

ANNEX IV: STAP Review

TECHNICAL REVIEW: PAKISTAN MOUNTAIN AREAS CONSERVANCY PROJECT PROJECT ID PAK/98/G31

1. OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

General impression of the project idea is positive. The project area is of global importance for the conservation of biological diversity, and this will not be successful unless local communities are involved and interact with one another. The overall concept seems excellent. However, given its complexity (in terms of both the region and the number of activities) and the large number of organizations and villages involved, considerable attention must be given to ensuring reliable and functional interaction between all government agencies, donor agencies, NGOs, and village organizations.

2. RELEVANCE AND PRIORITY

a) GEF Operational Programs

The project principally contributes to Operational Program 4 (mountain ecosystems). It falls clearly within the conservation and sustainable development goals stated in the Program Objective. The project region is specifically mentioned in the Program Objective; and the project concept clearly combines productive, socio-economic, and conservation goals. As the project region is largely arid and semi-arid, the project also contributes to Operational Program 1 (Arid and semi-arid ecosystems). In addition, the project contributes to the strategic consideration of conservation of biological diversity under conditions of land degradation.

b) relevant international environmental Conventions

The project contributes to the Convention on Biological Diversity, CITES, and Bonn (Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals) Conventions, to all of which Pakistan is a party. Part of the area is being considered for nomination as a World Heritage Site (Pakistan is a signatory to the Convention).

c) national/regional priorities

Relevant national policies include the National Conservation Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan. There is also a National Tourism Policy which specifically addresses the mountain regions of Pakistan. The level of priority given by the government to these policies is not known to this reviewer in any detail.

3. PROJECT APPROACH

The general approach of the project, which emphasizes the involvement of local communities in conservation, complemented by the development of alternative livelihood opportunities, is appropriate. One element appears to be missing: tourism. This region is a major global centre for mountaineering, and levels of tourist use (national, regional, and international) are increasing. This provides both challenges and opportunities with regard to the project. These should be addressed in its implementation.

4. OBJECTIVES

In Annex II, two objectives are stated:

- development objective: to protect and ensure the sustainable use of biodiversity in Pakistan's Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and Western Himalayan mountain ranges through application of a community-based conservation paradigm;
- immediate objective: establishment and effective long-term management of four community-based wildlife Conservancies covering wide ecological landscapes and zoned for multiple uses, backstopped by an enabling institutional, policy, regulatory, and financial framework.

Management objectives for the proposed conservancies are stated as follows:

- protect biodiversity by providing for the ecological needs of species and improving survivorship by arresting threats;
- develop and apply effective management measures for sustainable use;
- contribute to ecologically sustainable development of the area.

All of these objectives are valid, but rather general. Consequently, it appears more appropriate to comment on the seven proposed outputs, even though these are not formulated as objectives per se, and are still rather broad. The activities outlined are generally appropriate for achieving these intended outputs. Two issues require further consideration.

The first is that the proposed conservancies effectively appear to be perceived as 'buffer zones' to existing national parks and game reserves (it is not easy to tell from the map provided), and that local communities are expected to be closely involved in managing the resources of the conservancies. Success is more likely if representatives of local communities are involved in setting and implementing the management objectives of the national parks and game reserves, for instance by sitting on management boards and through employment as wardens, guards, etc. As shown by past experience with Khunjerab national park and many similar protected areas around the world, the success of the project will be jeopardized if national parks and game reserves are treated as isolated 'islands' in a landscape which has a long history of diverse human uses. It may even be appropriate to reconsider the boundaries of these existing protected areas, and to consider including them as the well-protected 'core zones' of the proposed conservancies, following the UNESCO biosphere reserve model.

The second is the minimal mention of tourism in the brief. Tourism can present both threats and opportunities. It can provide employment and income, but can also redirect labor resources from activities that might be beneficial to the conservation of biological diversity. It can also increase demands on local wood supplies, to provide cooked meals and hot water for tourists and accompanying porters and guides. However, it does present opportunities with regard to education, visitor fees, and the development of infrastructure which tourists expect, but from which local people may derive benefits. Consequently, tourism (both domestic and international) should be included in the activities designed to achieve all outputs, including #7: visitor fees could be paid directly into the proposed trust fund.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

The map of the project area does not show clearly the boundaries of national parks, game reserves, and proposed conservancies. The description of the project region places a strong emphasis on fauna; I would expect that this region also has a highly diverse flora, comparable to other high mountain areas in Central Asia. The lack of information in the project brief is probably largely due to lack of 'scientific' knowledge. However, the statement in Annex X, 3.1, that "The flora ... typically show low population densities" would suggest that the authors of the brief are not botanists, and do not place significant value on flora resources. It is likely that many local people recognize these various resources, and their values. This is recognized in various activities under outputs 3 and 5; though I would hope that the training of 'parabiologists' (activity 3.5) would be two-way. The case for the project could be made even more strongly if the importance of the region's flora was also addressed.

With the one exception mentioned below, I would regard the background information as relevant and credible. Relatively little substantiation is given in terms of sources of data (few are provided) or trends. Again, this may be due to lack of data; but it leads to certain inconsistencies, notably with regard to pressures on grasslands, forests, and plants (especially medicinal).

As mentioned above, there is almost no discussion of the important topic of tourism. Recent work has been done by the Development Research Group, Peshawar, as part of a regional project coordinated by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

(ICIMOD), and detailed statistics are available from the Sports and Tourism Division of the Government of Pakistan. In 1995, for example, nearly 5,000 people (predominantly porters) were employed by expeditions in the high mountains of Pakistan. Others doubtless obtained income from providing accommodation, food, etc. This has significant implications for any programmes pertaining to economic development and the production and availability of food. I regard this as an important omission in this brief.

With this one exception, the presentation of the project is clear and generally compelling. However, it is not well supported by the incremental cost matrix (end of Annex I), where the domestic and global benefits are not well-defined, and are jumbled together. In addition, the 'Costs' element of this matrix is difficult to interpret, particularly with regard to the basis for the baseline expenditures. In particular, what is the figure of \$78,021,500 for 'baseline' community development based on? The last paragraph in section 6.1 of Annex I is not adequate.

6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

As mentioned above, the brief has very few hard data; and those that are provided are not substantiated. To the best of my knowledge, threats and means to address them are generally identified correctly. However, Table 1 (Threats, root causes & proposed actions) is rather simplistic and could be better organised.

Subsistence and commercial hunting should be differentiated. The former is, by definition, not for financial gain; whereas the latter can bring very high incomes to fortunate hunters (and sometimes their assistants and families). Accordingly, the proposed actions should be treated separately.

With regard to the threat of habitat degradation by domestic livestock, more detailed trend data should be provided. If this region is comparable to others in highland Asia, there are traditional approaches to minimising degradation of pastures, which is not in the long-term interest of pastoralists. In addition, the traditional pattern of transhumance (grazing at different altitudes during the year) is based on intricate systems evolved by local communities over centuries and reflecting the changing availability of forage and the needs of different communities. Thus, it is likely that 'participatory grazing management systems' do exist, or did within the lifetime of current residents. Detailed fieldwork on this subject is advisable; such systems should not be designed *de novo* if suitable models exist, or have existed in historical memory. The stimulation of fodder production may be one way to approach these issues, but there may be more appropriate uses for scarce water resources.

The 'root causes' of deforestation are very generalised, and not substantiated. Evidence from many other parts of the Himalaya shows that many of the cited threats are less critical than assumed, and that overexploitation is either not a new phenomenon, or not happening. All of the proposed actions are appropriate, but more detailed trend and baseline data are required to evaluate the seriousness of the situation and provide a starting point for monitoring.

7. ACTIVITIES

The list of proposed activities is a long one. Given that this will be a multi-year project involving a large number of organizations and the expenditure of significant resources, the activities should be presented in a way that shows the sequence of activities to achieve the various outputs, and the linkages between activities and outputs. The tabular format utilised in Annex VI does not permit effective assessment of whether there is a logical sequence of activities to achieve the stated objectives. Some indication should also be given with regard to prioritisation of objectives.

Given this lack of clarity, it is not appropriate to suggest the deletion of any activities. Activities which explicitly link tourism into the development of alternative livelihood possibilities should be added.

In training activities, the considerable extent of local knowledge should be recognized. The development of indicators for monitoring, as well as training, should be interactive and participatory. Over the lifetime of the project, an increasing number of 'trainers' and government and NGO field staff should be from the project region. Given the timeframe of the project and the need to promote long-term sustainability, consideration should be given to sending project personnel on targeted training courses, even including bachelor's and master's degrees, both within the region and further afield, for instance through the START programme and the United Nations University.

Activities under Output 6 should include ensuring that 'appropriate authority' (tenure, leases, etc.) is extended not only to local communities and conservancy management committees, but also other traditional groups of users, especially pastoralists.

8. NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The project appears to be generally consistent with existing national policies and commitments. With the exception of evaluation of the challenges and opportunities presented by the development of tourism, social, cultural, and community livelihood concerns and their relationship to environmental objectives have been taken into account. In general, it appears that the involvement and consultation of local communities in the development of the project have been exemplary. However, additional explicit effort towards the involvement of women is needed.

9. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The project involves many institutions, not to mention a large number of villages. The scope and means of assuring close and functional interactions between the many partner and donor organizations is not stated in adequate detail. Given the complexity of the project, and the large number of involved organizations, such institutional arrangements need to be very clearly defined, and agreed by all parties, before the project begins. This needs to be done at four levels: national, regional, district/cluster, and village.

In addition, each participating organization should clearly specify the person(s) responsible for implementing specific activities and coordinating with other organizations, and make a commitment that such individuals are available and that they (or suitably qualified replacements, if necessary) will be able to fulfil their responsibilities throughout the lifetime of the project. The implementation of such projects is very complex and, like it or not, institutional memory resides largely with individuals. Further, to ensure the effective implementation of the woman-focused (gender) aspects of the project, particular attention should be given to recruiting female staff. Full curriculum vitae for all key individuals should be provided for assessment.

At the local level, considerable attention has been given to developing functional institutional arrangements, following considerable effort in the preliminary phase. Government agencies and NGOs concerned with (eco)tourism should also be included in the further development, implementation, and monitoring of Village Conservation Plans, Conservancy Management Plans, and other institutional arrangements.

The international level of institutional arrangements is not considered in the project brief. Nevertheless, the conservation of many of the species of interest, including migratory birds and large mammals, has an international component. Coordination with relevant authorities in neighbouring countries should be taken into consideration in the project, possibly through the

international organizations involved in the project or the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

10. TIMEFRAME

The only indication of timeframe is that the project is expected to take seven years. Given the generality of objectives and intended outputs, it is likely that these can be achieved in this time. However, more detailed assessment would require timelines and prioritization of all component activities. These should be provided to allow complete analysis of the likelihood of success within seven years. At the same time, it must be recognized that many of the benefits of the project can be measured only in decades.

11. FUNDING

The level of GEF funding is similar to other comparable GEF projects. The diversity of other donors is one of the strengths of the project, and the levels generally appear realistic; although the proportion going as overhead to organizations (i.e., not for the implementation of activities in the field) should be explicitly stated. However, it is not explained how the local communities are going to contribute the considerable sum of \$250,000 to the trust fund, unless this money is to come from the AKRSP Credit and Savings Programme.

12. INNOVATIVE FEATURES/REPLICABILITY

The wide involvement of communities in an area of very rugged terrain is innovative, and will present continuing challenges for implementation. It is particularly notable in the context of a country and region where interactions between mountain people have not always been positive. The large number of donor agencies is also impressive, and will also present challenges for coordination. If this coordination is successful, it would set a precedent for other projects anywhere in the world.

The emphases on building on the local knowledge base and decentralized responsibility for decision-making, monitoring, and implementation are not especially innovative (they are major trends of proactive conservation) but should be encouraged. However, the involvement of local artists, teachers, and broadcasters working in local languages is innovative. These models may be developed for demonstration and wider replication, particularly elsewhere in Pakistan and in other high Asian mountains, but also in other mountain ranges and regions of high importance as habitat for large mammals, especially with conflict over the use of resources and the predation of domestic animals.

A number of other village-level activities are also innovative. These include the implementation of village conservation funds and the linkage between village 'ecodevelopment' and conservation. At the same time, if 'ecodevelopment' is to contribute to more than subsistence, possible markets for products - whether from wild or cultivated sources, and also including provision of accommodation and other facilities to tourists - must be carefully assessed before significant investments are made. If such models are successfully developed, they could be used for demonstration purposes, with possibility of replication in many other mountain regions.

If the 'gender in conservation' component is successful, this would have great relevance in other societies which have traditionally been male-dominated, with potential for both demonstration and replication.

13. SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability will require that decisions and the distribution of resources during the project are seen to be equitable: a significant challenge in such a large and rugged region, and with so many organisations and communities involved. However, if successfully achieved, the

decentralization of decision-making, monitoring, and implementation to the community level should provide a strong basis for sustainability. To some extent, this would represent a return to many village institutions which existed before the imposition of centralized power.

The biodiversity trust fund will provide a mechanism for continuation of many initiatives which would probably fail after the completion of GEF funding. The involvement of other organizations, notably the AKRSP and WWF-Pakistan, which have shown significant commitment to the people and environment of the area, is another basis for sustainability.

14. DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS AND RATIONALE FOR GEF SUPPORT

The project is strongly based in ongoing development activities involving an impressive number of international and non-governmental organizations, listed in annex VIII. Almost all of the types of activities mentioned as suitable for inclusion in projects on the sustainable use of biodiversity in the GEF Operational Strategy are included. Similarly, the activities included in the project match closely with the types of activities listed under GEF Operational Program 4 (mountain ecosystems) which was developed in accordance with guidance given by the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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