

Achievement of Potentials

All communities in the buffer and core zones of the PNKB NP have development potentials, whether they are ethnic minorities, women or poor. Their potentials, however, can only be achieved if their differing development needs are recognised. Integrating gender, poverty and ethnicity considerations are of crucial importance for this recognition.

The buffer and core zone households have different livelihood options, combining the use of agricultural land, natural resources and off-farm income generation. Household access and use of productive resources is in turn related to gender, ethnicity, and poverty. Such access issues can be positively influenced by policy when accompanied by flexible planning instruments.

Available planning and development instruments are adaptable. With a flexible approach that considers the area's socio-economic and natural diversity they can be used in ways that effectively enhance people's potentials for sustainable livelihoods while at the same time conserving the Park's natural heritage.

Improving Social Inclusion

Implementation of the available planning and development instruments will support improved livelihoods but the main challenge here is to implement these instruments in such a way that they are socially inclusive. People who are the most socio-economically vulnerable should be at the forefront to benefit from all planning and development instruments, not just from specially targeted ones. Government policy on gender mainstreaming gives guidance when it says it is the responsibility of all elements of Vietnamese society to achieve the goal of gender equality.

There are different ways to improve social inclusion. At the broadest level, the BZDP is the framework which will provide the necessary guidelines for all investment plans affecting the core and buffer zones of the PNKB NP. Thus, the involvement of different stakeholders in the formulation of this plan is crucial. The Buffer Zone Support Group that advises on the BZDP may improve its consideration of social inclusion if it also includes representatives of the Women's Union, Committee for Ethnic Minorities and the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

At micro-level, the formulation of Green VDPs needs to ensure that the voices and opinions of women, the poor and ethnic minorities are always given highest priority since their livelihoods are the least secure. This means that the Green VDP moderators need to be sensitised and trained on social inclusion.

Instruments to Support Livelihoods

The biggest challenge facing the communities in the PNKB NP buffer zone is to improve their livelihoods sustainably while conserving natural resources, notably the high biodiversity of the Park and buffer zone. Biodiversity in the buffer zone has already been seriously depleted. Thus, this is a challenge of many years that will need to involve all stakeholders: local people, government agencies, the PNKB NP management, the private sector and official development assistance.

The Provincial People's Committee, the PNKB NP management and the PNKB Region Project are cooperating to develop or improve the instruments and mechanisms to support the dual aims of biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

Some of the main instruments available to the development partners include:

- Overall Buffer Zone Development Plan (BZDP)
- Investment and Socio-Economic Development Plans
- Green Village Development Plans (Green VDPs)
- Training and Capacity Development
- Specially Targeted Programmes
- Forest Land Planning and Allocation
- Special Studies

Immediate Measures

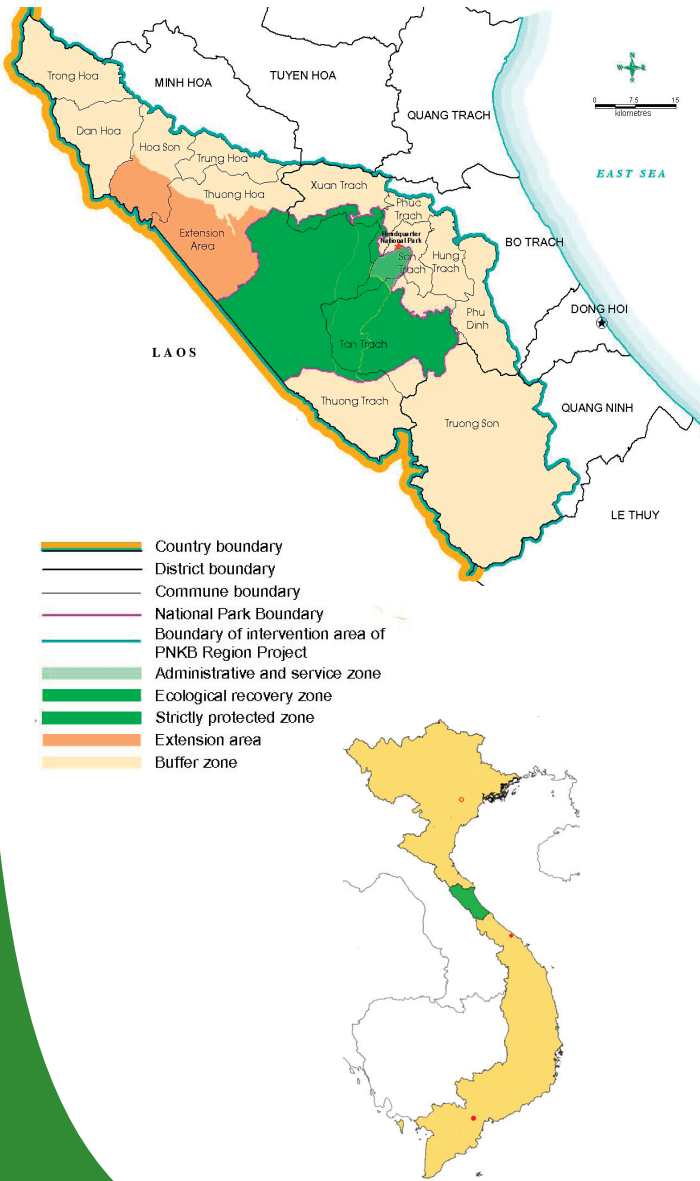
Immediate measures to support the precarious livelihood situation of the poorer buffer zone communities are also required.

- New Payment for Environmental Services modalities should be developed to reach ethnic minority and poorer households in the buffer zone.
- The PNKB NP should promote sales of local products at the park's visitor centres, especially including handicrafts made by ethnic minority people.
- Core zone ethnic minority people should be employed by the Park as rangers and in other functions.
- Vocational training for improved migration must be given, favouring young women and students from poorer families.
- Forest land allocation and community-based forest management must be done on a priority basis with ethnic minority communities.
- Women's needs for firewood, including piloting more fuel-efficient stoves, should be given high priority, as also their needs for NTFPs.
- Indigenous knowledge and good practices of ethnic minorities in forest use should be applied in biodiversity conservation.
- Ethnic minorities living near important forest areas such as upstream forests should be put at the centre of sustainable forest management strategies for the area.

Gender - Poverty - Ethnicity

the challenge of social inclusion in conservation planning for the PNKB





Improving Living Conditions

The Government of Vietnam gives high priority to economic growth and poverty reduction. It also pays high attention to improving the living conditions of all its citizens, whether they be men, women, Kinh or ethnic minorities. Vietnam has enjoyed high economic growth rates over many years and is among the world's most successful nations in reducing poverty. Its constitutional and legal frameworks provide the basis to ensure that there is a high level of social inclusion in the country. Gender equality is enshrined in the constitution. A National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011 -2020) aims to mainstream gender in all aspects of socio-economic development. Constitutionally, Vietnam is recognised as a multi-ethnic society with all ethnic groups equal before the law and protected from discrimination. The Government of Vietnam has developed and implemented many policies that have the specific objective to improve the living conditions of ethnic minority communities.

People of the Buffer Zone

The Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park (PNKB NP) was declared a **UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site** in 2003. Its core and buffer zones of have a population of over 62,000 people in 13 communes. This population includes 19% ethnic minorities belonging to the Bru-Van Kieu and Chut groups with additional sub-groups such as Khua, Sach and Arem. They have a long history in the PNKB region. Six of the 13 communes have a 50% and more ethnic minority population, much higher than for Quang Binh as a whole (2.4%). Most ethnic minority communities are located in the remoter, hillier parts of the communes.

Quang Binh province has made excellent progress to reduce the number of people living in poverty. Despite this the buffer zone poverty rate is more than double that for the province as a whole: 54% compared to 25% (2011). In the six communes with a majority ethnic minority population, the poverty rate is as high as 100% and average 78%.

Women in the buffer zone have difficult lives. Ethnic minority women still have too little access to education services and have the highest illiteracy rates. Young Kinh women, some only in their teens, leave their villages in search of work in the more industrialised South.

Uncertain Livelihoods

Many people's livelihoods in the buffer zone are both unsustainable and uncertain. Land shortage for both agriculture and forestry is a major problem. Flash floods have resulted in land losses in some areas. Inflation in agricultural input costs with highly variable prices for agricultural products results in unsure incomes. Micro-credit is available to assist farmers but not in the volumes required. Subsistence-oriented upland farming systems of ethnic minority communities are near collapse owing to limited land, high pest pressure and low yields. Off-farm income within the buffer zone remains limited and only a small percentage of families have access to tourism earnings via the PNKB NP. Legitimate sources of livelihood from Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) are also diminishing with biodiversity losses.

Kinh and ethnic minority villagers say they have no choice but to resort to illegal logging and plant and animal poaching to survive. When young men go to the forest for illegal purposes women's lives also become more difficult as they end up doing more of the men's tasks on the farm. Some village women start to have firewood shortages, forcing them to look farther afield for it.

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