

Social Assessment

16 March 2022

CEPF Application Code 111860

Turtle Survival Alliance

Back from the Brink: Recovering Two Critically Endangered Turtles in Myanmar

Upper Chindwin River, Myanmar

Grant Summary

1. Grantee organization: Turtle Survival Alliance
2. Grant title: Back from the Brink: Recovering Two Critically Endangered Turtles in Myanmar.
3. Grant number: 111860
4. Grant amount (US dollars): \$240,000
5. Proposed dates of grant: 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2024
6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken: Myanmar
7. Date of preparation of this document: 12 March 2022
8. **Indigenous People affected:** This section will describe the Indigenous People in the project area.

There are seven villages located along the Chindwin River within the project area consisting of 374 households and supporting a population of 2771 persons (Appendix 1). These villages are populated largely by indigenous Shan and Naga, and non-indigenous Burmese. Rice farming is the predominant livelihood, with a lesser emphasis on fishing and bamboo harvesting. Fishing provides additional dietary protein to households and little of the catch is marketed, except within the village. Many adult males also spend much of the year working in gold and amber mines, an occupation considered more lucrative than farming. In the past, cultural practices largely regulated the harvest of turtle eggs; these strictures are still respected by some individuals, and provide a basis of local support for our conservation project.

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 continue our existing community-based turtle conservation program focused on the Critically Endangered Burmese Roofed Turtle (*Batagur trivittata*) along the upper Chindwin River. A major thrust of this effort is our use of locally-recruited Community Conservation Volunteers (CCVs) charged with monitoring nesting sites and participating in conservation actions designed to recover turtle populations. Currently, a small number (ca. 5-7) of villagers serve as "beach 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. One such beach warden is assigned to oversee the secure sandbank at Limpha Village where the eggs undergo incubation; as hatching nears (late May and June), this individual inspects the nests several times each day and collects any hatchlings that may have emerged. Other CCVs that serve as field technicians are responsible for weekly monitoring translocated turtles (now free-living in the Chindwin River) using sonic telemetry. The team leader maintains an Excel database of spatial data from the telemetered turtles, which are occasionally transmitted back to TSA/WCS leadership in Yangon. These CCVs also provide daily care and feeding to >200 turtles being head-started in the grow-out facility at Limpha Basecamp. Water in the grow-out ponds is changed monthly, an operation requiring at least 48 hours. The CCV Team hires other villagers as day laborers to assist with this task. Finally, we maintain contractual agreements with five small-scale village agriculturalists to supply vegetables to the grow-out facility in Limpha Village. These growers are without exception women, most of whose husbands are either deceased or work at

distant amber and jade mines. The growers supply the grow-out facility with locally produced foodstuffs that are incorporated into the diet provided to the head-started turtles.

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

Our project has an overwhelmingly positive impact by providing seasonal and permanent employment for 10-15 ethnic Shan villagers living along the upper Chindwin River. This is especially important now given the state of the Myanmar economy and the lack of other employment opportunities. CCVs also receive training as part of their participation in the project and broaden their skill set in ways that may provide employment opportunities in the future. Because the riverside sandbanks where turtles nest are used occasionally 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.

TSA/WCS have been involved in the target communities since 2006 when our basecamp was first established in Limpha Village. Since that time, we have conducted biannual community education and conservation outreach programs in numerous villages along the upper Chindwin River. In 2016, as part of a CEPF funded initiative to promote community-based fisheries, we held discussions at numerous villages along the Chindwin River. During these visits, the team met with community leaders, monks, and villagers, explained our conservation objectives and the principles underpinning community-based resource management. Villagers remain supportive of our project and many perceive our work as a means to restore certain elements of Shan culture that are now lost (e.g., turtle egg harvest). Indeed, many of the elderly persons employed as beach wardens can recall participating in the annual egg harvest during their youth. In January 2021, prior to submitting our Letter of Intent, we conducted meetings with community leaders villagers in the seven project villages (Appendix 1) to advise them of our plans and allow them to voice any concerns. Participants raised no objections to our continued efforts to restore *B. trivittata* to the Chindwin River. We stress that villagers have always been – and continue to be - active participants in these discussions whose input is 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 by village-level regulations on portions of the four sandbanks used by nesting *Batagur trivittata*, and has been so since 2005. These restrictions are managed at the local level by the CCVs serving as Beach Wardens assigned to monitor these nesting sites. 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. The number of potential cultivators effected by the regulations is small (<10 persons). Moreover, Seven of the affected people are among the 10 CCVs employed as Beach Wardens to monitor turtle nesting activity and are paid a monthly stipend to do so, thereby compensating them for income lost by having to delay planting until mid-March.

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 below and following our practice with previous CEPF-funded projects, 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 must provide local communities and other relevant stakeholders with a means to raise a grievance with the grantee, the relevant Regional Implementation Team or the CEPF Secretariat.

This grievance mechanism must include, at a minimum, the following elements.

- Email and telephone contact information for the grantee organization.
- Email and telephone contact information for the CEPF Regional Implementation Team.
- The email of the CEPF Executive Director: cepfexecutive@conservation.org
- A statement describing how you will inform stakeholders of the objectives of the project and the existence of the grievance mechanism (e.g., posters, signboards, public notices, public announcements, use of local languages).
- You should include the following text, exactly, in any grievance mechanism: “We will share all grievances – and a proposed response – with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance directly to the CEPF Executive Director at cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by surface mail.”

Following the guidance above, describe the grievance mechanism that you will use.

In keeping with the policies of CEPF, the grievance procedures have been discussed during previous village-level discussions, most recently in January 2021. Contact information for TSA/WCS, 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 \$3000 in the project budget will be dedicated to insuring compliance with the CEPF safeguard policy. This amount includes \$1500 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.