the PPA.
 - proposed strategy and actions
 - Meeting with villagers at six villages around the PPA and other adjacent villages to introduce the protect initiatives.
 - Consultation workshops with local authorities and communities to create a platform for conservation coordination and cooperation among villages and district government authorities
 - Produce some education and outreach materials (e.g., posters) addressing threats to wildlife for awareness campaign.
 - Distribute those awareness materials to relevant villages, schools and district offices
 - Produce some board signs to post at key entrance to (and along boundary of) the Nam Mo PPA according to results of consultation and agreement.
 - Conduct awareness campaign in target villages nearby and adjacent villages for adults and kids.

- (ii) Strengthening the coordination and cooperation between local villagers and government protected area staff to effectively protect the endangered wildlife species in Nam Mo PPA
 - proposed strategy and actions
 - Organize meetings at target villages nearby the Nam Mo PPA involving all border' military, Nam Mo district offices, and key villagers to discuss and develop a conceptual model to find resolutions and ways of how to work together effectively to protect the endangered wildlife in their natural habitat.
 - Develop a regulation or agreement to specifically address the endangered wildlife species. The agreement will be signed off by a district or provincial governor to serve as a legal backup for villagers and local authorities to take effective ground conservation initiatives.

3. Assessment of project impacts on involuntary restrictions of access to resources

The aim of this project is not just to protect key wildlife species and ecosystem, but also to strengthen and empower local institutions and people in decision making and management of their commune resources. It is unlikely that this project will adversely impact on involuntary restriction of access to resources as most activities of this project are fully implemented with full participation of local communities in voluntariness. Major activities are limited in scope of building local (government staff and local villagers) awareness on sustainable use of natural resources and conservation of those threatened wildlife species that should maximize the long-term goods and services for local people. Conservation awareness campaign is an important tool in building cooperative effort so that all activities and decisions will be made voluntarily through participatory process. The assessment for above objectives and actions is described as following;

- (i) Raising conservation awareness about conservation significance of endangered wildlife species, with preference to the northern white-cheeked gibbon and Saola, and other Annamite endemic species for local villagers nearby the PPA – in order to achieve this objective, villagers and village committees are organizers of activities, and each of those is organized on voluntariness and culture or local norm. Despite they may be provided some educational materials (e.g., posters, t-shirt etc..) to support their activities, those will be designed or produced based on prior consultation and decision making is made on voluntariness. Since activities is implemented based on their decision, practice, culture and voluntary, it is anticipated that the proposed activities will not create the adverse impacts on involuntary restriction of access to resources (except to times consumed in implementation of activities). Rather, the project will empower and strengthen local people and institutions to support use of resources in sustainable way and long-term benefits provided by healthy through save the endangered wildlife.
- (ii) Strengthening the coordination and cooperation between local villagers and government protected area staff to effectively protect the endangered wildlife species in Nam Mo PPA. Regular interaction between government agencies and local villagers allow concerned parties to share experience and find optimum solutions to any problem related. It is crucial in a process of building cooperative effort, and enhancing effective conservation of species and ecosystem, which it, in turn, provides goods and ecosystem services necessary for local livelihood viability. In this regard, all activities, e.g, meetings or workshops, will be taken place under consultation and agreement with all concerned stakeholders, include local villagers and based on voluntariness and culture. Our main role in these activities is to provide technical and financial support to organize meetings and relevant activities. So, all issues or concerns raised by individual stakeholder will be discussed in the meetings, together justified and adapted accordingly. In this regard, everybody, either man or woman, will be given an equal opportunity to involve in implementing project activities based on his/her voluntariness. Those affected people from the project implementation will be identified and allow them to express their opinion to ease their concerns. However, it is anticipated that some negative impacts may occur with someone as illegal activities, e.g. hunting, may be restricted and direct benefits derived from the area minimized.

4. Measures to avoid the adverse impacts and for mitigation

This project is to focus on raising local awareness on wildlife conservation, which is essential for securing the long-term survival of key wildlife species and their habitat, and in turn this will contributes greatly to improvement of local livelihood and economy through sustainable use of resources. So, the key measure to avoid any adverse impacts on local communities that may occur during the project implementation will be a focus on open discussion, consultation, understanding and voluntariness- In the consultation meeting prior to implementation of project activities, several key topics to be raised will include; (i) what is the Saola and gibbon population status?, (ii) why need to conserve them?, (iii) how conservation of Saola, gibbon and other wildlife link to local livelihood, and (iv) how the public awareness campaign be useful for securing future conservation of species and livelihood development. All message will be communicated in local languages (i.e., Hmong and Khamu), and then all villagers as well as local authorities are consulted how they can work together to look for ways for mitigation of any negative impacts may occur, which is in line with national policy and local norms.

Prior to commencing education awareness campaign, potentially affected people will be consulted and appropriate measures will be together identified to reduce negative impact. They will be invited to join the awareness team in voluntary manner, and be paid with optimum wage while conducting

awareness activities, so that employment are provided through participating in project activities that they can compensate their times and effort during being away from families. Most importantly, all project activities will require close cooperation and consultation with local villagers to ensure all activities are compatible with village norms and all decision makings are made on voluntariness.

All local villagers (either male or females) are equally given opportunities to participate in process of project implementation and management, i.e., in critical thinking, making decision, implementing, taking responsibility, and sharing benefits. Most importantly, prior to commencement of each project activity, the Lao WCA staff will conduct an introductory session in local languages where the project and activity will be explained. Local villagers as well as government staff at the provincial and district levels, will be first consulted and clearly explained its goal and objectives. Should potential participants have questions or concerns, they will be invited to seek clarification and either receives immediate verbal or written replies (as requested). Consent by stakeholder participants will be documented for each activity. Participants who offer their consent and wish to continue participation will be requested to sign a consent form that clearly outlines the activity they will be participating in and state that they clearly understand and willingly participate from an informed position. If participants are not familiar with Lao language, efforts will be made to ensure that the consent form is explained in the person's relevant ethnic language. Further, this document will also include information on the communication channel they should follow if they are satisfied with the project for any reason.

Local communities will be encouraged to freely discuss how the project can or is affecting their livelihoods with WCA during implementation of project activities, so that mitigation strategies can be developed or adapted in close collaboration with persons (i.e., individuals, communities) and implemented accordingly. In order to achieve above consultation, a conceptual model (tool) will be developed together with local villagers to identify what are direct and indirect threats to animals, and also to find proper ways to address such threats, which create little adverse impact on local communities, but enhance conservation of the species. Participatory mapping process will provide substantial information on patterns of resource use of local communities, which then inform as group of people to be affected most by restrictions on resources. Then, those affected people will be consulted and appropriate measures will be together identified to have a minimal impact. They will be also requested to involve voluntarily in field activities so that employment are provided through participating in field surveys.

5. Monitoring avoidance of adverse impacts

Monitoring to avoid adverse impacts will be taken closely and continuously throughout the duration of the project by the set-up committee, comprises of villagers, local authority, and WCA staff, to;

- Regular visits to project villagers to meet with those target groups to find out and document any concerns that may occur and (if any) then consulted on mitigation measures
- Work with government partners and other conservation/development agencies on project initiatives and share information that can be used as baseline for project design that enhance conservation while cause little adverse impact on local communities.
- Employment of affected villagers to assist in project activities will be regularly checked and documented to ensure full support from local villagers.

6. Conflict resolution and grievance/complaint mechanism

Due to the relatively small size and short duration of project activities, monitoring will occur on an activity by activity basis by the Lao WCA project manager in collaboration with WCA' staff and local commune staff. In particular involvement of the local commune to assist in the identification of sources of conflict, respond to affected persons and report on results is essential as this is often the most appropriate level to address local areas of conflict. Reports will be provided to project partners, and project staff will follow-up on any reported issues with affected persons directly in the field. Where relevant, the project will support affected persons to contact CEPF RIT.

7. Complaint Communication Channel/Mechanism.

Should participants or other local people express their dissatisfaction with the project for any reason; the project will provide opportunities for them to communicate their dissatisfaction to one or all of the following: project staff, Lao WCA and the CEPF-RIT team. This channel/mechanism will be communicated to communities through a single-page hand-out that summarizes the project, provides the contact details of the WCA and CEPF-RIT staff in Bangkok, Thailand. The Lao WCA will ensure that copies of this complaint communication channel/mechanism will be kept with Commune Authorities, placed on Commune notice boards, made available during the course of project activities and upon request.