

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

16 November 2021

CEPF Grant 112481

Rural Development Fund

Improving the Management of the Chychkan Gorge

Kyrgyzstan

Grant Summary

1. **Grantee organization:** Rural Development Fund (RDF)
2. **Grant title:** Improving the Management of the Chychkan Gorge of Kyrgyzstan
3. **Grant number:** 112481
4. **Grant amount (US dollars):** approximately US \$150,000
5. **Proposed dates of grant:** 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2023
6. **Project location (country):** Kyrgyzstan
7. **Date of preparation of this document:** 15 November 2020

8. **Background**

Chychkan gorge is located in Toktogul district of Jalal-Abad region. The area is subordinate to several landowners and has different land use statuses. Thus, a significant part of the gorge has the status of zoological reserve and is managed by Toktogul Leskhoz, on the territory of the gorge there are also lands of Jany-zhol ayil aimak, while a highway running through the gorge is under the jurisdiction of the road maintenance department.

The peculiarity of this territory is a large concentration of natural resources, including fauna and flora objects, forests, water arteries, pastures and others. The main highway connecting the south of Kyrgyzstan with the north - Osh-Bishkek highway passes through the Gorge. The length of the road is 680 km. Average daily traffic intensity data on Bishkek - Osh road, according to the Ministry of Transport, is 665 trucks, 38 buses, 1100 cars - in total -1803 vehicles. This data is outdated and the traffic intensity has now increased several times.

There are parking areas and cafes along the whole length of the road. Local residents sell livestock products, beekeeping products and wild herbs harvested in the area all year round. The trade is unorganised, without proper observance of sanitary norms. A large number of vehicles, cafes and car parks create large amounts of rubbish. Although local authorities, forestry, and the Road Maintenance Agency partially help with rubbish disposal, the problem has not been solved and has disastrous consequences. All rubbish is thrown into the Chychkan river or along the highway. Pollution of the river leads to a reduction of fish and other aquatic animals and plants. According to elders, before the construction of the road along the river, this gorge was covered with such a dense forest that even a mouse could not pass through them, and therefore the gorge was called chychkan, which means a mouse in Kyrgyz.

In order to sell livestock products, locals are forced to graze their livestock close to the highway. Such livestock crowding causes overgrazing and degradation of pastures.

In summertime, the number of visitors to the gorge increases several times. This is due to the fact that locals, guests and tourists have a rest in nature, escaping from the heat and bustle of the city. Besides, the number of pickers of wild raspberries, mushrooms and other non-timber products increases every summer. Uncontrolled picking of wild crops, cutting down trees for cooking cause enormous damage to the biodiversity of the area.

Absence of coordinated actions of local authorities and landowners leads to general degradation of natural ecosystems and exhaustion of natural resources, which, in its turn, leads to disappearance of certain species of biodiversity.

The Chychkan State Zoological Reserve (zakaznik) was established to conserve wildlife species and has a mild status of protection and land use is not restricted. However, zakaznik does not have a separate management, its operation/protection is entrusted to Toktogul forestry. One third of the total 668551 ha, 28346.8 ha is on the balance sheet of Toktogul Forestry and the rest is under different landowners. Most of the area is on the balance sheet of Zhany-Zhol aiyl aimak. Like with other state reserves (zakazniks) in the republic, there is little attention and no funds allocated for the implementation of conservation activities. Apart from the employees of the leskhoz, hardly anyone knows about the status of the protected area. Moreover, the local population does not pay attention to the environmental value of the gorge, they perceive it as belonging, while land users do not think about the long-term prospects.

If the project is not implemented, the situation around the Chychkan Zoological Reserve and the surrounding area will not improve. Along the Bishkek-Osh road, chaotic construction of cafes, resting places and other buildings will continue. As a consequence, the volume of rubbish and the number of environmental offences will increase. Uncontrolled grazing may lead to extinction of endemic plant species. An increase in livestock numbers will lead to the migration of wild animals and, most importantly, to the degradation of pastures. The degradation of pastures is one of the main causes of mudflows, the number of which has increased sharply in recent years.

To respond to these issues, RDF and the Central Asian Regional Environment Center (CAREC) will:

- Establish baseline environmental and social data.
- Create a multi-actor platform that provides input to improve area management plans.
- Support pilot projects that promote conservation objectives.
- Raise the awareness of residents, small businesses, and visitors about the importance of this key biodiversity area.

9. **Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities**

RDF has received the following endorsements of its proposal to CEPF:

- State Agency of Forestry, A.M. Mycaev, Director (14 October 2021)
- State Agency of Environmental Protection, Jalal-Abad Territorial Administration, Toktogul Forestry, K. Toktonazarov, Director of Toktogul Forestry (14 October 2021)
- Toktogul District State Administration, A. Tyukebaev, Head of District (14 October 2021)

In addition to these formal endorsements, RDF has had discussions with the local governments of Jany-Jol aiyl okmoty and Bel-Aldy aiyl okmoty [an aiyl okomoty is an administrative unit that unites groups of villages] and in community meetings.

10. **Project Stakeholders**

Stakeholders include the people living and working in the Chychkan Gorge region. These are primarily the residents of Jany-Jol aiyl aimak, Bel-Aldy aiyl aimak, the Toktogul Forestry Enterprise (*leskhoz*), the Toktogul district administration, and the management of the Chychkan State Zoological Reserve

(zakaznik). With a goal of improving area management practices, particularly as they relate to tourism and the businesses that serve tourists, these also are vital stakeholders.

11. **Stakeholder Engagement Program**

Related to the stakeholders named above, RDF and CAREC will:

- Establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform with support and participation of all relevant stakeholders and introduction of a bottom-up management plan of Chychkan gorge;
- Promote awareness of the value of the Chychkan zoological state reserve (zakaznik) and participatory approach of its management through informational campaign and youth active engagement.
- Implementation of Pilot project program for conservation and better management and rational use of local nature resources of Chychkan KBA through sustainable eco-tourism activities.

12. **Consultation methods**

This project is about promoting the collective understanding of the importance of the Chychkan gorge as a key biodiversity area. Consultation, participatory research and dialogues are fundamental elements of the approach of the project. Analyzing who the stakeholders are (Component 1 of the project), creating a stakeholder a multi-stakeholder platform (Component 2), supporting engagement of local communities though the pilot projects (Component 3) and raising awareness (Component 4) all rely on consultation and agreement.

13. **Other Engagement Activities**

RDF will award “micro-grants” of less than USD 1,000 to demonstrate sustainable enterprise, improved land management, and conservation activities. Residents and small business operators in the region will be eligible. The selection process of these micro-grants will be conducted in an open and transparent manner with participation of community elders, local authorities, women and youth. The Pilot project selection process will be conducted based on the Guidelines of Pilot project program, which will ensure transparency, integrity and accountability.

14. **Timetable**

The project will proceed over 24 months with Components 1, 2, and 4 proceeding concurrently. The micro-grants program will run from roughly Month 6-24.

15. **Resources and Responsibilities**

Project Manager Jibek Koychukulova and Social Mobilization expert Emil Ibraev will ensure that all elements of the project proceed per this Stakeholder Engagement Plan and follow best practice.

16. **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.

RDF will work to ensure that local stakeholders are aware of the work and understand how to voice complaints, if any. We will post contact information in local languages at district offices and in appropriate “village council buildings” or public spaces. We will hold public meetings explaining our activities.

During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, RDF personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with RDF, village representatives, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project.

RDF will post telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons at RDF, village representatives, and CEPF. This information will also be put on all education materials that will be produced during this project implementation including posters, brochures, and booklets. Contact information of the Regional Implementation Team and CEPF will be made publicly available in local languages.

RDF and CAREC will ensure that the GRM will use suitable language and format. All project related documents and relevant PR materials will be delivered in accessible and clear language, will be culturally appropriate. Appropriate communication channels will be used (i.e. using smartphones – instead of emails or postal service, as well as using accessible apps - WhatsApp, tiktok etc. instead of Viber or Telegram etc.)

We will inform stakeholders that grievances should proceed in the following order below. If the stakeholder is unsatisfied with the response at any step, they may proceed further.

- Jibek Koychukulova, Project Coordinator, j@roza.kg, +996 555 697472
- Kuluipa Akmatova, Director, Rural Development Fund, akmatova.rdf@gmail.com, +996-755-330106
- Lizza Protas, RIT Team Leader, WWF-Russia, lprotas@wwf.ru
- CEPF Executive Director: cepfexecutive@conservation.org

17. Monitoring and Reporting

RDF will report on this plan every six months, per the items above. This will include listing of activities and participants, grievances and their resolution, and changes to the project if this affects stakeholder engagement either positively or negatively.