

Training report

Preamble

One of the key components of the project 'Building a grassroots constituency to conserve River Moyar in the Mysore-Nilgiri Corridor' is the active and real time engagement of the local human population. By design the project sought to undertake joint assessments of the socio-ecological character of River Moyar, reconcile disparity of data especially those pertaining to use of the river and its resources, cultural aspects etc. and evolve a mechanism by which the local populations could develop a micro-plan for conservation the landscape.

While the first phase of the project was devoted to initial meetings, establishing rapport and organizing group meetings on the scope and purpose of the project, as soon as the project moved to a phase where the Panchayats had to provide their willingness to participate in the process, a section of the local population became an inherent part of the effort by helping in disseminating the purpose of the project, providing logistic support etc. This meant that a small yet dedicated group of local inhabitants was available for the joint effort. The flip side to such an outcome is that a sizeable part of the community gets excluded and becomes invisible. Past experiences by the project proponents in other landscapes had provided insights to this flaw, which to say the least is a trap that many researchers/organizations fall into.

In a bid to overcome this lacuna, dedicated efforts were made to talk to womens' informal groups, local priests and farmers, the older men and women and peoples' representatives. Accordingly, each Panchayat was asked to nominate two persons as their official nominees, although other interested persons could take part as observers.

The Training Programme

The training programme was organized and conducted in two phases: while Phase 1 was intensive and restricted to a duration of two weeks (14 days), Phase II continued as an ongoing activity leading into the formulation of the micro plans (65 days).

Phase 1 was conducted by a team of ecologists and social workers in the respective Panchayats. The focus of the programme was River Moyar – its character and conservation issues. Within the broad theme, the following sub themes were identified :

- The river course and its relevance to humans and wildlife
- Sacred elements of River Moyar
- Riverine forests – are they protected or are they being degraded
- Impact of local tourism on the river
- Lesser known fauna of River Moyar
- Potential zones of conflict along the river

The programme was conducted in Tamil (the local language). Each component had a lead talk by one of the experts followed by a field based interaction. For instance, the issue of impact of local tourism on the river was coincided with one of the local festivals wherein large numbers of people from adjoining districts visit a temple inside the forest, and leave behind considerable amounts of waste. This waste, largely comprising of left over food and plastic, is either cleared after a few days by the Forest Department or is scavenged by the wild animals. The worst case scenario is when the waste is thrown into River Moyar. This field based interaction was a serious eye opener, and with proper facilitation was formed into an action point in the micro plan of one of the Panchayats.

Of equal interest was the aspect of increased conversion of agricultural lands to pesticide-fertiliser intensive cropping system dominated by plantation crops and the impact on riverine forests. Similarly, conservation of smaller animals and insects was a topic that was received with enthusiasm, and the diversity of turtle species in the river was an unforeseen data point for the research team. The programme concluded with the trainees pledging to disseminate their experience to the community.

Phase 2 – the ongoing component of the training programme had the nominees and the observers taking part in the field assessments. The methodology developed for the project (as detailed in the Methodology report) was demonstrated on ground first, and then followed with a session on the purpose and scope of the methodology. In view of the fact that the nominees were either functionally literate or had basic literacy helped in the smooth conduct of the programme. The data obtained from the assessments of the project team was presented and discussed with the trainees for their inputs and reconciliation if any. In all 89 man days of training was provided through the project. As a continuing effort, the volunteers are being absorbed into the project on In situ conservation of Vultures in the Moyar Valley.

Glimpses of Phase 1 Training Programme



Selection process of the nominees at the Panchayat Office



Field session on riverine fauna: notably reptiles



Field session on NTFP collected from the Sathyamangalam Forests

Glimpses of Phase 2 Training Component from Two Panchayats: Pictures 1 and 2 along the Perpendicular Transects Pictures 3 and 4 Riverine Transect

