



**USAID**  
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## NATURAL RESOURCES SAFEGUARDS AND SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

As part of the United States’ vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, USAID prioritizes the implementation of environmental and social safeguards that help protect natural resources. Threatening this vision, malign actors in the region are pursuing unsustainable infrastructure projects that erode the natural resources upon which many countries depend for their long-term prosperity. Irresponsible extraction of natural resources, including their illegal trade, threatens livelihoods, undermines accountable governance and inclusive economic growth, and can lead to regional instability and conflict.

The Indo-Pacific region is home to some of the world’s most abundant biodiversity and natural resources like energy, water, land, and air. Malign actors often take advantage of the region’s plentiful natural resources, benefiting themselves at the expense of others through corruption and criminal activity associated with fishing, forestry, and wildlife. The region also suffers from the majority of the world’s natural disasters and is frequently the origin of infectious diseases. Without strong safeguards and effective conservation measures, we lose natural buffers that help mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, we bear witness to the irreversible destruction of biodiversity, and we risk increased disease outbreaks and pandemics linked to animal-borne diseases like SARS, H1N1, and COVID-19.

Photo Credit: Milind Pariwakam, Wildlife Conservation Trust

**USAID'S ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE:** To safeguard natural resources, protect livelihoods, and support a free and open Indo-Pacific, USAID partners with governments, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen systems and standards that conserve Asia's natural resources and biodiversity. We do this by: (1) promoting the adoption and enforcement laws, policies, regulatory frameworks, and standards; (2) implementing conservation and sustainable practices, businesses, trade and investment; and (3) reducing transnational criminal activity related to marine life, wildlife, and the environment. We counter predatory practices and help our partner countries plan and finance their own development solutions.

## **PROMOTING LAWS AND POLICIES THAT PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT**

Strong environmental laws and regulatory policies help reduce degradation and promote sustainable, long-term growth. We encourage government transparency and support implementation of policies and regulations—including in energy—that adhere to internationally accepted standards. Contrary to our competitors' practices, we protect the environment while sustainably meeting Asia's growing energy demand. We prioritize efficient integration of transformative technologies, including battery storage, smart grids, electric vehicles, and modern gas systems. In Vietnam, USAID partners with the government to develop and implement its national Payment for Forest Environmental Services system. Through the system, downstream forest service users like hydropower companies pay upstream communities to protect watersheds so that those companies have a stable water supply to produce electricity. Since 2011, the system has generated more than \$500 million, which has been paid to tens of thousands of upstream households, to protect forests in 44 provinces.

## **BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION**

The Indo-Pacific region is home to one fifth of global forests, the world's largest area of mangrove forests, and the most productive fisheries on Earth. Despite this diversity and, often at the hands of malign actors, forests are declining, mangroves are disappearing, and many fish stocks are overfished. This decline threatens livelihoods. USAID promotes sustainable development practices that support biodiversity conservation. For example, we work to prevent fisheries collapse in the Mekong River by helping partners adjust their activities to account for migratory fish patterns. In South Asia, a holistic approach to conservation led to the design and construction of safe passages for animals to cross under busy highways. As a result, tiger numbers in Central India have increased by 50 percent over four years.

## **COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME AND ZONOTIC DISEASE**

Criminal networks and malign actors take advantage of the high value of natural resources like timber, fish, and other wildlife, fueling global illegal trade and jeopardizing the region's security. USAID is contributing to broader efforts to dismantle trans-continental trafficking syndicates. Our collaboration has resulted in global seizures of almost 34,000 wildlife and their parts, 545 kilograms of elephant ivory, and about 74 truckloads of timber. The wildlife trade—including animal markets—opens the door to zoonotic diseases. In response to COVID-19, we are adapting our programs to overcome the challenges brought to life by the pandemic. We are expanding prevention of the zoonotic spillover through habitat conservation and demand-reduction campaigns to limit vectors of zoonotic disease.