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People at the Center of USAID Biodiversity Conservation’s Conservation Strategies

While the objectives of USAID BCA are focused on achieving measurable improvements in the management of forest biodiversity— including the forest quality, and the status of wildlife populations—success will only be achieved through collaboration between those with management responsibility and those who stand to directly benefit from biodiversity conservation.

With the current levels of pressure and threats to biodiversity, a people-centered approach to conservation has never been more important and this is a recurring theme throughout the four strategic.

In the second year of implementing USAID Biodiversity Conservation, we have made significant progress in securing livelihoods for communities that are still dependent on forest resources. Locals are also being directly employed as members of community patrol teams; which is a key part of the overall approach to involving communities in supporting efforts to reduce threats to biodiversity, and engaging them in how protected areas are managed. Local people have also been mobilized as local champions to help build support for reducing demand for wildlife meat, which is critical if we are to create the conditions for wildlife populations to recover.

We now have a solid foundation on which to build stronger collaboration in project year 3 and beyond. And as we look ahead to the busiest year so far, through the hard work of our many partners, we can expect to see tangible benefits for both nature and people.

In this FY22 Year-end Newsletter, we share the key achievements and success stories up to the end of the second year of the Project.
The USAID Biodiversity Conservation project is designed to improve forest quality and secure wildlife populations. Besides improving forest management, the project puts a strong emphasis on the activities that engage and support local communities in all 4 strategic approaches. This helps empower communities to become stewards of biodiversity, for the benefit of forests and wildlife, and for the benefit of their own well-being.

COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION

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Highlights of the Year

Up until the end of Fiscal Year 22, the USAID Biodiversity Conservation project achieved:

- 269,699/700,000 hectares of biological significance are protected under improved biodiversity and natural resources management.
- 18/30 institutions, including management boards of protected areas, have had their capacity and performance improved via institutional strengthening to address sustainable landscape issues (landscape management and decision-making) and biodiversity conservation issues.
- 1155/3000 people have been trained in sustainable natural resources management and biodiversity conservation.
- 499/500 people in the protected areas have demonstrated the application of new knowledge and skills in their work in natural resource management and improving biodiversity conservation law enforcement.
- 24/30 laws, policies, or regulations that address biodiversity conservation and/or other environmental themes have been officially proposed, adopted, or implemented at the provincial and/or national levels.

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14 agriculture and non-timber forest product value chains that offer potential benefits to the 40 targeted communities have been prioritized as a result of stakeholder consultations.

9 community-based ecotourism sites/communities have been prioritized for intervention, of which 4/9 communities have established a Community-Based Tourism Association with the involvement of the private sector.

Engaging hunters and loggers made initial progress in livelihood models and in value chains and community-based ecotourism activities. More than 3,000 hunters and loggers have been identified and approximately 200 people participated in capacity-building activities.
Making a difference for forest-dependent households through community-based ecotourism (CBET)

Under the auspices of USAID Biodiversity Conservation, Helvetas and local authorities in Quang Tri and Quang Binh have collaborated to connect potential travel agencies with communities in the buffer zones of protected areas. This has equipped people with essential knowledge on eco-tourism and hospitality skills such as promoting traditional cuisine, hand-crafted gift products, developing and decorating homestays, applying technology and social media in advertising eco-tourism services (using Facebook, TikTok, etc.). These capacity-building activities will increase the confidence of communities in doing tourism by themselves and enhance cohesion between communities and the private sector.

Encouraging women’s participation in Huong Phung commune, Huong Hoa district, Quang Tri province

Huong Phung commune comprises Bru Van Kieu ethnic people living dependently on subsistence farming and forest resources that put the forest resources on the verge of exhaustion. Although this area has potential for tourism with a magnificent landscape like Chenh Venh (Precarious) waterfall, it is challenging for the local people to promote tourism activities without proper investment and training.

With a sustained effort from project staff and local authorities, the number of female attendees has increased significantly from only 02 in the first training session to 13 in the third. Local women became more proactive and showed continuous efforts in improving their capacities. They generated more income by providing sustainable tourism services such as homestays, guiding guests, and catering.

Maximizing current resources for local experience tourism in Rum-ho village, Le Thuy district, Quang Binh province

Rum-ho, located in the buffer zone of Dong Chau – Khe Nuoc Trong Nature Reserve, Le Thuy district, Quang Binh province, is a village with no electricity or mobile service. Tourists joining trips to this area can visit Duong Cam waterfall in Dong Chau – Khe Nuoc Trong Nature Reserve and enjoy local life with unique cuisine, and other traditional entertainment activities. With the support of the project, local people started to develop and run the CBET services on their own, including transforming their traditional houses into local homestays that meet the standards to serve tourists. A couple of Van Kieu people are now CBET and will inspire their neighboring communities to adopt these conservation-friendly business models.

Quote from community members:

Ms. A Thon (32 yrs) - A Roang Medicinal Cooperative member

In the past, we used to go to the forest for hunting and gathering and depended on the forest a lot. After participating in the Project and being trained in the methods and skills of herbal propagation, we feel much more confident. Now we are able to produce seedlings on the spot to supply to the people. There are more jobs, more income. We are delighted and thank the experts of the project.

Mr. Bulp Huu Bay, Secretary of the Party Committee of A Roang Commune

I believe that the most effective and important solution to the problem of illegal forest exploitation is to create jobs and sustainable incomes for local people. With the support of Helvetas from the Biodiversity Conservation project, households in A Roang will have stable sources of income by developing indigenous agricultural products, thereby contributing to forest protection.
SA2 | Strengthen the management of special-use and protection forests.

The camera trap grid for conducting systematic biodiversity monitoring now covers all 21 project sites. The setup of the camera traps and biodiversity baseline is completed in 9 out of 21 sites.

The capacity of management boards of Special-Use and Protection Forests (SUFs and PFs) has been significantly improved through the provision of training and equipment, with 814 people trained in natural resource management in FY22.

Seven out of eight planned sites have been registered as candidates for Green List certification. If a site passes several assessments and is Green Listed, it means that the IUCN has evaluated it as having good governance.

All project sites have received equipment to establish the SMART system and conduct SMART patrols.

Completed an assessment of management effectiveness in all 21 sites.
Under the auspices of USAID Biodiversity Conservation, a camera trapping system with over 1,200 grid points is being established, making it one of the most intensive systematic camera-trap studies conducted in Southeast Asia. By the end of Fiscal Year 2022: 582 stations had been established, with 1,164 camera traps installed in nine special-use and protection forests.

Reports generated from this activity enable management authorities to design appropriate conservation interventions and management strategies.

The software Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (or SMART) allows forest patrol teams in protected areas to collect information via smartphones to generate reports with information such as patrol routes, patrol results, and issues identified, with exact locations. This supports management boards in having consistent and quantified information to analyze the threat situation for their sites and design better patrol strategies.

At the provincial level:
USAID Biodiversity Conservation has provided essential support to management boards, including computers, hard disks, smartphones, and other patrol equipment to install or operationalize SMART. As a result of the Project’s unwavering support, the Department of Agriculture and Development (DARD) in TT Hue established a province-wide SMART reporting system last year. In addition, Quang Tri province is now seeking to implement SMART patrolling in all provincial protected areas, while Quang Nam province aims to integrate its SMART patrol data into the provincial forest resource monitoring system.

At the national level:
Over the years, several organizations have advocated for the use of SMART in protected areas in Vietnam. As a result, the information collected varies by site. Various SMART data models (the software configuration for recording data) are currently in use. These models were chosen based on what each protected area and supporting organization thought would be best for their work. However, this diversity makes it challenging to analyze data from different sites together.

The USAID Biodiversity Conservation, in collaboration with GIZ, has supported the Department of Protected Area Management (DOPAM) to finalize the national SMART data model. The systematic and consistent information reported from all sites would help DOPAM develop more efficient management and planning.

Many species have been photographed, including abundant species such as the Eurasian Wild Pig, Asian Brush-tailed Porcupine, Crab-eating Mongoose, and Common Palm Civet, as well as threatened species. Annamite striped rabbit, Sun Bear, Dark muntjac, Red-shanked Douc, Black-shanked Douc, Great Argus pheasant, Vietnam’s Pheasant, and more are Vulnerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered species, indicating the vital importance of the forests in Central and Southern Vietnam for the continued existence of these species.
SA3 Increase the functionality of the law enforcement system for forest and wildlife crimes.

Completed the development of protocols and procedures for the community-based patrol teams supported under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation.

Completed Phase I and Phase II of surveys of urban outlets for wildlife products in three urban centers of Quang Binh, Quang Tri, and Lam Dong provinces.

The project will support to establish 34 community-based patrol teams with 164 members.

A wildlife crime reporting hotline (0844773030) was established for Thua Thien Hue province’s FPD to encourage the local community to protect wildlife by providing needed information and connecting them with local authorities.

Conducted assessments of wildlife trade routes in Lam Dong, Quang Binh, Quang Nam, Quang Tri, and Thua Thien Hue provinces.
"The forest is now very different from what it used to be. It used to be full of massive trees and wild animals. The forest has been my friend since I was only 4, but joining the patrol team has brought me entirely new emotions, including fears."

"The most terrifying memory was being bitten by a very poisonous green viper while on a long patrol route in the forest. I might not be able to make it without my teammates", said Mr. Zo Ram Ngoan, a Co-Tu ethnic member of the Community-Based Forest Patrol Team in Tay Giang protection forest in Quang Nam province. This allows us to imagine the hardships and silent efforts of those working tirelessly to protect our forests and biodiversity in Viet Nam.

With only 5 members on 2 patrols in this area, the community-based forest patrol team was able to identify and remove nearly 400 wild animal traps, mostly snares. They also successfully rescued two wild animals trapped on cold rainy days.

Mr. Bling Nhien is another member of the Tay Giang protection forest CPT, and his wife BNuoch Thi Oanh are both local Co-Tu ethnic people. Ms. BNuoch Thi Oanh welcomed her husband home after many days of duty, saying that while she missed him terribly, she and the entire family were very proud of what he had been doing as a forest protector. The Community-based Patrol Teams are currently being established with support from USAID Biodiversity Conservation in Tay Giang Protection Forest along with other Protected Areas in 8 provinces Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Binh, Lam Dong, Cuc Phuong National Park (Ninh Binh), Vu Quang National Park (Ha Tinh), and Cat Tien National Park (Lam Dong, Dong Nai). Each team includes 5 trained members (standard model) from the local community who are responsible for conducting an average of 16 forest patrol days per month. These teams aim to support the Management Boards of Protected Areas in conducting forest patrols and removing snares to eliminate threats to wildlife and forest resources, and to improve biodiversity conservation.
SA4 Reduce local demand for illicit wildlife and forest products through behavior change.

Engaged the food supply chain actors in the “No consumption of wild meats” efforts with 150 pledges signed by the local FSEs. Enhanced public support through the World Wildlife Day campaigns with over 600 participants in the events held in Quang Nam, Lam Dong provinces and Cat Tien NP; social mobilization events attracted 1400 local people from the buffer zone of Phong Nha - Ke bang NP, Quang Binh province.

Increased communities’ awareness of risks associated with illegal hunting and consumption of wildlife with a total of 94 One Health community events, engaging more than 2,600 local residents in the buffer zones of the protected areas.

Strengthened community participation through the establishment of 56 Community Conservation Groups (CCG) with 926 members.
Local restaurants located near protected areas play a crucial role in providing food services to consumers. A recent baseline survey conducted by the USAID Biodiversity Conservation project revealed that 90% of illegally hunted wild animals are sold to urban restaurants and other intermediaries, with only 10% consumed locally. From June – August 2002, the Project, in collaboration with their government partners, organized a series of workshops engaging more than 150 Local Food Service Establishments (FSE) for open discussions on the latest wildlife-related legal regulations.

At the workshops, the FSEs and other participants were introduced to the legal regulations on handling violations related to wildlife protection, raising their questions on wildlife crimes and solutions to prevent illegal wildlife consumption. “After attending the workshop, I have gained a better understanding of the updated wildlife regulations. My company has pledged to ‘Say No’ to wild meat consumption, as a demonstration of our commitment to protect wild animals, nature, and our business in the long term,” said Mr. Doan Anh Tung, Director of Da Lat Golden Valley Tourism Service Joint Stock Company. He acknowledged that the local FSEs receive requests from both local and tourists for a wild meat, as they seek to indulge in the unique culinary experience offered by the wild.

The USAID Project aims to reduce the demand for wild meat consumption by changing social norms regarding wildlife and strengthening the pledges and support from key actors along the wild meat supply chain. The Project intends to broaden its network with relevant sectors such as Public Health, Tourism, and Hotel Associations to provide better messaging on “No wild meat consumption”.

Local Food Service Establishments (FSE) pledge to stop illegal wild meat consumption

Building capacity for effective biodiversity conservation: 500+ people trained in wildlife regulations

From September to mid-November 2022, the project organized a series of 12 training on wildlife laws and regulations for over 500 participants including members from all Community Conservation Groups (CCGs) and local partners in Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Binh, Lam Dong, Quang Nam, and Cat Tien National Park.

Many local people in targeted areas struggle to fully understand and identify wildlife crimes and violations because they lack access to up-to-date information on relevant wildlife protection legislation and laws. Building capacity for the CCG members and supporting them to become wildlife guardians is recognized as one of the critical strategies of the Project. The training programs provided with USAID support employ an interactive approach designed to maximize community members’ participation and contribution based on their own experiences.

In addition to acquiring basic information according to the provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Viet Nam’s national laws, the participants were shown how to identify relevant behaviors and measures to take when observing wildlife crime incidents.

With enhanced awareness, CCG members are going to develop their action plans and spread their knowledge and messages on the importance of wildlife protection within their communities to reduce wild meat consumption demands and crimes happening outside the forests. This will complement the interventions within the protected areas led by the forest owners and improve the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation work in the long run.