

## **Project Update: May 2011**

### **1. Record Investigation:**

All four Bufferzone User Committees' offices of eastern sector, Chitwan National Park were visited and asked about the existing practice of providing permission to excavate sand and stone from the Rapti River. The four User Committees are Lothar User Committee, Khagendramalli User Committee, Budhirapti User Committee and Mrigakunja User Committee.

According to representatives of concerned User Committees, they used to provide permission to those who had registered their tractors according to the norms of User Committee Office. Similarly, it was found that there is not any specific entry point in area of Mrigakunja User Committee. Tractors who take permission from Mrigakunja User Committee also use other user committee's entry point. Some schools also use to charge money for those tractors as support to run local school.

During this period, the information of entry point to river was also collected. Besides Mrigakunja User Committee, others have several entry points so pressure is extreme in these three sites. Official record also proves that these sites are also sensitive.

### **2. Direct Field Observation**

Fifteen days regular field observation programme was organised to monitor the local situation. During this field visit, hundreds of tractors were found in the river excavating sand and stones. Most of them had crossed the river which is illegal. According to rules and regulations, there is not authority to cross the river because it pollutes river in one hand and disturbs river system biodiversity on the other. Some tractors were found that they were running along the river. One serious condition was also observed that nine tractors were excavating stone within 1 km. Noise pollution was also extreme in the site and some workers were fishing in the river with nets, hooks and local weapons.

### **3. Field Level Interaction**

During the field observation, more than 424 workers with 110 tractors were approached and taught how their negligence could impact negatively on biodiversity. In this interaction, they realised that their small mistake could be an enormous threat to wildlife. In this interaction, they urged us to share such messages with their owners also so their owners won't pressure them to excavate sand and stone haphazardly. According to their suggestion, river conservation education programme was planned to create awareness amongst drivers, helpers, workers and owner of tractors.

During the field visit, lots of tractors without permission letters were also observed. From this, it could be easily said that the number of tractors is higher than the records of the User

Committee. So, investigation of official record will not provide real data. Regular monitoring and crosschecking mechanism was recommended to User Committees.

#### **4. Worker (Driver /Labour) and Owner Education Programme:**

As per the suggestion of labourers/workers during field level interaction, river conservation education programme were organised for workers (driver/labourers) and owners. The project educated 91 tractors related to people in different places. This programme shared conservation information with approximately 400 people including owners and workers.

During the education programme, resource persons highlighted possible threats from excavating activities, noise pollution, water pollution through lubricant leakage, erosion and scoring inside water zone, air pollution with old tractors and high smoking. So, participants were taught key ideas to reduce the possible threats. Programme also suggested:

- Don't operate excavation activities at least 100 m area in both side of water zone.
- Maintain your tractor as a less polluting vehicle (less smoking and no leakage).
- Use less erosion or trigger path.
- Don't push horn after entering river.
- Don't involve in fishing, hunting and other illegal activities.
- Don't use your tractor for timber transportation.

At the same time, participants were requested to contribute to conservation because their simple effort can play a vital role to discourage poaching. They can work as informants and regulate information about the illegal activities to Bufferzone User Committee. They can make a call to representative of Bufferzone user Committee and other concerned persons when they get some unknown people entering the park, illegal felling and transportation, fishing activities through poisoning and making disturbance to biodiversity.

After the programme, participants responded that they got the idea how could they help in conservation. They told that they became shy after knowing ideas because they are not paying such attention so far. Finally, they committed that they are ready implement learning in coming days. The main interesting things was all tractors drivers and worker participated by stopping their work on the programme days.

#### **5. Stakeholders Education Programme:**

Another interaction programme also organised to create awareness about illegal activities, rules and regulations about tractor driving. The sub-inspector explained legal punishment for involving wildlife trafficking, deforestation and illegal transportation of forest products and wildlife trophies.

