

Conservation plan for Securing Elephant Corridors in southern Western Ghats

Wildlife Trust of India

In the proposed project, WTI seeks to work in few of the important elephant corridors in Mysore- Nilgiri BR landscape (CEPF critical link- Mysore Nilgiri corridor) to identify the current status of these corridors, monitor usage by elephants and other wild animals, assess the level of dependence of local community on the corridor forest and **prepare a plan for securing and management of the corridors in this region**. The level of dependency of local community on corridor forest and their perception towards conservation will also be assessed and their traditional knowledge utilised to prepare plan for securing the corridors and their effective management.

Signages will be fixed at major points of the corridors for awareness of local people, developmental agencies and vehicle drivers passing through the corridors.

The major outcome of the project will be

- Plot map of each corridor demarcating the corridor and land-use
- Functionality of corridor: corridor usage information based on regular monitoring to understand its criticality and need for securing.
- Increased awareness among local people through various consultative process and interactions. The inputs to be used for preparing securing plan.
- Final report documenting the current status of individual corridors and its functionality. This will be a securing plan based on which the effective management and securing of individual corridors could be taken up through separate project.
- Signages in each corridor for greater awareness.

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) is committed to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the local communities (which includes tribal and forest dwelling communities) which share the areas with wildlife and in fact does not make any distinction between indigenous and non indigenous people which becomes a rather subjective judgment. In fact, it is our endeavours

that through our various programs, we not only ensure that the local communities are not adversely impacted but rather to ensure that they are beneficiaries and stakeholders in our conservation efforts. This is borne out of the fact that all our conservation initiatives in North east as well as in Southern India involve the local tribal communities at various levels.

In North eastern State of Meghalaya for example, WTI is working with the tribal communities in Garo Hills for the conservation of elephants and other wildlife. Here we have been able to work with the local people and sensitize them on the issue of environment and the need of wildlife conservation and its direct and indirect benefit. Thus through a *free, prior, informed and written consent*, the local communities (of Aretika and Rewak kosigre village) near **Siju-Rewak elephant corridor** have set aside approximately 250 hectares of forest land for wildlife conservation and secured the corridor that has been formally registered under the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) as **village Reserve forest**. Similarly more than 1000 hectares of forest and *jhummed* land (slash and burn cultivation) in Garo hills has been declared as village Reserve forest that has benefitted the wildlife of the area as well as helped in improving the catchments (water being a major problem in West Garo Hills). WTI is also working with them in restoring the degraded forest thereby not only involving them in restoring the forest but also contributing to their economy as well developing a sense of ownership or responsibility towards wildlife conservation in the area. A Village Reserve management team comprising of members from local community, forest department, GHADC and WTI has also been formed for each village reserve to manage the reserves and suggest conservation actions. ***Thus instead of consultation, we have gone one stage further and have actually insisted and followed the policy of written consent from local community*** for securing the wildlife habitat of the region.

Similarly in the proposed seven elephant corridors in southern Western Ghats, WTI will work with the local communities at various levels to learn from their traditional knowledge and utilise it for wildlife conservation as well as make them beneficiaries and stakeholders in our conservation efforts.

Wildlife Trust of India believes that the long-term conservation of an area is only possible if the local people are sensitized on the issue and made partner/stakeholders to the entire conservation effort to make it sustainable. The project in no way is going to adversely affect

the people; rather efforts will be made that how the local communities benefit out of the entire effort. ***The thrust of the entire initiative is to bring in synergy between scientific findings and local people action, knowledge and support to develop securing plan for all the corridors.***

The details of the local communities living in the area and as collected from secondary sources are as below. We have not been able to get details about the corridor in Nilambur area. These facts need to be verified once we start working.

Corridor Name	Village within Corridor	Community Name
Tali	Ombalanadoddi and Kannandadoddi	Kurumbagaunda and some SC families
Karadikkal-Madeswara	Nil	-
Chamrajnagar-Talamalai at Punjur	Monki and Beduguli	Soligas
Chamrajnagar-Talamalai at Muddahalli	Booahipaduga, balapadugai	Soligas, Oorali and Nambadis
Kottiyur - Periya	CRP Kunnu and Chandanathodu.	Christian and Hindu (Thiyya tribe)
Periyar at Pakranthalam	Pakranthalam (Partially) and Panoth	Kurichiyen tribe and Christian families
Nilambur Kovilakam-New Amarambalam in Nilambur Forest Division	Information not available	Information not available

During the implementation of the project, WTI will prepare a Social Assessment of the project sites (seven corridors) through following actions:

- 1) Identify and interact with the local communities in each corridor and explain them about the project objectives.
- 2) Conduct socio-economic assessment of the people living in corridor area and also assess their level of dependence on the corridor forest. Their perception towards wildlife conservation and problem (if any) faced due to wildlife will also be assessed.
- 3) Efforts will be made to link government social schemes to help reduce their dependency on forest and strengthen their economy. This will be based on the skill-

set of the people and also keeping into consideration its impact on their social and cultural life based on free and informed consultation.

- 4) Sensitize them on the need and benefit of protecting the corridors, including reducing human-elephant conflict in the region which is a major problem in most of the elephant areas.
- 5) Involve them in consultative meetings and their traditional knowledge could be used for finalizing management tools for protecting and securing the corridors. The consultative meeting will involve members of both sexes.

The consultative approach will depend on the size of the local community dependent on the corridor forest. However, the following general steps will be followed:

- a) Inform people about the project objective through village level meeting. This could also be used as opportunity to collect information on elephant movement as well as loss due to crop depredation by elephants.
- b) Village survey to collect information on socio-economic status of people dependent on corridor forest as well as to assess their perceptions towards wildlife conservation and corridor protection.
- c) Organise village level consultative meeting along with members from local Panchayat to have their view as well as utilise their traditional knowledge to prepare securing plan for the respective corridor.

We do not see any negative impact of the project on the people, especially because the securing plan will also take into consideration the views of the people and their traditional knowledge utilised for preparing the securing plan of individual corridors. It has been our constant endeavour to work with the local communities and make sure that they are made stakeholders in the project for successful implementation and long-term sustainability.

The possible benefit to the communities:

- a) Villagers sensitised through village meeting and other means on the importance of corridor.
- b) Their inputs incorporated in the securing plan for individual corridor thereby taking into consideration their concerns/ apprehensions.
- c) Involving the local community will also create a sense of pride and ownership that they are contributing to its protection.
- d) Efforts will be made to bring in the government social schemes in the area during project period or a plan of how to do this could be included in the securing plan. This could then be used while implementing the plan through separate project.

Timeline: Since the project involves seven corridors spread over three states (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala), it will not be possible to prepare Social assessment of all seven area together.

In the initial phase, we will prepare the social assessment of one corridor based on above initiatives and consultative process and the same process will be followed in other corridors as and when we shift to respective corridors as per the timeline stated in the original proposal.

Since the project in no way involves either buying of land nor relocation of people, WTI does not see any negative impact on the local community. The local people will be involved in all stages of planning so that they not only are important partner to the project but their traditional knowledge and best practices are utilised for preparing securing plan for individual corridors.