

## **Project Update: November 2010**

Kalpavriksh has been working in two villages, Yelavali and Bhorgiri, in Bheemashankar Wildlife Sanctuary with an overall objective of creating support for conservation among the local people, making conservation work for the benefit of the local people and to eventually arrive at and facilitate a joint protected area management strategy for Bheemashankar Wildlife Sanctuary. Specifically we hope to be able to do so by creating awareness about the wildlife and ecological value of the sanctuary among the local people and children and creating awareness about the value of conservation among the political leaders, particularly those involved in the local governance, facilitating a process of documenting of traditional knowledge by the local people themselves, facilitating the process of strengthening local governance systems and linking these structures with effective management and conservation of the surrounding forests and effective use of available laws and policies, among others.

Towards this end and keeping up with the rights-based approach to conservation, in the last 2 years many discussions have been 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 for management and conservation, under the above-mentioned Act. Many discussions have taken place in the village in this regard and villagers have come up with a set of rules and regulations that must be followed once the rights have been granted and management and protection is in their hands. This according to them will not be easy for them to take on alone and they will require adequate support from the forest department. Yelavali villagers have also had a few meetings in the neighbouring villages to inform their neighbours about their intention to claim and protect forests within their traditional boundaries. Keeping this in mind a discussion was initiated with the Conservator Forest, Pune Wildlife Division. He advised that the villagers should come up with their plan of management and send it to the department and the department will then be able to react. The plan is currently in the process of being discussed and formulated. A Forestry and Ecosystem Management student from Germany is helping in facilitating this as an intern with Kalpavriksh. This may take some time but once ready will be discussed with the neighbouring villagers and submitted to the forest department.

In the meantime, awareness raising about biological diversity in the area and its link with the fast eroding local culture continues. Yelavali and Bhogiri villages organized a biodiversity festival again this year. Women from both the villages cooked various recipes from seasonally available wild vegetables. The display and discussion on recipes were followed by a discussion on the value of such vegetable for human health, particularly in this region. Group which included people from Pune and the participants from the villages also discussed the current availability

and consumption status of these wild foods. Environment education programmes have also been initiated in these two villages. The programme aims at capacity building of interested local people in such a way that they conduct environment education programmes with the school children in their villages combining the new knowledge and their own local experiences and knowledge.

In the meantime, one female and one male member from the two villages have started helping with collection of socio-economic information and data collection for National Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). The forms under the scheme are being filled. The ultimate objective is to link the scheme to the management plan prepared by the villagers.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 a group of 30 villagers from these villages is visiting Hiware Bazar in Ahmadnagar District and Baripada in Dhule District. This exposure visit is expected to help the villagers learn about management and conservation of natural resources while improving local livelihoods.