

Project Update: January 2006

Community Consultation and Planning Phase

Greetings from Nepal! I am going to present here the progress of Ghodaghodi Conservation Education Project funded by The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation in 2005.

January 2006 became exciting month for us as we were in planning phase. The following activities were carried out in the planning phase.

Volunteer Selection and Empowerment

We focused on the selection of volunteers for the project in this phase. As per this, we carried volunteer sensitization activities in collaboration with Bird Conservation Nepal Pokhara Branch (BCN-Pokhara) and Shelf-Help Environment Awareness Camp (SHEAC) in Institute of Forestry. We carried out personal contacts and group discussions with committee members of these organizations to discuss about the preliminary activities to be done for volunteer involvement for the project. We were mainly focused on selection of motivated volunteers which could have significant contribution and motivation to conservation.

Three prime activities were conducted in this phase. First, we decided to launch a quiz contest programme with a view to enhance the skill and capacity of the potential volunteers. They were involved in preparation of questions for quiz contest, preparation of slides, notice preparation, design of sequence of contest activities and literature review. A good exercise was made among volunteers in reviewing conservation literatures and preparation of objective questions related to birds and wetlands conservation. A total of 15 students were participated with 7 volunteers. We have collected preliminary feedback on the practicability and user friendliness of quiz contest questionnaires from this programme and we expect to modify and enhance these for execution of quiz contests among school students at Ghodaghodi Lake Area. This program was jointly implemented by BCN-Pokhara and this project little bit earlier. Second, we overlapped our sensitization program with that of SHEAC jointly. I made an hour presentation on 'Overview of bird and mammal conservation and study methods' among the students (75) and facilitated a guided visit on Banpale Forest. Its main objective was to familiarize the potential volunteers about the techniques how to facilitate the bird watching programs in the field and create their interest on conservation. Third, we support the publication of monthly wall paper entitled 'Bird's World' in collaboration with BCN-Pokhara. Attempts were made to present basic information on birds and their habitats as wetlands. Till now, two issues have been published. The main objective was to create a foundation for the preparation of network of conservationists which is one of the prime activities of the project.

Summing up, we have built up the following foundations during this phase, which we expect help the project's forthcoming activities:

Selection of four volunteers for involvement in project's forthcoming activities.

Provision of theoretical and practical knowledge to the volunteers in natural way, which we

will use in project's forthcoming activities.

Preparation of preliminary foundation for networking of conservationists.

2. Preliminary field visit and community consultation for planning

We visited the Ghodaghodi Lake Area October end, 2005. During this visit, we made contacts with key informants. Key informants were the committee members of local NGO-Ghodaghodi Area Conservation and Awareness Forum (GACAF), independent researchers and village elites. Our main intention was to explore the community dominated by Tharu Indigenous People. We finally identified the Fulbari Community Forest User Group (CFUG) located in Seukalia, Ward no. 9 of Ramshikharjhala Village Development Committee (VDC). All the committee members of Fulbari CFUG are Tharus. Preliminary consultations were made to explain our working objectives, intended purpose and their possible involvements. Most of the time was consumed on understanding their activities, needs and problems. We are expecting to interact intensively with series of focus group discussions and adult non-formal education in June end. A photograph showing Fulbari Community Forest User Committee members in front of their local office is presented below.

In our preliminary visit for planning, we found more primary and lower secondary schools than secondary schools. We explored two schools most relevant for this project (which aims at providing conservation awareness among Indigenous Tharu Community). First is Shree Birat Sanatan Dharma Sanskriti Bedbidhyashram School located in very vicinity of south west boundary of the lake in Sukhad VDC. The outstanding feature of this school is that it has been providing education free of cost to the students of poor Indigenous Tharu Families. It is operated by the funds collected from religious activities on the lake area. It should be noted that Ghodaghodi Lake is an important religious place with a shrine dedicated to Ghodaghodi Deity where indigenous Tharu people celebrate a traditional festival, Agan Panchami, in December and take a holy bath in the lake. Second, we explored Sitakunda High School in ward number 2 of Ganeshpur tole in Ramshikharjhala VDC with 473 students. The students are dominated by Indigenous Tharus. Intensive school teaching, interactions and bird watching field campaign will be carried out in these schools as part of field activities.

Rapid Rural Appraisal and Transect Walk

At October end 2005, we conducted rapid rural appraisal among local community to explore their activities which can have some effects on wetland ecosystem. We found that majority of Tharu people are heavily engaged and dependent on fishing for subsistence living. They do fishing not for sale, but only to eat due to their poverty, limited land and illiteracy. They use to collect the seeds of lotus plant to eat. Some photographs have been taken which are presented below:

We have taken some photographs showing the present condition of the lake. We found that eutrophication and sedimentation are the major problems in the area.

Some of these photographs are presented below:

Planning for forthcoming activities

We have prepared a detail schedule of activities for year 2006. After thorough discussion with the professionals and academicians, we have pulled the publication works for February. In February, we will prepare draft educational kit and brochure, which will be used during school teaching and bird watching field campaign from April end. We expect that it will be an effective field testing strategy. The use of draft educational materials on the field will be an instrument to test the effectiveness and user-friendliness of the proposed educational materials through school teaching, art competition, quiz contest, essay competition, short-term field training and presentation. Then, these materials will be modified and enhanced by incorporating feed back obtained from field test strategy. In March, we will launch website for educational and networking purposes. Chapter wise information on wetlands, birds, forests and soils will be continuously uploaded to the website for free download. We are now preparing these educational materials.

We conducted this type of preliminary survey because conservation efforts will be impact-less if the socioeconomic and cultural background of the society is not well understood. We have collected some basic background information on people's dependency on wetland resources, pattern of resource exploitation and their perception. We expect that this information will help in better understanding of the local community and the smooth implementation of forthcoming project's activities based on the needs and problems of the local community.

BCN-Pokhara and SHEAC located in Institute of Forestry has provided working space for the project's indoor activities. Thanks for their support.