



PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES IN JALDAPARA FRINGE AREA

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Aim: Conservation of the wildlife habitat at Jaldapara

Objectives: The objectives of the present rapid survey around Jaldapara are three fold:

1. to assess the resources on which both the rhino and the local people depend in common
2. to find out the issues which might be crucial for conservation of the wildlife habitat especially in relation to the local population and
3. to arrive at a set of alternatives along with the local people which would ensure conservation of the habitat while satisfying their basic needs

Methodology

The survey included three phases: pre-field, field-survey and post field.

During the pre-field survey, various literatures and Census records regarding population, landuse, migration and other information pertaining to the area were reviewed to gain an overall idea of the concerned area and issues.

The rapid survey in the field was spaced over a period of 10 days. This included:

-interviewing forest officials and local people for identifying issues and conflict areas important for conservation of rhino and its habitat

-identifying with the help of forest officials and local people three representative villages and

-conducting a rapid participatory appraisal at the community level using Participatory Rural Appraisal(PRA) techniques in the villages selected.

The PRA activity involved assessment of the various issues that are crucial to this fringe areas and finding out the perception of the local people regarding the same.

The activity especially focused on involving people in suggesting mechanisms that would reduce conflict and ensure their greater participation in conservation effort.

The post field phase involved analysis & interpretation and collation of the information collected during the other phases.

For interpreting and suggesting options for future, it was found necessary to project the human population in the fringe areas for the coming years. A demographic computer package DEM-PROJ (Ref: The Future Group, UN) has been used for the purpose.

Findings:

Crucial issues:

- Increasing human population, immigration and their dependency on the Jaldapara sanctuary area
- Poor income and health conditions in the fringe villages
- Lack of any alternative income opportunities within the village
- Lack of any alternative options within the village for firewood and grazing
- Poor communication linkages and thus poor access to market, medical and educational facilities
- Communication gap between common people in the villages and the forest department
- Lack of rights and involvement of the local villagers in conservation of the protected area.

Possible solutions:

1. Strict regulations:

A very strict anti-poaching regulation and its enforcement is an absolute necessity for the area. Prompt and consistent decisions even in minor incidence is a dire necessity to make people honor the rule. The regulations again need to be applied to everybody irrespective of their social/economic status in the area or otherwise.

However, enforcement of a strict regulation alone will not solve the crucial problem, in fact it can only aggravate the situation. While rules are being tightened it is important that forest department assumes the position of a nodal agency and catalyse a number of social and welfare activities in the village. Again the choice of such program should be strictly according to the suggestion of the majority of the villagers in the area and not necessarily only their elected representatives.

2. Working together with the local people:

Greater dialogue of the forest department with the people. Checking poaching and illicit felling will be much easier if peoples' participation is ensured.

Chalking out management plan of the Jaldapara Sanctuary area jointly along with the the common people of the fringe villages. In order to achieve the above, the following are necessary:

- i. Extension training to the people of the forest department and possibly forming a cell within the department specialising in Participatory Approach.
- ii. Creation on forums for informal dialogue from time to time between the park managers and common villagers to share problems and possible solutions.

iii. Gaining people's confidence and co-operation by being sensitive to their problems and recognising their rights.

Possibly some kind of permit/family for collection of wood and other materials in specified areas (keeping in mind the habitat requirement of the rhino)

3. Dependency of the fringe population on the wildlife habitat:

Though increasing dependency is a serious problem for the conservation of the area, yet some amount of dependency of the local population on the wildlife habitat will ensure their interest and involvement in the conservation effort. However, a careful balance has to be arrived at by allowing villagers to harvest certain products and developing alternatives within the village area.

The forest department needs to be the co-ordinating agency in achieving an overall development in the villages adjoining Jaldapara sanctuary. This is necessary in order to improve their living standard, reduce their dependency on the wildlife habitat to the minimal and to gain their full co-operation in the conservation effort.

A few possible options in this regard are as follows:

Reducing the increasing dependency:

i. One way to deal with the problem would be restricting immigration to the area possibly by strict implementation of land regulations. The other necessary action would be to restrict further growth and setting up of tea-plantation. People rendered landless for either case more often remain in the area totally depending on the adjoining wilderness for livelihood and income.

ii. Extension of buffer-zone activities within the village area utilising river-damaged land in collaboration with revenue department and the people of the village.

Therefore over 5yrs. period, people in a village should increasingly depend on the buffer zone within the village for fuel and fodder. Then the forest dept. can gradually reduce the permit amount for the same per household.

This activity will also require creation of a protection-committee within the village with true representation from all section of villagers for protecting the buffer zone area and other common property resources.

iii. Modifying the chulas presently used to achieve even a 15% fuel efficiency. For Jaldapara village it has been calculated that about 300 trees (/equivalent amount of wood) can be saved per year in this way.

If both buffer-zone activity within the village and fuel efficiency of chulas can be achieved within the next decade, even with the predicted increase in the population the dependency for firewood will either remain same or will actually be lower than the present figure by the year 2011.

iv. Possibly linking up with the Rural Development Scheme or any other independent project to provide a better and a more permanent housing - especially roof to the people. This again will substantially reduce their dependency on Chhan(thatch grass) from the forest.

Improving agriculture and income possibilities:-

i. Agriculture

-Ensuring irrigation facilities at least for the vegetable crop. In areas where water table is at favourable depth, low cost water-harvesting technologies like treadle-pump can be installed.

ii. Animal husbandry:

-Providing veterinary facilities for treatment of the livestock.

Income opportunities within each village:

i. Value addition:

- training for value added products and setting up small units for:

- bamboo based craft and furniture
- drying and cutting areca nuts etc.

ii. Micro enterprises on locally available resources to make:

- paper from jute stalks
- rope from jute
- production of construction materials based on sand and stone in the area

Note: All the options enlisted here has been suggested by people of the different villages that we surveyed.

Health & Nutrition and Education facilities:

i. Fighting malaria and other diseases which claims a lot of lives in this area. Training of large number of paramedical staff and providing health centres or even some para-medical staff the necessary training and rudimentary equipment to detect malaria will be most essential.

ii. A fresh approach for a community participation for well being and family planning for each village

-Setting up informal as well as formal facilities for education especially for women and female children. Percentage of women education in the area is found to be strikingly low.

4. Institution & Infrastructure:

Institution:

The Protection Committee set up for the buffer zone and other common property resources can be gradually given more responsibility in fighting and eliminating incidence of poaching of wildlife, ensuring effective family planning, adult and child literacy and such other issues that affect the life of a common person in the village. The committee should evolve as a platform of co-operation between the villagers and the forest dept. to make conservation viable in the area.

Infrastructure:

-Maintenance of road and issue of permit to the villagers in certain areas to use the forest road to ensure better communication to the market, hospital, school etc. Some of the routes

were suggested to us by the villagers during our survey which ensures least disturbance to the wildlife and its habitat.

Better road and communication will also provide a boost to the anti-poaching drive in the area.

5. Revenue for the dept and employment for the people:
Developing well organized eco tourism facility This will involve:

- building up the minimum and rudimentary infrastructure
- through training local people as nature interpretation guides and guards
- awareness programmes for dept. staff, guides and guards on importance of the effect of specific practices on the habitat.
- similar awareness camps for the villagers in the fringe villages
- printing out detailed information on the habitat and wildlife for the tourist
- developing well specified rules i.e. do's and don'ts for the tourist so that they honor the culture and sentiments of the local people. This can be even specifying dress code.
- training the guards to be strict with rules
- preparing detailed tourism plan with the villagers whereby the tourist will be able to experience the wilderness (not necessarily sight wildlife) but will have least interaction or impact on the adjoining villages.

Note: Caution- Anything but a well planned and well implemented eco-tourism programme is far more harmful to the wildlife habitat and the people around compared to conventional tourism.

SOME FACTS

This is a note in effort to highlight a certain issue like human population growth and to quantify as far possible the extent of their dependency on the adjoining wilderness.

Dependency of the fringe settlements:

Human population

Given the present population figure, fertility rate, health records, the population shows a rapidly upward trend. This is found to be especially influenced by migration from and to the area from Bangladesh and other adjoining states, which still continues. The number with landholding greater than 6.5 acres in any village varies between 2-5 only. A major percentage about 60-70% of the villagers however are either landless or hold less than 0.5 acre. This figure is more likely to have influenced the migration rate, which shows an increasing trend. It is again predicted that agriculture alone will not be able to meet the demand as there will be lesser land per person. At the same time while population is increasing at the present rate more households are expected to fall in the category of landless and holding below 0.5 acre. Keeping in view of the ground reality, it is predicted that while more households will become landless or marginal landholders during the next two decades, the number of large land-holders will also increase owing to and giving rise to further economic disparity in the area. Fig 1: as an example depicts the trend in Jaldapara village terms of landholding per household. In Jaldapara-

Pradhanpara-Natunpara (clubbed under Jaldapara) village there is hardly any immigration, however, migration exists. If migration reduces, it will give a tremendous boost to the population. Therefore along with the development programs in the area, slow migration should be encouraged at the rate of 8-10 individuals/yr over the next two decades in order to reduce the direct population pressure on the sanctuary area.

The growing population, substantial immigration and resulting economic disparity in the fringe villages with more people falling under landless and marginal landholder category holds a great relevance to the future of the adjoining Jaldapara Sanctuary.

Dependency for livelihood of the settlements adjoining Jaldapara is hundred percent. This is especially so because of low income and absence of any alternatives in most of the cases. People with very minimal or no land and practically no option for income generation within the village depend greatly on the adjoining wilderness for income. Presently the population and the number of landless is increasing, thus the dependency of the households, both for their own consumption (livelihood) and income, on the adjoining wilderness is going to increase further.

In the following sections, items on which villagers depend for their livelihood and income are listed separately:

Dependency for livelihood (consumption):

- i. Firewood 15-20 kg/day/household (>= to 1 tree/yr./household)
- ii. Chhan (grass) for thatching: atleast 750-800 (2250-2400 kgs.) bundles/year/household
- iii. Grazing of domestic cattle: 48 kgs of fodder grass/day/household approximately for about 7-8 months.
- iv. Hogla for mat: about 2 mats/year/household
- v. Cotton: approximately 1 kg/year/household

Dependency for income:

- i. Firewood collection and selling: approximately Rs.320/months/household for about 5 months
- ii. Cotton floss collection and selling: Rs.400/per month/household for about 3 months
- iii. Hogla mat: Rs.320/month/household for about 9 months
- iv. Pipil (Pipul spp.): Rs.75/month/household for 1 month
- v. [At times Chhan (grass for thatch) are sold at 20p/bundle]

Approximate income/household from the forest products is approximately Rs.590 /month concentrated over nine months.

