

CEPF SMALL GRANT FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

Organization Legal Name:	Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF)
Project Title:	Coexistence bottom up: strengthening Asian Elephant conservation in human dominated landscapes.
Date of Report:	
Report Author and Contact Information	Mr. Tarsh Thekaekara

CEPF Region: Western Ghats Sri Lanka Biodiversity Hotspot (Mysore-Nilgiri Corridor)

CEPF Strategic Direction: 1 Enable action by diverse communities and partnerships to ensure conservation of key biodiversity areas and enhance connectivity in the corridors.

CEPF Strategic Direction: 2 Improve the conservation of globally threatened species through systematic conservation planning and action.

Grant Amount: \$ 18,000

Project Dates: 1st August 2013 to 31st January 2015

Implementation Partners for this Project (please explain the level of involvement for each partner):

The Shola Trust (TST) – the grant was implemented in collaboration with TST, using their experience of working the region for the last 5 years, knowledge and social capital.

Adivasi Munnerta Sangam (AMS) and Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development (ACCORD) – Indigenous leaders were consulted at the start of the project to understand their views of living with elephants, and they also help facilitate meetings in tribal villages etc.

The **Gudalur Rotary club** was also a key partner in reaching out to the wider public for meetings etc.

Conservation Impacts

Please explain/describe how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF ecosystem profile.

The grant matched the **CEPF IP 2.4 (ii)** – “**facilitate networking and information exchange among civil society groups on themes of common interest** (human-wildlife conflict, ecosystem services, green economy, sacred groves, etc.).

The key focus of the grant was to understand how people and wild elephants were able to share space in the past, or how particular indigenous ethnic communities were able to share space with elephants even today, while others - particularly the newer immigrants - were not. To this end we worked with a range of stakeholder in the region to first document case studies of relative harmonious coexistence and then see if these coexistence strategies can be used by other stakeholders.

The details of how the various activities have contributed to the implementation of the CEPF ecosystem profile is further discussed below.

Please summarize the overall results/impact of your project against the expected results detailed in the approved proposal.

The key expected outcomes from the project are listed below (**in bold**) along with the progress against each and the actual outcomes detailed below.

Maps of conflict hotspots, elephant presence/absence will be created and disseminated with local officials and landowners and communities, as also the Western Ghats Portal.

Fully achieved.

A GIS based grid was created for the entire landscape, and local people or forest department field staff were identified in each grid and interviewed about the presence of elephants on a scale of ‘never come’ to ‘occasional visitors once or twice a year’ to ‘regular visitors through the year’.

Human habitation (houses) were also all marked using google earth, and the two were compared to see if any conflict hotspots – of regular elephant use and intense human habitation – would come up.

However, it was found that elephant use of the landscape was much more widespread than imagined, and interacted extensively with human habitation, almost making the entire region a ‘conflict hotspot’. This map has been shared extensively with local stakeholders, and was particularly popular with the forest department, highlighting the fact that people at high densities, even in municipalities and towns, are in fact sharing space with elephants.

The map was sent to the Western Ghats portal team, and will be updated in due course, to be disseminated to a wider audience.

This kind of a map is an excellent starting point for understanding human-elephant shared space, and based on our work, a similar effort is being undertaken in Coorg by the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science /Asian Nature Conservation Foundation.

Qualitative and quantitative assessment of levels of tolerance/willingness to conserve.

Fully achieved.

We interviewed 100 families from the O’valley region of Gudalur, to understand their perceptions of elephants and ‘tolerance’ of elephants (Questionnaire in Appendix 1). This fits into a larger study aimed at understanding how diversity among the different ethnic communities in the region in how they perceive elephants. In total we now have interviewed 300 families spread across 6 different ethnic communities.

The results of this study are being analyzed and written up for publication in a peer reviewed journal (open access), but the key take away is that significant differences exist between the different communities, with Kattunayakans, a hunter-gatherer tribe, being the most tolerant, and Malayalis, a new immigrant group from Kerala, being the least tolerant.

We also interviewed 25 family owned tea estates, using a different approach and questionnaire, since the context of large landowners was very different from small scale

farmers. Our main objective was to find out about wildlife presence on their lands, and their willingness to have elephants on their lands in the years to come. Results of this survey are also being analysed and written up for publication, but the key take away is that 22 of the 25 estates were happy to always have elephants on their lands in the future, and were even willing to actively work towards this goal.

GIS based maps of estates for the 5 partnering land owners, and wildlife coexistence plans will be created, so that land owners face reduced damage by wildlife, but are able to also continue to have wildlife on their lands.

Fully Achieved.

A detailed GIS mapping was undertaken to map wildlife presence and elephant movement through 5 partner estates. One sample estate map is included as appendix^[BA1]. results were well appreciated by land owners – some of them even putting printed versions up on their walls. Given the somewhat private nature of land ownership, these maps will not be available in the public domain, but will be available with The Shola Trust and CEPF/ATREE, and will be used together with other data in a publication at a later stage after the actual owners are made anonymous.

However, the effort to create more detailed ‘Coexistence plans’ did not go as planned, primarily because in all the estates, coexistence was already happening, and they all felt nothing more could be done!

Some estates requested some detailed literature on the various options for fences (solar/electric, chillies etc.) and this information was shared with them.

GIS based maps and HEC mitigation plans for 5 villages will be created and made available on WGP.

Fully Achieved.

Again a full mapping was undertaken of all the houses in 5 chosen villages, along with paths people used, houses that were damaged by elephants, and how elephants moved through the villages. Discussions were held in the villages about what the people felt they could do about elephants, in ways that people and the elephants could continue to share space without adversely affecting each other. The results of these surveys is in a table as an appendix, but again, like the estates, there was not too much that could be done about it. Some innovative suggestions did come up - like getting people to put up smaller electric fences around a few houses of people related to each other rather than large communal fences. The large fences could not easily be maintained, and always broke down, and also prevented elephants from moving from one place to another.

The maps have not yet been shared on the WGP, as some of the people were not sure about sharing the locations of their houses in a public forum. Discussion around this will continue to find an anonymized way in which data can be shared, but for now this will not be shared on the WGP, but will be available with The Shola Trust and CEPF/ATREE, and will be used together with other data in a publication at a later stage.

The overall coexistence plans will be published in an open access journal in due course.

Database of crowd sourced reports of elephant movement will be maintained on the Western Ghats Portal. Effectiveness/challenges in such a system will be documents through popular articles.

Partially Achieved.

The SMS based early warning system, which we now call the ‘Crowd-sourced Elephant monitoring and Early Warning System’, or CEMEWS, was launched in the middle of 2014, with a training conducted for the forest department.

The blogpost on the TST website details this: <http://www.thesholatrust.org/launching-cemews/>, which has the details about the training along with pictures.

The system is now hosted by the Swatantra Malayalam Computing, and available at <http://smc.org.in/cemews/> and is working.

However, there has been almost no uptake by the forest department, despite a reasonably positive response from the field staff and a good rapport with higher officials. One reason could be that the forest department has just spent a significant amount of money of hardware that can be used for detection of elephant movements. We have worked with the provider of this system, and integrated it with our early warning system^[TT2] We are looking into this further, to better understand how the forest department could use the system more. We believe there may be better uptake in the years to come, once the failed system is forgotten!

The interaction with field staff was nevertheless very useful, and it has been a good two way learning exercise for both the staff and us, better understanding the realities of elephant and people living in this landscape.

Though less tangible, an ‘elephant movement’ of sorts will be created, involving all the local stakeholders, the forest department, local media, school children etc. The focus of this will be a film telling positive local stories of coexistence.

Partially Achieved.

A Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/thesholatrust>)^[BA3] for the shola trust was created to spread the message of coexistence to a wider audience. This has been reasonably successful, with about 500 followers, with over 50% of them being from Gudalur!

However, the documentary film was supposed to be main tool in spreading awareness about the inevitability of elephant in the Gudalur landscape, and this is now in the final stages of editing.

A draft version of the video is available at: <https://vimeo.com/126105880> (password: thesholatrust)

Once it is completed it will be used to complete the above objective.

Database of pictures of individual elephants will be maintained, as well as a photo documentation of all interesting animals found in 5 chosen estates. This will be shared with the wider community through initiatives like the Western Ghats portal.

Partially Achieved.

Again, all the animals photographed in estates are being uploaded to the Facebook page and the WGP, but we are not sure if we have completed documenting ALL the elephants in the region. The challenge has been that in this landscape the elephants almost hidden in forest patches through much of the day, and are active mostly at night, when photography is impossible.

We have however identified 4 individual herds, and hope to keep following them in the years to come.

Scientific manuscript/summary report will be created on elephant behaviour.

Partially achieved

This was beyond the scope of this project, and we were over ambitious in planning it. Based on extensive discussions with scientists at the Indian Institute of Science (Dr. Sukumar, Nachiket Sharma) and National Institute of Advanced Studies (Dr. Anindhya Sinha and Nishant S.), we have now planned a full fledged scientific study over the next three years. Our initial documentation of the elephants in the region and their unusual behaviour has been important in forming the basis of this study.

A popular article published highlights this:

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/features/blink/cover/more-brain-than-brawn/article6446198.ece>

Please provide the following information where relevant:

Hectares Protected: NIL

Species Conserved: NIL

Corridors Created: NIL

Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its short-term and long-term impact objectives.

On the whole we are quite happy with the progress of the project in achieving the short term goals as described above. We have had good cooperation from all the stakeholders involved.

The long-term goal – of a ‘harmonious coexistence between people and wildlife’ - is much more challenging, as it goes against the dominant narrative everywhere in the world. There is a rapid ‘globalization’ of values underway, where local people and their views about animals are influenced more by TV and mainstream media than by their own interactions with animals around them. Even if there is no real conflict on the ground, they are reminded of it every day from sensationalized reporting of these incidents from across the country.

The role The Shola Trust (as a small NGO) can play to change these larger forces is somewhat limited. We are very aware of this, and try to take a step back every year to re look at what we are doing and whether it will actually make a difference.

Three key challenges emerged over the course of the last two years.

- 1) We found the panchayats, the ‘local self government’ in the region is highly politicized, and in many instances are not genuine representatives of the people in their constituencies. We viewed these elected members as genuine representatives, but in many instances we had local people complaining that their ‘ward member’ had been parachuted in by the political party leadership, and was not local or concerned about the issues of the ward or panchayat. This is a big challenge, and we are not sure how to address it.
- 2) Working with the forest department is a constant challenge. Given that we had a good working system, we found it strange that they would bring in another private player at considerable expense, about INR 500,000 (US\$8300) was spent on the elephant detection hardware. We have to perhaps engage with the forest department spending patterns, and possibly take part in their tender process of undertaking research or implementing ‘solutions’. If they have to pay for services they will value it more than free services offered and NGOs and researchers.
- 3) There is a considerable ‘human-human conflict’ at play, between the local communities and the forest department. This is primarily over land, as tenure is not secure in the region, with a long and ongoing battle over the ‘janman lands’ that were leased out from the Nilambur Royal family in the 1800s. This makes implementing any activities with locals very hard, as they have a deep sense of mistrust of the forest department and also do not necessarily have a long term stake in the region as they are unsure of their future.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

The maps generated had an unexpected positive impact on local people. They acted as a key ‘in’ into the subject. Since the conservation vs people debate is highly polarized, it is always hard to start an open conversation, since we came from an arguably ‘biased’ conservation NGO. But the maps offered a good neutral starting point – to just start talking about elephant presence or absence and then onto the problems people faced and whether they thought they could actually live with elephants in the long-term.

One possible negative impact also came from the mapping of estates – many estates were worried about the implications of their lands being ‘mapped’ given the insecurity over land tenure, making them unwilling to share their maps on public platforms, and the issue of wildlife on their lands got marginalized.

Lessons Learned

Describe any lessons learned during the design and implementation of the project, as well as any related to organizational development and capacity building. Consider lessons that would inform projects designed or implemented by your organization or others, as well as lessons that might be considered by the global conservation community.

On the whole, the key learnings were:

1. Understanding the context at local levels is very important. Even for a small local NGO like us, where most of us were born and brought up here, there are always nuances and new factors that emerge which we need to carefully understand and incorporate into our planning.
2. We need to be open to change. As stated above, given changing circumstances, there needs to be the room to constantly modify our planned activities accordingly.
3. There urgently needs to be a more long term approach to understanding success and failure – it is quite impossible to be certain over such short timespans.

Project Design Process: (aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings)

The fact that all of us working on this project were from Gudalur and had good working relationships with the project stakeholder that allowed extensive consultation while planning our work was very useful.

Project Implementation: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/shortcomings)

Again, being local and having a long term stake in the region was very useful.

Other lessons learned relevant to conservation community:

Nothing beyond the lessons listed above.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
The Shola Trust	In kind, where staff time, vehicle, equipment etc. that were not funded by the CEPF project were used extensively	\$2800	
AMS/ACCORD	Again in kind, where significant help was given in identifying villages, organizing meetings etc.	\$1200	
The Elephant Family	A	\$2500	The setting up of the CEMEWS system was funded by the elephant family.
The Godrej Foundation	B	\$8000	Funds received on the basis on work done on the CEPF project to continue with our work.

****Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:***

A Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)

- B** *Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)*
- C** *Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

Sustainability/Replicability

Summarize the success or challenge in achieving planned sustainability or replicability of project components or results.

In terms of sustainability we need to continue with a project-based approach to fund our on-going research and interventions at the human-wildlife interface in the region, and we see no other way around it, as no long term funding is available. But this has not been an issue so far, and we are confident of continuing with this approach.

Some key initiative – like the CEMEWS – will hopefully be taken on by the forest department after the first few years. We are reasonably confident of this as well, as we have a line of communication open with the local staff as well at the Chief Wildlife Warden.

Scalability is not something we have actively concerned ourselves with, partly because our approach has been bottom-up, looking for initiatives that work at local scales, not regional, national or global.

Summarize any unplanned sustainability or replicability achieved.

That said though, as mentioned earlier, some of our work is now being replicated in Kodagu (Karnataka Western Ghats), and much of it should be applicable in similar human-elephant co-existence zones.

Further, we are in discussion with the Indian Institute of Science and the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to radio/GPS collar some elephants in the Gudalur region and then create a social media profile for these elephants and gather a large number of followers. These will be implemented in the coming year.

Safeguard Policy Assessment

Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.

There was one safeguard policy that way flagged – the indigenous people’s planning framework.

The following actions were implemented for this:

1. The Adivasi Munnetra Sangam, an indigenous people’s movement, was consulted before the project, with all the dimensions of the project explained and a ‘no objection certificate’ obtained.
2. A meeting was held with the local govt. authorities and panchayats, during which all our plans regarding human-elephant coexistence were explained.
3. A grievance redressal poster was made in Tamil and English and display at all times in our office, while also displayed during any formal meetings.

Performance Tracking Report Addendum

CEPF Global Targets

(Enter Grant Term)

Provide a numerical amount and brief description of the results achieved by your grant.
Please respond to only those questions that are relevant to your project.

Project Results	Is this question relevant?	If yes, provide your numerical response for results achieved during the annual period.	Provide your numerical response for project from inception of CEPF support to date.	Describe the principal results achieved from 1 st August 2013 to 31 st January 2015 (Attach annexes if necessary)
1. Did your project strengthen management of a protected area guided by a sustainable management plan? Please indicate number of hectares improved.	no			Please also include name of the protected area(s). If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
2. How many hectares of new and/or expanded protected areas did your project help establish through a legal declaration or community agreement?	n/a			Please also include name of the protected area. If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
3. Did your project strengthen biodiversity conservation and/or natural resources management inside a key biodiversity area identified in the CEPF ecosystem profile? If so, please indicate how many hectares.	no			
4. Did your project effectively introduce or strengthen biodiversity conservation in management practices outside protected areas? If so, please indicate how many hectares.	no			
5. If your project promotes the sustainable use of natural resources, how many local communities accrued tangible socioeconomic benefits? Please complete Table 1 below.	no			

If you answered yes to question 5, please complete the following table.

Additional Comments/Recommendations

Nothing of significance.

Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

Please include your full contact details below:

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List of appendices:

- 1) HEC Questionnaire
- 2) Map of human and elephant presence/use of the landscape
- 3) Coexistence plan for Deivamalai village
- 4) Sample map of estate with wildlife presence