

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FOR TIGER CONSERVATION PROJECT, BHADRA
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I. PROJECT ABSTRACT:

Bhadra Tiger Reserve (492 sqkm area) is predominantly a tropical moist deciduous forest (Pascal J.P., Meher Homji, 1982). The Park comes under the Global Tiger Conservation Priority Unit, TCU-55 (Wikramanayake E.D. et.al., 1998), in the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) - World Wide Fund for nature (WWF) report on prioritising areas for large mammal conservation, tiger as a case study. Bhadra is an area potentially superior to many of better-known wildlife habitats in Karnataka. It has many features that make it a priority area for conservation (Karanth KU 1982). Till the late 80s, the management focus was heavily tilted towards revenue generation forestry activities and extensive logging of valuable timber species was carried out. In addition, Bhadra's extensive Bamboo forests were severely exploited to meet the raw material requirements of a large paper mill. From the 90s the management focus has slowly changed towards wildlife conservation and protection due to a shift away from Revenue generation forestry in Wildlife Reserves and consistent pressure and active involvement of local conservation groups led by D.V. Girish and supported by Dr. Ullas Karanth and others.

The reserve was first given infrastructure support by Global Tiger Patrol (GTP) in 1996 through Wildlife First when 3 jeeps and 50 field kits were donated. The reserve was subsequently supported by the Karnataka Tiger Conservation Project (KTCP), a 3 year state level project, supported by Wildlife Conservation Society-India Program, Save the Tiger Fund - National Fish and Wildlife Fund and ExxonMobil. KTCP aimed at improving field protection through further infrastructure support/training to the Karnataka State Forest Department (KFD) and local community interface initiatives.

Poaching of wild animals for meat, using shot guns and muzzle loading guns for personal consumption and for sale has considerably depressed the tiger prey base. Intentional forest fires (during the dry season from March-May), to facilitate cattle grazing and illegal Non Timber Forest Produce extraction in the tiger reserve is another major threat. These threats need to be addressed for the long-term conservation of tigers in the Park.

Habitat fragmentation is another serious threat for the long-term survival of tigers in the wild. A substantial area of moist grass savannas or hadlus, which are prime habitat for ungulates, in Bhadra Tiger Reserve is under cultivation. Presently, 736 non-tribal families live in 16 legal enclosures with a total occupied area of 836 acres. Their main occupation is farming and coffee plantations, and those families who do not own land work as wage labour in these farmlands.

The Project aims to consolidate this potentially superior tiger habitat by reducing human-wildlife conflict through voluntary rehabilitations, mobilising public support through education / interface and explore possibilities of private land acquisitions.

These objectives would be achieved through continuous watchdog activities, field staff training / motivation, scientific monitoring of tiger and prey populations, Interface with

Karnataka Forest Department (KFD) and the families willing to relocate and networking with various collaborators.

Long term evaluation would be based on data generated through biological monitoring protocols. Short term evaluation would be on the basis of encounter rate surveys for human cattle intrusion, annual forest fire monitoring / assessments. Project output would include scientific publications on tiger and prey population trends and video documentation of existing pressures and the positive impact of CLTC activities to minimise such pressures.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

1. Continue conservation 'watchdog' activities by maintaining a strong on ground presence.

The Project leader has carried out 24 monitoring trips to the Sanctuary. A total of 4814 kms were logged for the 24 visits. More than 25 meetings and interactions with the Range Forest Officers, Foresters, Guards and Watchers were held, to motivate and inspiring them to carry out their duties better.

2. Continue monitoring of tiger and its prey population through rigorous application of scientific survey techniques in the field.

Tiger prey population density estimate survey was carried out at Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary with guidance from Dr.Ullas Karanth, Centre for Wildlife Studies.

3. Interface with families volunteered to resettle and the State forest Department for effective and speedy implementation of the rehabilitation project.

A Project Officer has been employed under the CLTC Project, exclusively for counseling and motivating families on the advantages of accepting a voluntary rehabilitation package. The Project Officer has logged about 8,500 kms visiting various villages for meeting and interaction with people. A verification of the survey carried out earlier on the number of families, members and dependents was recorded under the Project.

The villagers have been educated about the rehabilitation project; the rehabilitation package that is going to be delivered and the different phases of implementation of the Project. The villagers have been educated as to how the project would provide them better facilities with better options and opportunities regarding employment, education, health, and economical gains.

The Project Leader has continuously interacted with forest, revenue, public works and horticulture department; coffee board, spices board and other government agencies assisted them in conducting surveys, evaluating buildings and properties of the beneficiaries.

The Project has assisted the District Administration by providing information on the families, property owned, nature of residence etc., thereby speeding up the acquisition and rehabilitation proceedings. It has also assisted the villagers to organise themselves in

submitting memorandums to the government for various suggestions on effective implementation of the Rehabilitation Project. The Project has assisted the villagers to draft and submit relevant applications and documents to fulfill the rehabilitation procedures in order to hasten the process.

The Project Leader has effectively interfaced with the villagers and informed them about the key development including the State Cabinet approval of the rehabilitation package. The Project has facilitated the villagers to visit the rehabilitation site. The Project Leader has intervened to get the District administration to bring the remaining villages under the acquisition notification and provide rehabilitation for all of them simultaneously.

Constant interaction with the village leaders has ensured that the Project Leader and Project Officer have won the complete trust and confidence of all the villagers.

The Project Leader had several meetings with the district ministers and brought to their notice the bottlenecks in implementing the rehabilitation project and has requested to instruct his officers to speed up procedures. The Project Leader has also educated the politicians to prevent any possibility of opposition by locals in the rehabilitation area in accommodating the rehabilitated people into their community.

The Project has consolidated, verified and finalized the list of villagers for the approval of the forest and the revenue departments. A total of 12 meetings were held with the District Administrator for facilitating the rehabilitation. Discussions in the meetings included the families to be rehabilitated, their history, implementation of proposals and the delivery of package, records of rights, notifications etc.

4. *Pressurise the State and the Central Government to commit additional funds for the rehabilitation project.*

The Project Leader has met several senior officers in the state administration who deal with state finance along with other concerned ministers. The minister in turn has assured that the state will provide free allotment of house sites to all displaced families. The Central Govt. has already issued 50% of the funds even before the award stage and has assured full funds immediately. The Deputy Commissioner, Chikmagalur has made a commitment to complete the process by the end of December 2001 and physical resettlement by March 2002.

5. *Motivate and educate field staff in better protection and management of the Park*

The Project Leader has maintained a personal contact with the field staff motivating and drawing their attention to conservation needs and has constant feed back about implementation of protection measures.

The Project Leaders' constant liaison between senior officials and field staff has given them more confidence to discuss their problems freely including shortcomings.

The Project's constant support and deliberation on wildlife and other offences have made them more aware of how to deal with problems and situations.

The Jeeps and other equipment like Wireless which were donated by Global Tiger Patrol in the past and subsequently under Karnataka Tiger Conservation Project have improved mobility and communications tremendously.

The field staff were also educated about fire management and fire prevention measures.

The number of cases detected by respective ranges

1. Muthodi - 6 Cases
2. Hebbe - 5 Cases
3. Lakkavalli - 26 Cases
4. Tanigebyle - 12 Cases

Wildlife Conservation Education camps were conducted to volunteers and students along with regular meetings with the Project Team.

The number of education programs conducted under the Project is mentioned below:

Nature Camps - 2

Interactive meetings on Wildlife conservation - 2

Talks in Schools & Colleges - 4

Internal Project Group meeting - 16 Meetings

Nature Conservation Guild - 4 Meetings

Fire prevention meetings with villagers - 5 meetings

The Project has made arrangements for trips to villagers to rehabilitation sites - 4 meetings and 2 visits.

6. *Establish a base in Chikmagalur (the Reserve Headquarters) for administration of the project.*

A Project office is based in Chikmagalur along with accommodation for the Project Officer. The Project Office has been a meeting point for all the villagers (beneficiaries of the rehabilitation package) and has often stayed overnight at the office as traveling back to their villages is difficult due to bad transportation infrastructure; the office has been extensively used by all the villagers for their needs on rehabilitation. The Project Office provides an opportunity for villagers to freely express, discuss their feelings, aspiration and doubts regarding rehabilitation program also to acquire suitable solutions, to meet relevant offices and officers, get any relevant document and data.

EVALUATION:

Photographs and Video documentation has been made regarding various pressures on villages.

The forest fire in the park, which was rampant in earlier years, more than 70% of the undergrowth of the Park Area was being burnt in 1993. This has come down to less than 1% in 2001 March after continuous interaction and satisfaction of the rehabilitation package to the villagers. This is a very significant achievement by the Project in association with the Forest Department.

Data on survey of tiger prey density estimates are yet to be analyzed.