

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

23 March 2022

CEPF Grant 113014

Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan

**Supporting private sector and community conservation co-management in Baljuvan KBA,
Phase II**

Tajikistan

Grant Summary

1. **Grantee organization:** Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan (ANCOT)
2. **Grant title:** Supporting private sector and community conservation co-management in Baljuvan KBA, Phase II
3. **Grant number:** 113014
4. **Grant amount (US dollars):** approximately US \$125,000
5. **Proposed dates of grant:** 1 May 2022 – 30 April 2024
6. **Countries or territories where project will occur:** Tajikistan
7. **Date of preparation of this document:** 23 March 2022

8. **Introduction**

ANCOT has been implementing CEPF grant 110796 since December 2020. The subject grant represents a continuation of work started under 110796.

Baljuvan has been recognized internationally for its high biodiversity but only the 3,800 hectares (4%) of the Sari-Khosor National Park, out of the 94,000 hectares of Baljuvan KBA, as defined by CEPF, currently benefit formal protection from the government of Tajikistan. Such as in the rest of the country, the land of Baljuvan is state-owned and managed by the State Forestry Agency which authorizes and organizes its leasing to communal or private entities. The Agency currently leases the vast majority of Baljuvan KBA for the exclusive use of transhumance herding which is considered the most lucrative land use model in the area. Unfortunately, over the years livestock-grazing intensity has increased beyond carrying capacity and contributed to severely damage the unique ecosystem. There is currently no strategic plan from the government to link Sari Khosor National Park to the nearest protected areas through specified biodiversity-managed corridors. Although the Vakhsh mountain range forms a natural ridge, and a corridor for wildlife dispersal from Sari Khosor to Dashtimaidonsky Nature Refuge, the latter area receives no substantial protection and is nowadays very heavily grazed by livestock. Childukhtaronsky Nature Reserve located in a different district, is too far distant from Baljuvan to be linked by a corridor.

In 2016, the State Forestry Agency has leased for 10 years (with the possibility of another decade long leasing) ca. 24,000 hectares (25%) of Baljuvan KBA in the Vakhsh mountain range to Oxus Holding LLC, a private Tajik concessioner, for the development of sustainable commercial hunting and high-end tourism. The leasing agreement does not upgrade the status of the area to any formal level of protection but requires the area to be managed cooperatively for sustainable use of natural resources, fauna and flora protection, sustainable development. This leasing agreement removed about one quarter of the KBA from the intensive transhumance livestock grazing so far practiced in the area. This concession and inhabited surroundings (total ca. 30,000 hectares) will be the target area of our project under CEPF investment.

The Oxus Holding operation in the area is nascent and has so far received few guests and conducted only one test-hunt. The company has so far invested from its capital funding in infrastructure development (a guest house, a ranger station, stretches of paved roads), and on limited protection efforts (hiring 10 rangers and providing them with some equipment). Oxus Holding currently operates on a budget of ca. \$US5,000 per month that covers staff and general operation (cars, fuel, accommodation, maintenance, etc.) costs. The Oxus operational development is constrained by a knowledge gap and financial limitations. The company is not aware of modern conservation concepts and how to manage the area for the preservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural

resources. It has limited understanding of the area's values besides natural and the beautiful scenery. Rangers have received very little training and have limited knowledge on protection. The management of the company is not familiar with co-management requirements of the economic and ecosystem model that they intend to implement (i.e. sustainable regulated trophy hunting and tourism) in an area traditionally used by local people.

Furthermore, in the global context of COVID-19 pandemic it is difficult for Oxus capital fund to invest extensively in other activities (e.g. capacity building, livelihood support to local people). If not properly developed and managed, Oxus Holding activities could prove detrimental to a vast part of the KBA.

Baljuvan KBA is not empty of people. Although no more than 50 people live permanently inside the area leased by the concession, at least 1,500 villagers live in four settlements (Dashmandy, Khorma, Kamolakdara, Dekhbur) adjacent to it and have been harvesting the natural resources in the area (mainly wild fruits, berries and nuts, flowers and mushroom and game for meat) for very long time, as well as practiced subsistence agriculture, including livestock raising, planted fruit-tree production and bee keeping. Unfortunately, in Tajikistan leasing of state-owned land occurs with limited, if any, prior public consultation, and is usually driven by provincial or national economic interests. People are accustomed to accepting strong and authoritative policies implemented by the government and accept such decisions without objecting publicly. Although they probably regard the land as 'theirs', it is therefore difficult to assess to which extent local communities resent Oxus Holding, which they have to respect as a powerful private initiative developed with state endorsement.

Oxus Holding has not imposed any restrictions over local people's entry and circulation in the area. But it has prohibited all forms of hunting without permit all over the concession, banned livestock grazing in some parts, and authorized some level of other natural resource harvesting. Because Oxus Holding is not currently engaging local people as partners or at least collaborators to its operation, and to some extent restricts land uses practiced in the area, it is reasonable to assume that this policy generates (or risks generating) resentment and conflict with local people, and will undermine the long-term sustainability of the conservation action, unless an alternative approach is adopted. The project aims to foster a better partnership between Oxus and local people that would include 1/trust-building through support of people's livelihoods, and 2/conservation education. The project will expand two forms of sustainable agriculture practice already adopted in the area (i.e. bee-keeping and fruit production) and for which people have requested help and investment because of their recognized economic viability.

Livelihood activities are being developed with community recipients under the framework of signed collaborative agreements. These activities were introduced gradually and are under the monitoring of appointed trainers and supervisors. Agreements target the most dedicated recipients and secure the long-term sustainability of the investment. In addition to duties related to the proper maintenance and propagation of introduced livelihoods, ANCOT also includes 'conservation requirements' in these agreements. The details of these requirements have been carefully discussed and developed with project partners, and include no poaching and no retaliation on brown bear in case of beehive destruction. To support its long-term sustainability the project also promotes behavioral change through building a sense of ownership and improving conservation knowledge amongst local younger generations.

9. Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities

In early 2020, ANCOT and Oxus Holdings conducted a wildlife survey of the Baljuvan region, and at that time, also began discussions with local stakeholders about this proposal. Formal endorsements have been given by:

- Director General, Oxus Holding LLC (June 2020)
- Head of Baljuvon district, Khatlon Province (4 June 2020)
- Director, State Forestry Agency, Baljuvon district (4 June 2020)
- Head of Department, Committee of Environmental Protection, Baljuvon District (4 June 2020)

Since Phase I began, stakeholder engagement has proceeded as part of the project. This has included training in beekeeping for community members and summer camps and school programs for children. Since December 2020, there have been no grievances made to ANCOT or its partners.

10. Project Stakeholders

Stakeholders are defined to include the approximately 1,500 people living in the villages of Dashmandy, Khorma, Kamolakdara, and Dekhbur who use the land in the Oxus concession for grazing of animals and to collect forest products.

11. Stakeholder Engagement Program

The goal of the project is to better manage the 24,000 hectares of the Oxus concession in the Baljuvan key biodiversity area, as well as surround areas. By design, this requires engagement of local stakeholders via:

- Provision of beehives and beekeeping equipment for 20 households from four villages.
- Environmental education modules to be delivered to up to 40 primary or secondary students from schools in the four villages.
- Attendance at a 5-day wilderness camp for up to 20 local school children.

12. Consultation methods

ANCOT, working with Oxus, engages the local leaders in each village, the directors of target schools, farmer cooperatives, and religious leaders to initiate discussions with communities and identify candidates for beekeeping and identify land for an orchard. We will document discussions and ensure that men, women, and any other sub-group are able to participate equally.

13. Other Engagement Activities

ANCOT works with the State Forestry Agency, CEPRT, and Baljuvon district government personnel. ANCOT also works closely with Oxus, training its rangers to better engage community members. Ultimately, Oxus will produce a 5-year management plan for its concession that will include specific elements on community engagement.

14. Timetable

Phase II will continue the operations of Phase I, with a deepening and expansion of activities. This will include:

- Beekeeping training (February 2023)
- Beehive installation (March 2023)
- School activities (May-December 2022)
- Wilderness camp (June 2023)

15. **Resources and Responsibilities**

The team includes a Project Manager, a beekeeping expert, and agriculture expert, who, collectively, will be responsible for ensuring appropriate engagement with stakeholders.

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.

ANCOT 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 appropriate locations in Baljuvan, in the four villages, and at Oxus offices.

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

ANCOT will post telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons at ANCOT, government authorities, 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.

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

- Director of ANCOT, info@tajwildlife.com, 992-935-389-183
- Chairman of Baljuvan district, +992335721225 (reception)
- Regional Implementation Team via <https://www.mca.earth/en/contacts/>
- Conservation International Ethics Hotline: +1-866-294-8674 / secure web portal: <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/10680/index.html>

17. **Monitoring and Reporting**

ANCOT 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 these affect stakeholder engagement either positively or negatively.