

Social Assessment

20 December 2016

CEPF Application Code: 66322

Turtle Survival Alliance

Securing Local Participation in Conservation of River Turtles in Myanmar

Upper Chindwin River

Grant Summary

1. Grantee organization: Turtle Survival Alliance
2. Grant title: **Securing Local Participation in Conservation of River Turtles in Myanmar**
3. Grant number: Application number 66322
4. Grant amount (US dollars). \$80,000 (requested)
5. Proposed dates of grant: 1 January 2017 through 31 December 2018.
6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken: Myanmar
7. Date of preparation of this document: 10 December 2016
8. **Indigenous People affected:** This section will describe the Indigenous People in the project area.

There are 30-40 villages located along the Chindwin River within the project area, populated largely by ethnic Shan, Burmese, and Naga with lesser numbers of Chin and Rakhine. Rice farming is the predominant livelihood, although some villages contain significant numbers of fishers and bamboo cutters. Many adult males also spend much of the year working in gold and amber mines, an occupation considered more lucrative than farming or fishing. Nonetheless, fishing remains an important livelihood that provides households with both income and dietary protein. In the past, cultural practices largely regulated the harvest of turtle eggs; however, it is unclear to what extent these strictures were applied to fisheries.

9. **Summary of the proposed project:** This section will describe what you plan to do and how you plan to do it, with a particular focus on activities implemented in areas inhabited and/or used by Indigenous People.

We propose to expand an existing community-based turtle conservation program along the upper Chindwin River to include 1) an increased number of Community Conservation Volunteers (CCVs) charged with monitoring nesting sites and participating in conservation actions to recover turtle populations, and 2) establish community-based fisheries – including Fish Conservation Zones (FCZs) - to protect critical turtle habitat. These activities are each discussed separately below:

Community Conservation Volunteers - Currently, a small number (ca. 10) of villagers serve as "conservation wardens" every year during the *B. trivittata* nesting season (December through March), tasked with protecting and monitoring known turtle nesting sites, and assisting the TSA/WCS team with collecting and transporting eggs to a secure incubation site. We plan to amplify this already successful program by establishing a dedicated cadre of CCVs at 30-40 villages along the upper Chindwin River. The CCVs will be tasked with protecting and monitoring nesting sites of *Batagur trivittata* and softshell turtles, searching for softshell turtle eggs and assisting with egg collections, and serving as focal individuals in their communities for collecting project-relevant data (e.g., reports of turtle nesting activity, sightings of turtles by local villagers, and incidental take of turtles by fishing gear). CCVs will also serve as field technicians in monitoring a second reintroduction of head-started *B. trivittata* in the Chindwin River. Recruits will be selected to serve as CCVs on the basis of their previous association with TSA/WCS Turtle Team or recommendations of village leaders, monks, and village school teachers. Once selected, recruits will participate in a supervised training program that includes both classroom instruction and hands-on practical experience with the team. Upon

successful completion of the training period, recruits will be commissioned as CCVs, given assignments, and paid a modest monthly stipend.

Establish community-based fisheries to protect critical turtle habitat – As detailed in our proposal, a variety of criterion will be used to select areas suitable for inclusion within a network of Fish Conservation Zones (FCZs), including participatory interviews of river dwellers (2012-16), preliminary surveys of river fisheries (2016), and continuing consultations with villagers (2016). Most FCZs will encompass deep pools (known locally as *aikes*) that are critical habitat for resident female *B. trivittata* and in many cases immediately adjacent to nesting beaches. These deep pools are also important spawning sites for fish and as such, are often over-harvested. Establishing FCZs at these sites would go far towards protecting turtles from by-catch in fishing gear and insuring sustainable fish populations through enhanced recruitment. A participatory planning process is involving villagers in every step of the planning and implementation process. Preliminary discussions with riverside dwellers suggest a great deal of enthusiasm for measures that will foster an increase in local fish stocks which are widely perceived as being greatly reduced from past years. These reductions are attributed to industrial gold mining and years of over-fishing.

10. Potential impacts: This section will assess expected project impacts (both positive and negative) on Indigenous People.

Our project will have an overwhelmingly positive impact by empowering local communities to sustainably manage their fisheries resources. If effective, FCZs and attendant regulations will increase local fish populations through enhanced recruitment, and ultimately result in a sustainable river fishery that provides a steady income stream to local fishers. Because the riverside sandbanks where turtles nest are occasionally also used as seasonal agricultural fields, protective measures could result in the loss of a small amount of agricultural land (but see mitigation below).

11. Participatory preparation: This section will describe the participation of affected communities during the project design process (i.e. prior to submission of the full proposal), and explain how Free, Prior and Informed Consent was obtained.

After it became apparent that developing and implementing a community-based fisheries management plan would be an important adjunct to our turtle conservation efforts, the TSA/WCS Team initiated discussions of this topic during regularly scheduled outreach programs to riverside communities in February 2016 (Annex 1). During these visits, the team met with community leaders, monks, and rank-and-file villagers, explained our conservation objectives and the principles underpinning community-based resource management. It quickly became apparent that villagers were overwhelmingly in favor of managing their own fisheries, and we therefore began informal group discussions in each village to develop tentative site-specific plans. During these meetings we discussed potential negative and positive impacts on local livelihoods, sought information on local fishing practices, important fish habitats, customary fishing rights, the location and configuration of potential FCZs, possible community-based fishing regulations, and social safeguard measures. Villagers were active participants in these discussions and their input was sought at all levels of planning.

12. Mitigation strategies: This section will outline measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits.

The only potential adverse impact that we foresee arising from our project is the possible displacement of a small number of seasonal riverside agriculturalists from sandbanks designated as

critical turtle nesting habitat. Seasonal agriculture is already restricted on portions of the four sandbanks used by nesting *Batagur trivittata*, and has been so since 2005. This regulation is enforced by the Myanmar Forest Department. However, once the turtles have nested (early to mid-March) and the eggs removed to a secure incubation area (Limpha Village), cultivators are once again granted access to the sandbank. Should additional nesting sites for *Batagur trivittata* be discovered (unlikely given the very small number of adult female turtles surviving in the wild), seasonal agriculture will no doubt be likewise restricted until after the laying period. That said, the number of potential cultivators effected by the regulations is small (<10 persons). Moreover, most of the affected people are also employed as CCVs to monitor turtle nesting activity and paid a monthly stipend to do so, thereby compensating them for income lost by having to delay planting until mid-March.

On the other hand, seasonal riverside agriculturalists are not viewed as a threat to softshell turtle nesting. Indeed, softshell turtle eggs are frequently unearthed from the loose sand of cultivated riverside fields. We suspect that cultivation may actually enhance the value of sandbanks as softshell nesting habitat by removing vegetation and providing an open, easily excavated substrate for nesting. Thus, there seems to be no pressing need to deny agriculturalists access to sandbanks used by nesting softshell turtles.

13. **Monitoring and evaluation:** This section will explain how compliance with the safeguard policy on Indigenous Peoples will be monitored, and reported to CEPF and/or the Regional Implementation Team. Monitoring and evaluation methodologies should be adapted to the local context, indicators, and capacity.

As explained in the item below, contact information necessary for filing grievances will be provided to villagers and community leaders in the form of bilingual (Shan and Burmese) posters and handbills. Should grievances arise, each will be immediately investigated by the TSA/WCS Team based in Htamanthi. The merits of any grievance will be assessed and attempts will be made to resolve conflicts to the satisfaction of all parties. Each grievance and subsequent outcome will be included in six-month reports to CEPF. Regardless of whether or not any grievances have been filed, inquiries will also be made during regularly scheduled community meetings to identify problems that might not have been reported through regular channels; efforts will then be made to address these issues in a timely manner.

14. **Grievance mechanism:** All projects that trigger a safeguard are required to provide local communities and other interested stakeholders with means by which they may raise a grievance with the grantee, the relevant Regional Implementation Team, the CEPF Secretariat or the World Bank. Affected local communities should be informed of the objectives of the grant and the existence of a grievance mechanism. Contact information of the grantee, the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director should be made publicly available, through posters, signboards, public notices or other appropriate means in local language(s). Grievances raised with the grantee should be communicated to the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days, together with a proposed response. If the claimant is still not satisfied following the response, the grievance may be submitted directly to the CEPF Executive Director via the dedicated email account (cepfexecutive@conservation.org) or by mail. If the claimant is not satisfied with the response from the CEPF Secretariat, the grievance may be submitted to the World Bank at the local World Bank office. Please describe the grievance mechanism that you will use for your project, and how you will ensure that stakeholders are aware of it.

Riverside communities in the project area are already aware of our conservation efforts and project objectives, although we have yet to discuss the availability of grievance procedures. In keeping with

the policies of CEPF, this information will be provided during forthcoming consultations in each village during early 2017. Contact information for TSA/WCS, Myanmar Forest Department, CEPF Regional Implementation Team, and CEPF Grant Director will be made available on posters and handbills in both Burmese and Shan language. Posters will be prominently placed in each village (public announcements are customarily displayed at the home of the village headman and in one or more local shops) and handbills distributed to villagers during meetings and group discussions. Moreover, the grievance procedure will be further explained to villagers by TSA/WCS Team members during community meetings, reinforcing information provided in printed format.

- 15. Budget:** This section will summarize dedicated costs related to compliance with the safeguard policy on Indigenous Peoples. These costs should be incorporated into the budget of the CEPF grant and/or covered by co-financing.

An amount of \$3300 in the project budget will be dedicated to insuring compliance with the CEPF safeguard policy. This amount includes \$1800 for travel to project villages (to conduct community meetings and discussions) and \$1500 for sponsoring meetings and producing posters and handbills that will inform villagers about the grievance process.