Frequently Asked Questions

Ridge to Reef: Integrated Land and Seascape Management in Tanintharyi, Myanmar

What is the Ridge to Reef (R2R) project about?
The R2R project is aimed at the long-term sustainable development and ecological security of Tanintharyi’s pristine marine, coastal and terrestrial biodiversity through a robust system of integrated planning, management and protection. The project, a first of its kind in Myanmar, is anchored in regional and global good practices and principles in achieving its objectives. It puts the local communities and indigenous peoples at the front and centre of its implementation approach. This approach is aligned with the revised Conservation of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law promulgated by the Republic of Myanmar in May 2018. The six year project is aimed at setting in place effective systems for mitigating and preventing a wide range of impacts arising from an unsustainable pattern of economic growth on the biodiversity-rich forested landscapes, coastal and marine ecosystems in the Tanintharyi Region.

Why was the Tanintharyi Region selected for the project?
The Thanintharyi region is a natural asset of tremendous national, regional and global significance. Approximately 20% of the Myanmar’s Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are found in the Tanintharyi Region which include the largest areas of lowland wet evergreen forest remaining in the Indo-Myanmar Hotspot, some of the largest contiguous blocks of mangrove forest in mainland SE Asia, and some 800 islands and diverse marine ecosystems of the Myeik Archipelago. These ecosystems support outstanding biodiversity including flagship species such as tiger, Asian elephant, Asian tapir, Sunda pangolin and many others. However, the region faces escalating threats including on account of climate change which if not effectively mitigated and addressed in the short and medium term may irreversibly have damaging impacts on the biodiversity and communities living therein.

What are the key threats to biodiversity in Tanintharyi Region?
The region is faced with the immediate threats of deforestation from unsustainable oil palm plantation development, together with illegal logging, forest encroachment, industrial development and overall unsustainable use of natural resources. The current pattern of economic development benefits individual companies at the expense of forgone development opportunities that would accrue benefits to the state and local communities, and provide the basis for the prosperity of community based natural resource management, as natural capital and resilience building for local communities and indigenous peoples.

What does the project aim to achieve?
The project aims to secure the long-term protection of Key Biodiversity Areas in Tanintharyi through integrated planning and management at land and seascape scales, with interconnectivity from ridge to reef. This will be achieved by protecting KBAs through various
conservation mechanisms, such as protected areas, community forest reserves and locally managed marine areas, while maintaining ecological functions in the surrounding land and seascapes using the High Conservation Value (HCV approach) to identify and safeguard the natural capital upon which local communities are to a greater or lesser extent dependent.

**What is the role of the local community in the project?**

Engagement with the local communities lies at the very heart of safeguarding the Key Biodiversity Areas, and achieving sustainable natural resource use at the grassroots level given the dependence of communities on forest and marine resources. Local communities will be active participants of community forestry and promoting community conserved areas; Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA); land use planning and protected area gazettement decision-making; and livelihood development initiatives.

The capacity of communities within the KBAs, buffer zones and corridors will be developed to improve natural resource management and incentivize sustainable livelihoods, with specific attention towards promoting gender equality, and climate resilience through adaptive planning approaches.

The project will adopt participatory processes for development of management plans for sites targeted to be conserved and establish a Stakeholder Working Group. Subsequently, it will implement the management plans in partnership with relevant stakeholders and, in particular, identify and realize opportunities for co-managing forests, mangroves and marine areas with local communities. This will include developing strategies for community engagement (e.g. joint patrolling, community patrolling, etc.)

Please also see the safeguard mechanism section below for further details on how the communities will be involved in various types of Community Based Natural Resources Management, including community forestry, community fisheries, community-based tourism and participation in protected area management. It needs to be reiterated that the project emphasizes strengthening the sustainability of local livelihoods rather than strict nature protection. The project will aim to ensure that its activities do not restrict legal access of local people to natural resources. Customary land use / rights / tenure will be fully respected by the project, and in fact the project will help to map out such claims as part of its participatory land use planning approach.

**What was the nature of the consultations during the project formulation, and Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) of local communities?**

During the project formulation, a wide range of consultations were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including village communities. A total of 19 villages in the landscape were consulted: 8 villages from Coastal area, 3 villages from Seascape area; and another 8 villages from Landscape area.

UNDP team also had about three meetings with Karen National Union (KNU), a key political and representative body functioning at the central and district levels, including during the project formulation stages and KNU officials were apprised on the R2R project. UNDP and
Fauna and Flora International (FFI), one of the project partners have also reached out to number of local CSOs including CAT over the past few months. Local CSOs and NGOs were invited to the project inception workshop held on 17 July in Dawei.

Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) is a very important part of GEF Social and Environmental Safeguards. FPIC is an ongoing process and is not a one off exercise. UNDP is committed FPIC and will take forward appropriate FPIC consultations ahead of actual project activities once the project sites are finalized. This has been clarified to our project partners and is being reiterated to all the stakeholders.

During the project formulation process, a series of meetings were held with the KNU regarding their engagement and project is supporting biodiversity friendly livelihoods, including professional engagement in local conservation work. Earlier, during the project formulation stage, there has also been an in-principle agreement with the KNU mapping department to collaborate on customary land mapping to avoid overlaps with the proposed parks and facilitate FPIC for park gazettement.

**What are the safeguard mechanisms in place to protect the rights and livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples?**

The overall project approach entails consultations and engagement of all villages in the project target areas in order to obtain support and agreement for proposed project activities. The project will adopt a participatory and consultative approach towards the management of natural resources. It will actively promote and support through small grants the involvement of communities and local organizations in various types of Community Based Natural Resources Management, including community forestry, community fisheries, community-based tourism and participation in protected area management. Thus, the emphasis is on strengthening the sustainability of local livelihoods rather than strict nature protection. The project aims to ensure that its activities do not restrict legal access of local people to natural resources.

In addition, appropriate mitigation measures will be considered and incorporated if it is judged that project activities will curtail illegal activities which form a significant portion of local peoples’ livelihoods. Customary land use / rights / tenure will be fully respected by the project, and in fact the project will help to map out such claims as part of its participatory land use planning approach.

The project will take a positive engagement strategy towards ethnic minorities / indigenous peoples within the project landscapes, and will seek to assist them in developing sustainable marine / forest resource use within the context of their own traditions and customs. Small grants schemes will be provided to such communities along with technical assistance and awareness raising.

**Does the project have any mechanism for stakeholders’ representation and engagement?**

The project has two management/guiding bodies: Project Board (at Union level) and Regional Advisory and Coordination Group (at the Regional level) considering the regional
nature of the project. Regional Advisory and Coordination Group (RACG) has a critical role to provide guidance and direct project activities, and will be meeting every quarter. UNDP has considered representation of KNU in the RACG, together with other technical entities. Further, management plans and environmental standards for integrated landscape and seascape management will be drawn through Working Groups. These groups will consider representation of local communities, village tracts, NGOs and CSOs. The project has provision to establish Tanintharyi Land and Seascape Forum which offers an opportunity for stakeholders to express concerns about the project both electronically and during its biennial meetings.

**Does the project have a grievance mechanism?**

The Tanintharyi Land and Seascape Forum offers an opportunity for stakeholders to express concerns about the project both electronically and during its biennial meetings. The project has a plan to establish a hotline to the PMU (grievance mechanism) which is distributed among all concerned local stakeholders in particular, through which grievances can be expressed, and logged by the PMU. The PMU will then decide upon, act on and record their response to each individual complaint. These will then be reported to the Project Board each year. Complainants also have access to legal recourse through the Myanmar justice system. Environmental and social grievances will be reported to the GEF in the annual Project Implementation Review (PIR).

**Where are the proposed R2R project sites?**
The proposed project areas include:

1. **Tanintharyi Landscape**
   a. Part of the Tanintharyi River basin in Myeik District
   b. Lenya Extension proposed National Park
   c. Two Reserve Forests (Thein Khun Reserve Forest and Tha Gyet Reserve Forest) between Lenya Extension proposed National Park and Tanintharyi proposed National Park

2. **Lenya Landscape**
   a. Part of the Lenya River Basin in Kawthaung District
   b. Lenya proposed National Park

3. **Auckland Bay Mangroves Landscape - Coastal mangroves in Kyunsu Township, Myeik District**

4. **Thayawthatangyi Islands Seascape in Myeik District and including the Locally Managed Marine Area-LMMAs, and**

5. **Langan Islands Seascape in Kawthaung District and including the Locally Managed Marine Area-LMMAs**

**Did the project consider concerns of local communities during the project site selection?**

In the initial Project Information Form (PIF) Tanintharyi Proposed National Park was earlier included as one of the project sites; however, considering the concerns raised by Karen National Union (KNU), on implications for Karen communities (numbering about 30 Karen
villages) - Tanintharyi Proposed National Park has been excluded from final project site selection.

Can the project sites be adjusted?
Given the evolving ground situation in Myanmar and the fact that around 2 years have elapsed since the project consultations were first carried out, it is important to note that the project sites proposed in the project document are indicative, and there is scope to adjust the sites in line with local community needs identified through further consultations. Project inception workshop is a key forum for tabling any residual concerns and secure agreements on the project sites, including approaches to project implementation. The sites can either be adjusted based on the community consultations, or alternatively promoted as local community protected areas (which is recognized by the recently revised draft Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas Law). The latter scenario will be a win-win-win situation for local communities, government and biodiversity conservation.

What is the funding size and project duration?
The actual funding of the project is US 5.25 million through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), remaining US 16.5 is co-financing – mostly in-kind from UNDP, government and responsible parties. The project period is for a period of six years, 2018 to 2023

Who are the key partners in the project?
Project’s key partners include Forestry Department (FD), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MoNREC); Dept of Fisheries (DoF), Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MLF); Tanintharyi Regional Government; Fauna and Flora International (FFI); and Smithsonian Institution (SI). Others will be determined during inception and in the process of project implementation.

Who can be contacted for more information regarding the project?.
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