

## **Social assessment**

The Agasthyamalai (c.1600km<sup>2</sup>) and Periyar-Srivilliputhur (c.2800km<sup>2</sup>) hills constitute the southernmost ranges of the Western Ghats. They incorporate six Protected Areas containing some of the best preserved forests in India. They contain unique ecosystems and several endemic species, and are acknowledged as high priority areas for conservation. The entire landscape is currently managed under the PA network and under Reserve forests. The Wildlife Protection Act (1972) and the Forest Conservation Act (1980) are applicable to both regimes and prevents extraction of resources or conversion of forest land to non forest activities. This landscape was historically part of a single, wildlife-rich forested landscape, but human pressure has reduced both animal numbers and connectivity. Large mammal movement between these ranges is increasingly rare owing to the rapid pace of development in the intervening mosaic of multiple-use forests, plantations and small settlements. Both habitat conversion and poaching in this intervening mosaic have contributed to this situation.

Restoring connectivity between these ranges to ensure long term population viability of large mammals is not only a priority for State Forest Departments, but also for the National Conservation Authorities and conservationists. This ecologically rich and sensitive region is outside the PA network, thus providing a potential for enlarging the network through incorporation of additional land into the protected areas. While such inclusions are possible with Government owned land, incorporating privately owned land can be expensive and time consuming. Thus immediate steps should be taken to maintain and enhance biodiversity in areas identified as corridors on both state owned forests and privately owned land. This project seeks to establish protocols and build experience in using payments for ecosystem services to restore and conserve biodiversity in such areas and also to rationalize the existing PA network to incorporate areas within multiple use Reserve Forests critical to long term sustenance of wildlife and their habitat. The project targets the Shencottah gap, a mosaic of remnant moist and dry deciduous forests interspersed with rubber, tea, teak, areca nut, paddy and other crops.

The specific activities proposed under this project include the identification of critical bottlenecks for large mammal movement, developing a framework for PES approach to enhance habitat quality in these bottlenecks, developing a baseline for comparison of treatment and non treatment areas to assesses conservation success, and developing baseline carbon sequestration rates. The actual payments will not be made from funds allocated by CEPF to the project and the same will be raised from other sources during the course of the project.

The project will take place in the Shencottah gap between the Achankovil- Mekarai and Ariankavu-Puliyarai forest blocks on the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu states

Since June 2008, FERAL has been conducting preliminary social assessments within the project area, in preparation for the scaling up of activities. We have found that there is only a single tribal community within the project area. This community comprises 115 households belonging to the Malapandaram tribe, living in a single settlement, the Girijan Colony in the Achankovil area. The Malapandarams are the only nomadic tribes described from this area. About 35 years ago the Forest Department provided 45 families with 2.5 acres of land in Achankovil. The State rubber-board provided saplings and trained them to tap rubber, and ever since they have been staying in this settlement and living off their rubber plantations. The principal source of income for this community

comes from tapping rubber on their own land. The only activity that involves dependence on forest resources is collection of wild honey. About 25 to 35 households are involved in collecting honey from the forest, under a special provision of existing laws and the same is sold through the *Vana Samrakshana Samithi* (Forest Protection Committee). All households are members of the VSS and under various activities planned by the VSS they find additional employment for planting trees and fire protection. About 35% of the male members of this community are members of the timber loading unions and are involved in loading timber on to trucks, typically they get employed for a day every 40 days or so.

The Achankovil Girijan Colony is located on the periphery of the project area. It is envisioned that the community will not be involved in or affected by project activities in any significant way. The only exceptions is that, it is possible that the project may employ members of the community as trackers or guides for project related activities. Previously we have hired a few members from this community to assist in data collection as they have a good knowledge of the surrounding landscape. As a few households are involved in honey collection and extensively comb the surrounding forests, we do believe that these households can actively be engaged in monitoring activities of the project and also be trained as trackers for potential tourists, if ecotourism is feasible in the project area.

We believe that the project will have no adverse affects whatsoever on this community. The community will not be expected to change their land use or resource use patterns in any fashion, even on a voluntary basis. Any involvement of this indigenous community in the project (i.e. as paid trackers or guides) will be on the basis of free and prior informed consent. The people involved will be compensated fairly for any inputs. The project will ensure that all discussions are conducted in their local language.

Nevertheless, the indigenous community and other local communities in the project area will be informed about the project and provided with the contact details of FERAL, the CEPF Regional Implementation Team at ATREE and CEPF, so that they are able to raise any grievances or other concerns that they may have about the project.

In unlikely event that this community is affected in any way, directly or indirectly by the project, a full and detailed social assessment will be conducted, in compliance with CEPF's social safeguard policies. This assessment will incorporate an Indigenous People's Plan, developed in consultation with the affected communities, setting out measures to mitigate and provide full compensation for any negative impacts.

A team from CEPF-ATREE visited the project team at the project location and these issues were discussed in detail. These consultations have led to the drafting of this document.