



Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund Social Assessment

(compliance with CEPF's Safeguard Policy on Indigenous People)

Project title: Findings the Saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) in the Annamite range in Lao PDR.

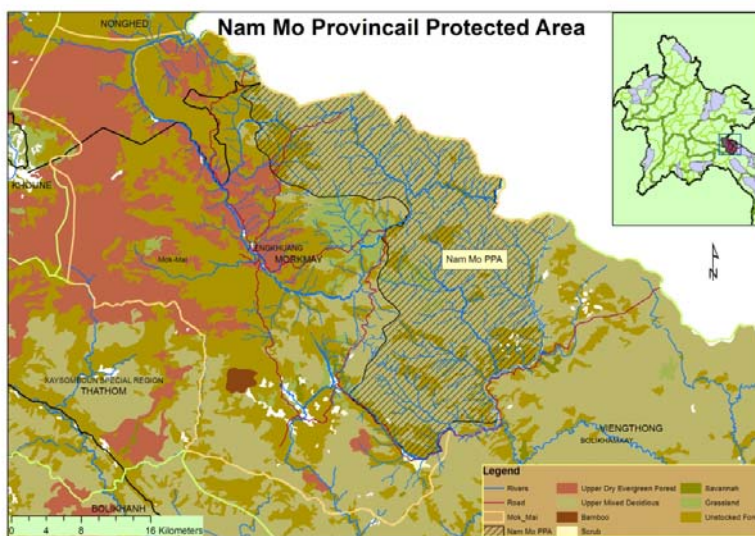
Organization: The Lao Wildlife Conservation Association (Lao WCA)

Date: November, 2012

1. Project background

This project seeks to conserve the priority population of the Critical Endangered Saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) in Annamite mountain range, with a particular focus on Nam Mo-Nam Thong (NMT) provincial protected area (PPA) of Xiengkhouang province, north-eastern Lao PDR. The species 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) for basic survey to determine the status of Saola. However, more than 10 years later, this area has never been surveyed. The main reasoning behind this was largely due to the area has been restricted to outsiders as a result of security issues.

NMT PPA is approximately 100,251 ha, located in Mok Mai district, Xiengkhouang province, near Lao-Vietnam border. The PPA has been now proposed to the central government to upgrade it as national protected area, and the process of approval is ongoing. So far, the biological information was come only from village interviews by provincial protected area staff, but no ground surveys were undertaken. Of those recorded species, the Saola was one of them to be reported of occurrence in this area, but exact locations are still uncertain. Lack of abundance and distribution of species makes it difficult for the government of Lao PDR, particularly conservation agencies, to develop proper plan to secure the long-term conservation of this endangered species. Therefore, this project aims to investigate the occurrence and distribution of Saola, and also the nature of threats to the species in the northern portion of Saola' potential range. The survey will first start by village questionnaires, and then followed by ground forest surveys in target sites by working



closely with local villagers and government staff to search for their evidence, i.e., track, droppings. The expected outcomes of this project include;

- Reliable Information on abundance and distribution of Saola in the NMT PPA
- Information on its habitat and its current threats
- Improved local understanding on Saola conservation significance and needs.
- Improved local capacity for field survey techniques
- Identified site for future Saola conservation action

1.1. The project approach

This project initiative is the first systematic field assessment of the status of Saola in the last northern portion of Saola range, aiming to generate better understanding on its occurrence and distribution of the species. This project will focus its activities to achieve these following objectives;

- (i) Obtain and document a reliable estimate of abundance and distribution of the Saola – there has been reports of Saola presence for years, but no systematic assessment of its population status, either its abundance and distribution, was made in this portion of Annamite range.
- (ii) Assess and document the threats/potential threats to the species and find ways to maintain/increase the Saola population
- (iii) Enhance development of conservation strategy to ensure the long-term survival of Sala through consultation and participatory planning with local villagers nearby the area.

Major activities taken to achieve the above objectives, which funded by the CEPF include;

- Formal and informal village interviews to determine the occurrence and distribution of the Saola in villages inside and nearby the NMT PPA. In villages with reports of Saola, we will conduct village Participatory Biodiversity Assessment using community mapping to build better understanding on locations of Saola presences and unique features of the area. This will involve the government staff at central, provincial and district levels.
- Conduct ground field surveys to locate the evidence of Saola, including tracks, scats, etc., and assess its habitats in the PPA. This will involve local villagers, government officials, and university students to conduct field activities.
- Document the survey findings in forms of technical reports showing the presence and distribution of Saola in NMT PPA.

1.2. Summary of Socio-economic Context

The targeted Project villages within the NMT PPA share similarities in socio-economic characteristics i.e. they are located within Lao's northern poor mountainous district and the remote, ethnic minority communities living inside and on the periphery of protected areas are generally poor. Those villages inside and nearby this forest area are home to populations of Lao's ethnic minorities, especially Hmong and Khamu peoples. The overwhelming majority of people in Laos are of Lao

Loum (lawland Lao) ethnicity. Given the dominance of what are considered nationally ethnic minorities at each village, no Indigenous People's Planning Framework will be prepared; all measures to mitigate impact to local communities, described in this Social Assessment, will apply directly to local ethnic minority groups.

All communities inside or close to this PPA have a relatively significant reliance on forest based natural resources for their livelihood, as these typically include timber harvesting, hunting for bush meat, forest clearance for agriculture, collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and grazing of livestock within forest areas. The national laws, e.g., forestry and land law, clearly define that local people have a customary right to use land and other natural resources in sustainable manner for their livelihood. Under Section 4 of the Forestry Law (2007), Articles 40, 41, 42 and 43 permit (i) the utilization of forest and forest products for village public benefits (village offices, schools and dispensaries); (ii) for housing (construction and repair); (iii) for customary utilization of forest and forest products for household consumption; and (iv) for commercial trading. Further clarification on this issue is provided by MAF Regulation 360(Now, base on new forestry law its on processing to draft the new regulation by DOF)

2. Assessment of project impacts on indigenous people

It is unlikely that this project will adversely impact local indigenous people as most activities are limited in scope to participatory assessment of baseline data on abundance and distribution of the endangered Saola. All approaches will be made through involvement and strong consultation with local communities. However, anticipated impacts of project activities are outlined below.

1. Village interviews to gain basic knowledge on species presence - *Positive:* Villagers are consulted and this will help to raise local awareness on Saola conservation significance and needs, and thus support the participatory conservation that secure the save of the Saola from extinct. *Negative:* Some villagers may worry about restricted access to forest resources as a result of Saola conservation initiatives in the protected area.

2. Baseline surveys in the field to determine population status - *Positive:* Villagers are requested (or hired) to participate in field surveys, their knowledge and experience gained through participation in training and field survey will enable them to better understand about animal ecology, and thus encourage them to protect the Saola. Along with field survey, villagers are hired to assist in the fieldwork can earn some incomes from involvement in this project. The findings from this project will be used subsequently to support participatory planning and conservation actions to secure long-term survival of this species as well as to provide alternatives for local livelihood through sustainable use of natural resources. *Negative:* Presence of outsiders (researchers) in the area may make villagers feel less respectful to the forest. Villagers may think that Saola has high economic value, and thus leads to increased poaching of Saola. Fieldwork may keep villagers away from their daily family activities or make sometime homesick.

3. Plan for free or Mitigation

3.1 Plans for free, prior and informed consultations with affected communities

This project is to focus on gathering baseline information on abundance and distribution of Saola population, which is essential for development of effective conservation strategy to ensure the long-term survival of the endangered Saola and its habitat and also improvement of local livelihood and economy. In this regard, local people are central to implementation of the project. 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. Hence prior to commencement of each activity, e.g., questionnaire survey, field visit etc., the Lao WCA will conduct an introductory session in local languages where the project and activity will be explained. Should potential participants have any questions or concerns, they will be invited to seek clarification and either receives immediately verbal replies or written information (if requested) from Lao WCA staff. It is envisaged that potential participants will thereafter be able to make an informed decision whether they would like to pursue further involvement in the project activities and grant their consent.

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 (or affix a finger print next to their name if necessary) that clearly outlines the activity they will be participating in and states that they clearly understand and willingly participate from an informed position. If people 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 channels they should follow if they are dissatisfied with the project for any reason.

Note: All local communities involved in this CEPF-funded project will be informed of the concept and process of Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation during the course of the project. Further, if subsequent funding is raised during the life time of this project, local communities will be consulted in line with this policy.

3.2 Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits

As mentioned above, this project is aiming to gather baseline information on Saola population status that can be used for future development of proper conservation plan and action. So, the key measure to avoid any adverse impacts on local communities that may occur during the project implementation will be a focus on **raising local awareness and understanding** - In the consultation meeting prior to implementation of project activities, several key topics to be raised will include; (i) what is the Saola population status?, (ii) why need to conserve Saola?, (iii) how conservation of Saola link to local livelihood, and (iv) how the collected information be useful for future planning on Saola conservation 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.

Prior to conducting field work, potentially affected people will be consulted and appropriate measures will be together identified to reduce negative impact. They will be hired to work in field activities, with optimum wage, so that employment are provided through participating in field surveys that they can compensate their times and effort during being away from families. Most importantly, although the field survey techniques are designed by the project team, the ground-truth field surveys will require close cooperation and consultation with local villagers to ensure field

activities are compatible with village norms. Some people will be trained on field survey and conservation techniques, therefore it provides future employment for them to engage in long-term monitoring, other conservation activities, nature-based tourism etc.. Of most important, it is strongly envisaged that villagers' experiences and knowledge gained through participatory implementation of survey activities will strengthen local involvement in conservation of Saola.

4. Monitoring avoidance of adverse impacts

Monitoring to avoid adverse impacts will be taken continuously throughout the duration of the projection,

- 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.

5. 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.

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 Hanoi, Vietnam. 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.