

Vietnam Conservation Fund

Background

One of the objectives of the second edition of the sourcebook is to provide a tool to support the implementation of the Vietnam Conservation Fund (VCF). This chapter provides a brief overview of the VCF, and explains the utility of the sourcebook in supporting VCF implementation.

Introduction to the VCF

The Forest Sector Development Project, a major initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), has been developed with support from the World Bank, the Royal Netherlands Government and other donors. The goal of the project is the sustainable management of forests and the conservation of biodiversity, to achieve environmental protection, improved livelihoods of people in forest-dependent areas and enhanced contribution of forestry to the national economy. The project has four components: (i) institutional development; (ii) small-scale plantation forest development; (iii) Special-use Forest conservation; and (iv) project management.

The Special-use Forest conservation component seeks to: (i) establish, on a pilot basis, the Vietnam Conservation Fund, a new financing mechanism that will provide small grants to initiate and improve management of up to 50 Special-use Forests supporting biodiversity of international importance, on a competitive basis; and (ii) mobilize international and local technical assistance to build the capacity of Special-use Forest management boards and local communities to plan and implement priority conservation activities.

To access funds from the VCF, Special-use Forest management boards must submit proposals. The activities included in these proposals must address priority issues defined in Operational Management Plans (OMPs) or Conservation Needs Assessment (CNAs). Screening tools will be applied to ensure that funds are focused only on priority conservation

activities at sites supporting biodiversity of international importance.

The day-to-day management of the VCF will be the responsibility of a secretariat established within the Nature Conservation Division of the Forest Protection Department (FPD) of MARD. The VCF Secretariat will ensure that approved grant funds reach Special-use Forest management boards in a timely and efficient manner. All funding proposals submitted to the VCF will be reviewed by an independent Technical Review Group, to ensure that funds are used for eligible sites and activities consistent with the objectives of the VCF. At the central level, the VCF Secretariat will be assisted by a Technical Advisor, while three Regional Technical Assistance Teams will assist Special-use Forest management boards to build the necessary capacity to access VCF funds and use them effectively. Responsibility for providing formal approval of grant packages will lie with a Management Committee, while the Steering Committee of the Forest Sector Development Project will provide overall supervision for VCF operations.

Eligibility criteria

In order to ensure that VCF support is focused on the highest priority sites, a series of eligibility criteria have been formulated. Special-use Forests will be eligible for support from the VCF if they meet criteria A, B and C below.

Criterion A - The site must support terrestrial biodiversity of international importance.

Criterion B - The site must be an existing or proposed national park or nature reserve.

Criterion C - The site must be under appropriate management.

Each site card in the sourcebook contains a table showing the site's eligibility against the above criteria. In addition, a matrix of Special-use Forests against the eligibility criteria is given in Table 6.

In the following cases, Special-use Forests that meet criteria A, B and C will be ineligible for support from the VCF:

- Special-use Forests at which major infrastructure or other development is planned, under implementation or completed, and where this development is inconsistent with the conservation objectives of the VCF or the Special-use Forest concerned;
- Special-use Forests that have a substantive level of international support for conservation management at the time of proposal submission to the VCF;
- Special-use Forests that benefit from a high level of support from central government or overseas development assistance, and where the OMP and budget indicate insufficient focus on priority conservation activities.

In order to support the application of the above criteria, each site card contains a summary of ongoing and planned conservation projects at the site, as well as a review of conservation issues, in which attention is drawn to any major inconsistent infrastructure or other developments at the site.

VCF funds can only be used to support high priority conservation activities. Priority activities for VCF support are defined in OMPs and CNAs. Activities can only be eligible for VCF support if they meet criteria I and II below. Among eligible activities, preference will be given to those that meet criterion III.

Criterion I - Activities that address threats to biodiversity.

Criterion II - Activities not included on the negative list.

Criterion III - Activities consistent with the objectives of the VCF.

Each site card contains a summary of priority activities for VCF support identified in any OMP or CNA that has been prepared for the site.

The eligibility criteria are presented in greater detail in the operational manual of the VCF (FSDP in prep.). The VCF Secretariat will review the eligibility

criteria for sites and activities on a periodic basis. Consequently the criteria presented here may differ from those currently in use by the VCF. Further information and documentation on the VCF will be made available via the BirdLife International in *Indochina* [www.birdlifevietnam.com] and FPD websites [www.kiemlam.org.vn].

Social screening

Special-use Forest management authorities applying for support from the VCF must have prepared an OMP and/or CNA. The involvement of local communities in the preparation of OMPs and CNAs is one of the standards of good practice that they should be aiming for. It is also a precondition for support from the VCF. This is in line with the view, widely expressed by Special-use Forest managers, that there exists a pressing need to increase local community involvement in conservation and to identify practical and effective means of doing so.

To this end, the Social Screening Report submitted together with the proposal to the VCF must demonstrate that criteria A, B and C below are met. Furthermore, although it is not a precondition for support, Special-use Forest management authorities receiving VCF support should ideally work towards the attainment of criterion D.

Criterion A - The people's committee chairmen of all communes located in the buffer zone and core area of the Special-use Forest were consulted in the preparation of the CNA/OMP.

Criterion B - People living in the buffer zone and core area, and all sections of these communities, were consulted during the preparation of the CNA/OMP.

Criterion C - Draft results of the CNA/OMP were fed back to all local communities and their comments were taken into account in the final document.

Criterion D - Where activities are proposed that restrict local communities' access to resources that are integral to their cultural practices or that they rely on for their subsistence, Special-use Forest management authorities have negotiated and reached agreement with local communities on acceptable levels of local use of specified resources.

Each site card contains a table showing the site's eligibility against the social screening criteria.

References

Baltzer, M. C., Nguyen Thi Dao and Shore, R. G. eds. (2001) Towards a vision for biodiversity conservation in the Forests of the Lower Mekong Ecoregion Complex. Hanoi: WWF Indochina Programme.

FSDP (in prep.) Operational manual: Vietnam Conservation Fund. Hanoi: Forest Sector Development Project, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Tordoff, A. W. ed. (2002) Directory of important bird areas in Vietnam: key sites for conservation. Hanoi: BirdLife International in Indochina and the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources.