

CONCEPT IDEA

Project Description
<p>Project Title</p> <p>Improve the livelihood of local communities in the buffer zone of Cuc Phuong National Park and bamboo forest restoration.</p>
<p>Project Location</p> <p>The project will be implemented in Yen Tri Commune, Yen Thuy District, Hoa Binh Province. The commune is in the buffer zone of Cuc Phuong National Park, located in the North - East of the core zone, with a total area of 17,5 km².</p> <p>The commune was one of the extension areas of the Cuc Phuong forest, dominated by bamboo forests, from the foot of the karst mountain ranges of the national park to layers of relatively low hills in the North - East. Interviews with members of local communities revealed that growing and harvesting bamboo for material used to be one of their primary sources of income. However, with the rapid growth of Vietnam's economy, modern materials have replaced bamboo as a primary building material. There are only a few paths of bamboo remaining in the area, which served as land boundaries between acacia plantations.</p> <p>The project is designed to restore the bamboo coverage in the area, with new varieties; provide training and improve techniques to produce bamboo-made of-products, re-create occupation for local people at the buffer zone for the Cuc Phuong National Park for sustainable value chain.</p>
<p>Project Duration</p> <p>The project will be implemented in at least 36 months</p>
<p>Project Budget</p> <p>Total budget (TBC): 100,000 USD</p>
<p>Project Rationale</p> <p>Protected areas, such as national parks are playing a central role in conserving the intactness of the ecosystem and biodiversity of the world. Since the establishment of Yellow Stone - the first-ever national park in 1872, our understanding of the social, ecological, economic, and social values of national parks has increased significantly. The park is not only about trees, animals,</p>

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landscapes, or other natural properties but also about the people living inside, surrounding, or even further from the area. With the outbreak of disasters such as COVID-19, which is suspected to come from a zoonotic disease, the impact of effectiveness in the management of protected areas is becoming more apparent.

With the ever-higher requirement for better management and governance of protected areas, IUCN is promoting the Green List - a global campaign for successful nature conservation. The Green List is a standard which provides the global benchmark for how to meet environmental challenges in the 21st Century. The standard covers not only the environmental and natural values of the protected areas but also the economic and social aspect, especially in the relationship with communities inside or surrounding the site.

Cuc Phuong National applied for the standard in 2020, passed the application phase in 2021, and now is an official candidate for the Green List. Cuc Phuong is now required to provide evidence of compliance for all 17 criteria and 50 indicators. Criteria 2.4 requires the site to understand the social and economic context of the region and criteria 3.3 requires the site to include in its management document plans to address challenges from these social and economic contexts. It means, in the case of CPNP, there should be plans in place and implemented to support the economic development of the communities in the buffer zone.

Also, Green List standard criteria 2.3 requires the site to understand the threat to the major site's values. Being the oldest national park in Vietnam, CPNP is implementing an effective system of forest protection, thus, deforestation or illegal logging isn't a pressing issue. However, located in a populous area, there are still threats of forest violation in the form of illegal collection of non-timber forest products, and wildlife, by members of the surrounding community, to supplement their livelihood. Criteria 3.4 requires the site to implement a work program that effectively responds to these threats. Development of the local economy, reducing the needs of wildlife, thus reducing the pressure on the forest is considered the most effective and sustainable method.

The project aims to pilot the model of sustainable livelihood by restoring the bamboo forest in Yen Tri Commune and producing handy crafted products to utilize idle labor. The goal is to create an additional source of income, reduce harvesting pressure at NP, at the same time improving biodiversity with sustainable harvesting of the materials.

The project will receive financial and technical support from Cobtain Viet Nam Trading and Production Company Limited - a young and rapid-growing start-up with goals to develop a system of recyclable and eco-friendly goods from agricultural products. The project will also be supported by Truong Giang Limited Company, which has over 30-year- experience in producing and exporting bamboo handy crafts.

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Project Goal

The goal is to prove that the restoration of forest, combined with the development of suitable livelihood opportunities can become the sustainable livelihood approach to strengthen the buffer zone of a protected area.

If successful, the project will prove that with the collaboration of various stakeholders, including the park authority, local government, and support from international organizations and the private sector, the area surrounding the park could become a true buffer zone, protecting the main forest area and also supporting a thriving community.

Project objectives

The project is to pilot a livelihood approach, in which, some areas of the bamboo forest in the North - East buffer zone of the CPNP will be restored. The restored forest will not only provide a sustainable buffer zone for the park but also create a transitional area between agricultural systems in the lower land and the forest of the karst system in the core zone. Unlike existing acacia plantations, the bamboo will be harvested in a sustainable manner, leaving the opportunity for wildlife to expand their occupancy from the main forest area.

The project will also pilot a sustainable value chain of bamboo handy craft products, with support from the private sector, from the transfer of technique, investments in equipment and facilities, to exporting..

If successful, the project will prove that with an innovative approach, in combination with the collaboration of various stakeholders, the area surrounding the park could become a true buffer zone, protecting the main forest area and also supporting the livelihood of thriving communities.

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Project outputs

The project is planned for 36 months with 5 specific outputs:

1. At least 30 hectares of bamboo forest is planned in the buffer zones and maintained in the project area with the investment from Cobtain and co-finance from the community and other sources such as Truong Giang Company. The farmers will be provided with seedlings, fertilizer, techniques, and needed equipment. Farmers will provide in-kind contributions in planting and taking care of the bamboo with incentives from the project.
2. A production group is established with at least 50 members (at least 70% women). The group members are trained in the technique to produce handy craft products to be exported by Cobtain, Truong Giang, or other businesses.
3. Research on the feasibility of developing an FSC-certified production area is completed. The research will be a baseline for further investments from the private sector in international and sustainable production forest areas.
4. 50% decrease in the number of cases of forestry law violation in the project area
5. A PANORAMA solution is developed based on the lesson learned from the project and contributes to the Green List evaluation process of Cuc Phuong National Park.

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Activities

Output 1: At least 30 hectares of bamboo forest in planned and maintained in the project area

- Establish a supervisor team that includes representatives of stakeholders: IUCN, Cuc Phuong National Park, Yen Tri Commune People Committee, and representatives of local communities.
- Collaborate with representatives of the local communities and authorities to select suitable and good willing householders to pilot the model.
- Purchase and provide the committed householders with needed techniques (through training), materials, and equipment for the planting.
- Organize the planting of 8 hectares in the 1st year, 10 hectares in the 2nd year, and 12 hectares in the 3rd year of the project.
- Monitor the growth of the bamboo and other aspects such as wildlife.

Output 2: A production group is established with at least 50 members

- Establish the production group with support from local authorities and community representatives.
- Conduct training on bamboo harvesting and post-harvest processing.
- Conduct training on bamboo material and produce handy crafts from bamboo.
- Study visit and knowledge exchange between the production group from Yen Tri and other groups in Ha Nam Province.

Output 3: Research on the feasibility of developing an FSC-certified production area

- Contract a consultant to conduct the feasibility study on FSC in the buffer zone of Cuc Phuong NP, focusing on Yen Tri Commune and Yen Thuy District.
- Organize a consultation workshop on the feasibility of FSC in the buffer zone of Cuc Phuong, focusing on Yen Tri Commune and Yen Thuy District.

Output 4: 50% decrease in the number of cases of forestry law violation in the project area

- Conduct regular consultation meetings with Cuc Phuong National Park and forest rangers in Yen Thuy District on the result of forest protection and biodiversity conservation.

Output 5: A PANORAMA solution is developed based on the lesson learned from the project

- Collect lessons learned and develop a PANORAMA solution by the end of 2024.

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Risks

The project has relatively low risk. Some risks should be mentioned as follows:

- Low commitment of the local community: as changing to a new farming system, the local community has some doubts about the economic effectiveness of bamboo and handy crafts. To address this risk, the project will be started with a relatively small area (8 hectares in the 1st year) and collaborate closely with businesses to maximize the profit for members.
- Low commitment of the private sector partner: Truong Giang Company is the main private sector partner of the project, which will provide techniques, equipment, and outlet for the product. The project will require TGC to invest in the project, both in material and in-kind contributions. The donor - Cobtain company will also support TGC with purchasing contracts to ensure their commitment.
- Nature challenges: another outbreak similar to COVID-19 is unlikely to happen, however, the project will collaborate with CPNP and local authorities to mitigate the impact, if any.
- Low commitment from local people, through the project, communities are provided with training and skills to produce bamboo products but no binding agreements or confirmation to ensure their participation in the long-run. In order to address this risk, it is important to create and sustain markets for selling bamboo products at market competitive prices.

Project Partners / Stakeholders

1. IUCN: IUCN will be responsible for the overall project implementation, overseeing all activities and collaboration between partners. IUCN will also be the primary contact point between the donor and the project. IUCN will develop plans for activities and financial disbursement during the project duration.
2. COBTAIN Viet Nam Trading and Production Company Limited: COBTAIN is the main donor of the project.
3. Cuc Phuong National Park: Cuc Phuong National Park is the primary field implementing partner of the project. CPNP will contribute to the planning process, and provide technical advice on forestry aspects. CPNP will also be responsible for supporting the local community to plant and take care of the bamboo. The result from the forest monitoring system of CPNP will contribute to the PANORAMA solution.
4. Yen Tri CPC: Yen Tri CPC will provide political support for the project, and contribute to the project planning and community engagement.
5. Communities in Yen Tri Commune: The main beneficiaries of the project, also contribute to the project with in-kind contributions.
6. Truong Giang company: TGC will provide technical and material support on producing bamboo handy crafts, and is also committed to buying all the products for further processing and export.

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Long-term Sustainability/Replicability

The improvement of the effectiveness of the CPNP buffer zone by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities and restoration of the bamboo forest is an innovative approach. The project is expected to prove that a production forestry system doesn't have to be like acacia plantations, which is a rotation of planting and cutting trees but can be managed more sustainably. The model is a comprehensive cooperation system, in which community members play the center role to restore the ecosystem effectively if they are provided with the appropriate support.

In addition, the project success will encourage future investment from the private sector in the forestry system, not only in the forest-for-timber but also the high-value, secondly processed products for domestic and international markets. As one of the most valuable lessons learned from other projects implemented by IUCN, once the model is proven economically viable, the private sector will take the lead in maintaining and expanding the result in the long term.

The knowledge and experience from this project will also contribute to the planning process of CPNP. As one of the candidates for the Green List, the CPNP is required to include the social and economic development of the surrounding communities in their management and operation plan. The model in Yen Tri is expected to be the case study for replicating in other communes and districts of the park.