

Project Update: March 2010

Keeping up with the rights-based approach to conservation, many discussions were held in both the villages about the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forests Rights) Act, 2006. Officially the process of recognition of community and individual forest rights has been slow in taking off. After the discussions and facilitated by Kalpavriksh (KV), villagers in Yelavali decided to take the process forward, passed a resolution in their village assembly, formed a forests rights committee (FRC), and filed the claims and submitted them to the sub-divisional level, as is required. Subsequent to this KV facilitated the process of verification of village boundaries and preparation of village natural resource availability and use map by applying PRA techniques. This is to facilitate the process of claiming their traditional forests under the above-mentioned act for protection and management.

Yelavali villagers also came together and contributed labour for construction of the approach road to their village (a kacha footpath). This was followed by a *van bhojan* (forest meal) that they organized to increase cohesiveness and bonding within the village and celebrate it with Kalpavriksh members. A similar activity was organized by the villager's post monsoon last year facilitated by KV, where women in the village participated in a biodiversity festival. The festival included a competition on knowledge of diversity, properties, and recipes of wild vegetables available in Bheemashankar region.

Neema and Pradeep also met the Conservator of Forests along with Mr Ulhas Rane (ecologist, architect and planner) to discuss a wider tourism plan for the area such that it enhances the livelihood options for the local people while leading to maximum ecological benefits (as against the current tourism activities and trends). The issue of local youth getting involved in such activities by organising eco-tours was also discussed. In the meanwhile, KV facilitated a visitation of a group which stayed in the homes of Yelavali villagers. The local people organized all the logistics for the visit and earned a decent revenue. KV has also facilitated interactions of the villagers with some small-scale eco-tour operators who have shown interest in organizing similar trips in near future.

