

## Social Assessment for CEPF grant #62894

Applicant: Arulagam

Project title: Right to Soar High Again: Establishment of Vulture safe zone in Southern India

Project contact: S. Bharathi Dasan, Secretary, Arulagam India

Safeguard policies covered: Indigenous People (OP4.10)

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### Background

Arulagam seeks to implement CEPF supported project entitled, "Right to Soar High Again: Establishment of Vulture safe zone in Southern India".

This project aims to establish a **Vulture Safe Zone** by removing diclofenac for cattle usage from the Moyar valley in northwestern Tamil Nadu state through targeted awareness activities and sampling method.

The proposed project area is unique in its socio-cultural and economic character, harboring some of the remnant endogamous groups, early migrants and recent migrants.

1. Early settlers – people who settled in the area largely during the Pre-Colonial period, and who are now recognised as scheduled caste: category of backward and most backward, residing as homogenous units. These persons are not considered Indigenous Peoples, as per the CEPF Safeguard Policy.
2. Recent settlers – mostly migrants in search of livelihoods. These persons are not considered Indigenous Peoples, as per the CEPF Safeguard Policy.
3. Recent settlers from tribal communities – mostly communities in search of livelihood opportunities, landless labor and communities displaced from adjacent districts. These persons belong to Scheduled Tribes and are considered Indigenous Peoples, as per the CEPF Safeguard Policy.
4. Indigenous tribal communities – the original residents of the landscape, a number of Endogamous groups, notable for their involvement in the protection of the landscape. View themselves as custodians of the forest. Strong presence of customary rights and regulation in the use of natural resources: Notable are the Kurumbas, with their four subgroups namely Bettu kurumbas (or Oorali), Jenu kurumbas, Mullu kurumbas and Alu kurumbas, as well as the Irulas. These persons belong to Scheduled Tribes and are considered Indigenous Peoples, as per the CEPF Safeguard Policy.
5. The Scheduled Caste communities – considered the lowest in caste hierarchy. These persons are not considered Indigenous Peoples, as per the CEPF Safeguard Policy.

The proposed project site (Sigur and Thalamalai plateau) covers six forest ranges, namely: Masinagudi range of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve; Sigur, Singara and Nilgiri North Eastern Slopes ranges of Nilgiris North Forest Division; and Bhavanisagar and Thalamali ranges of Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve. There are 24 villages located within and around the project site. These are Masinagudi, Singara, Achakarai, Thodilingi, Bokkapuram, Mavinahalla, Chemmanatham, Moyar, Vazhathottam, Chokkanalli, Anaikatti, Siryur, Pudukadu, Thengumarahada, Gulithurai, Kallampalayam, Galahatti, HalliMoyar, Bhiudhikuppai, Ramaranai and Thalamalai, Gettavadi, Hasanur, Thimpum. These villages are inhabited predominantly by members of the Irula tribe, a pastoral community. There are also a few members of the Kurumba tribe living in Anaikatti and Vazhathottam villages. Kurumbas are hunter gatherers. Thengumarahada village has a mixed community.

Livelihood options range from dependence on non-forest timber produce to tenant cow herding to medium sized commercial plantations. Major livelihoods of the landscape fall in the category 'intermediate agriculture', which denotes that a part of the system is subsistence, while a significant part is devoted to the cultivation of commercial crops, notably horticulture. Livestock raising is considered part of the agricultural operations. Certain interesting trends have been witnessed in livestock, for instance, the landscape was well known for its trade in dung as

manure with many of the villages harboring cattle ranches that were called patties. Since the presence of such great numbers of livestock, which were free ranging, was perceived as a major detriment to wildlife, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department in collaboration with some organisations, systematically enforced a reduction in livestock ownership. This is one aspect that has not been studied for its impact.

It is also interesting that much of the livestock is maintained by tenant farmers. So, in a sense, absentee owners of lands and livestock are a stakeholder group that the project must identify and address as a first time effort.

### **Assessment of project impacts**

The project in no way involves either buying of land or relocation of people. Project activities are largely restricted to outreach and awareness, and research (monitoring of vulture populations and diclofenac availability). These will be participatory activities, and involve members of Schedule Tribes as active participants. Thus, the project is not expected to have any negative impact of the local community, whether tribal or otherwise.

Project impacts are evaluated as follows:

- Arulagam has got good experience on working with various stake holders and especially indigenous community.
- Arulagam has established good relationship with local people, village panchayats, Tribal Research Institute and other likeminded organizations from earlier projects supported by CEPF.
- Arulagam is very much concerned to ensure that there should not be any adverse impacts on the local community.
- Arulagam believes that local communities are real stewards and we can learn from them.
- Arulagam engages local community members in our conservation activities.
- Arulagam recognizes traditional and local institutions where indigenous and tribal communities are represented.
- Arulagam ensures that marginal groups within the communities such as women are represented strongly in project activities and consultation forums.
- Arulagam recognizes the rights of indigenous people and understands and incorporates local cultural beliefs and norms into micro planning and will not seek to alter the same.

### **Grievance Mechanism:**

The Gram Sabha and the elected Panchayat for each community where the project will be implemented will function as a grievance mechanism for Indigenous People or other local communities who have any concerns or grievances about the project to raise them with the project team. In the unlikely event that a grievance is raised, Arulagam will ask the relevant Gram Sabha or Panchayat to convene a meeting between the project team and the affected parties, in order to resolve the conflict.

Arulagam will seek to hold these meetings within one month of any grievance being communicated to them. Any grievance raised will be communicated to CEPF, together with minutes from the meeting held to address them, plus a detailed plan of remedial action.

Long term sustainability of the project will be ensured will the project team working closely with the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat to develop proposals for the consideration of the State and Central Government, Other Nongovernmental organizations and Donor Agencies.

To this end, Arulagam will prepare a poster, in local languages, which outlines the aims of the project, and provides contact details of the project team and the CEPF Regional Implementation Team at ATREE, where grievances or concerns can be raised.

As a collaborative group of institutions striving to reconcile conservation and development goals, we appreciated the safeguards policy of CEPF and shall strive to adhere to all the issues/concerns and terms listed in the policy document.