

CEPF FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

I. BASIC DATA

Organization Legal Name: Bombay Natural History Society

Project Title (as stated in the grant agreement): Civil Society Networks for Site Conservation in the North Bank Landscape, India

Implementation Partners for this Project:

- 1) **Nature's Banyapran**
Contact Person: Pradip Kumar Sharma
Vill. Kulaguri Jaroni, P.O. Bedeti, Dist. Sonitpur, Assam – 784179
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ajaybedeti@rediffmail.com
- 2) **Natures Care and Friends**
Contact Person: Mr Mukanda hazarika
Village Lengeri, Moran
Dibrugarh District.
- 3) **Mehao Conservation Team**
Contact Person: Epra Mikola
P.O. Roing, Dist. Lower Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh
- 4) **Katakee**
Contact Person: Ananta Dutta
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- 5) **Royal Society for Protection for Birds (RSPB)**
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Besides NGOs, Forest Department of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh will also be involved in various project activities.

Project Dates (as stated in the grant agreement): 1 January, 2008- 31 December, 2010

Date of Report (month/year): 4 March 2011

II. OPENING REMARKS

Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.

The north eastern part of India has a diverse range of high priority biodiversity rich landscape right from the lowland forest, grasslands, wetlands, riverine forests and sandy

islets, tropical hill forest and high altitude temperate forests as well as alpine meadows in the higher eastern Himalayas. With its long association with the areas wildlife and its conservation challenges and socio-cultural aspects spanning over several decades, BNHS has identified five such high priority biodiversity rich conservation landscapes comprising of wetlands, tropical lowland forests, and hill forests and grasslands for establishing a conservation network and initiative through involvement of the civil society.

For our project we have selected two wetland habitats namely **Jhanjimukh-Missamari** wetland complex and **Panidehing** Sanctuary, moist deciduous forest habitat namely **Sonairupai**, lowland evergreen hill forests namely **Behali** Reserved Forests, and tropical broadleaf hill forests with temperate elements namely **Mehao Sanctuary** in Arunachal Pradesh. Our objective was to conserve these sites along with its associated wildlife species through developments of local Site Support Groups (SSG), enhancing their capacities and monitoring the particular site with these groups..

Another aim was to develop an information dissemination tool for the local workers which we did in the form of a local newsletter called *Mistnet Assamese*. In this newsletter, the local workers expressed their views as well as their field study results and thus enhancing their writing and documentation capacities. We had also developed and closely worked with our partners towards developing a proposal for Community Conservation Area (CCA) and perusing the same with the respective government authorities. Intensive wildlife field surveys in our sites with our partners had been carried out to get a clear picture of the wildlife diversity in each site. We have initiated a Rural Volunteer Membership (RVM) programme, along with our Site Support Groups to develop a wider working base consisting of grass-root workers and stakeholders.

This project had developed and strengthened a cadre-based conservation network in five of the most high priority conservation landscapes of the north-east India.

III. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT IMPACTS

Project Impacts:

Long Term: Long-term conservation of globally important sites for bird and other endangered wildlife species and biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Himalayas region of India.

The long-term conservation impact of the project is developing the capacity of five NGOs, developing their advocacy skills and improving their writing and communication skills. Through Site Support Groups (SSGs) and Rural Volunteer Members (RVM) we were able to collect very useful information on threatened birds and mammals which will be useful in the future publications of the BNHS and SSGs advocacy tool. Range maps have been developed of all globally threatened bird species of the north-bank in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and these distribution/range maps will be used in future publications to highlight the status of threatened bird species such as the Critically

Endangered Bengal Florican, Vulnerable Swamp Francolin, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Slender-billed Babbler, Marsh Babbler etc. Management actions plans for each species are also in place. Species Recovery Plan for Bengal Florican has been developed and its will be submitted to the Government of India and the Assam Government after the election in April 2011.

Short Term: Civil society networks that deliver sustainable support for the management, monitoring and protection of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the North Bank Landscape strengthened and expanded.

In the short-term, we have developed through SSGs immediate conservation actions plans for some sites such as Jhajhimukh and Behali RF which are not under the protected area system of India. We also provided financial help to all the five SSGs from CEPF grant to kick-start their activities. Most of them did not have basic facilities of computer, camera, binocular, printer, projector etc. These were provided to them from CEPF grant.

Describe the success of the project in terms of achieving its intended impact objective and performance indicators:

See below

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

IV. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Project Components:

Planned vs. Actual Performance

Indicator	Actual at Completion
<p>Output 1: Effective and sustainable Site Support Groups (SSGs) established at selected unprotected KBAs</p>	
<p><i>Indicator 1.1: SSGs established at 3 protected (Mehao, Sonai Rupai Willdife Sanctuary extended area and Pani Dehing) and 2 unprotected (Behali and Jajimukh) KBAs of North Bank Landscape) by end of the project</i></p>	<p>All the five SSGs were established/recognized and regular contacts/meetings were held with them.</p> <p>1. Ketekee SSG: This team has been formed for the conservation of the Missamari-Jhajhimukh wetland complex and had been coordinating with the BNHS. This team had been selected and had been strengthened to carry out a long term sustainable conservation effort for the greater Jhajimukh area where the Missamari Beel and surrounding wetland complex is situated.</p> <p>2. Natures Care and Friends SSG: This group has been formed as a grassroot workers team for the conservation of rural wildlife and awareness in the greater areas of Dibrugarh west and Sibsagar east, two districts of Upper Assam. Under the CEPF project, this group had been identified after closely interacting</p>

	<p>with them and studying their field working capacity. This SSG has been further streamlined and their capacities had been strengthened wherein they became more organized and purpose oriented. This SSG has been specially developed for the conservation of Panidehing Bird Sanctuary, an IBA.</p> <p>3. Sonairupai Conservation Unit SSG: This team was established under this project after close interaction with local interested youths around Sonairupai Sanctuary.</p> <p>4. Behali Reserve Forests: Natures Banyapran SSG was identified for protection of Behali Reserved Forest (RF). We have identified this team after several discussions looking at their organizational capacity. Their works till then had been quite small and local. We have further streamlined their operational capacities and enhanced their ability to deliver our objectives.</p> <p>5. Mehao Conservation Team SSG: This team had been formed under this project after a long search and study of the potential conservation workers in and around Mehao Sanctuary with close cooperation of the Forest Department.</p> <p>This was a difficult task as to most of the local tribal Mishmi population the concept of conservation is new and quite unusual. Most of the local people are hunters. After several round of discussions we could identify a small team of youths which showed some interest towards conservation of the Mehao Sanctuary. They had the feeling that their involvement in conservation will take them away from their hunting activities which they consider as a part of their culture.</p>
<p><i>Indicator 1.2: Involvement of local communities increased in 5 KBAs by end of the project</i></p>	<p>1. Ketekee SSG: This team is lead by Mr. Ananta Datta, a teacher by profession and a</p>

	<p>dedicated worker as General Secretary of the organization. He is supported by Mr. Dulal Kalita as President. This Team had an executive body of nine members. Fifty active field workers were developed under the CEPF project as Rural Volunteer Members, and around two hundred general members.</p> <p>2. Natures Cares and Friends: This team of this SSG is lead by Mr. Mukunda Hazarika as the General Secretary, Mr. Tarun Changmai as President. This team had an eight member executive body. Forty RVMs were identified under this project, and another one hundred general members.</p> <p>3. Sonairupia: Seven youths have been identified who had a zeal to work towards conservation of Sonairupai which is a very troubled area. This team had a very good rapport with the local people and had a thorough idea of the different factors that are posing a threat to Sonairupai. This team's capacity was enhanced under CEPF project to become a viable conservation group. The members of this team had a very humble background and the basic utility that the project had from them is to make use of their rapport with the villagers, and their ability to work in a very disturbed area. This team is lead by Mr. Ajit Kumar Das as General Secretary and Mr. Ratul Baruah as President. This team has seven executive members. Twenty RVMs and some general supporters and members were also identified by us.</p> <p>4. Behali RF: Natures Banyapran SSG had quite a few good resource persons among their rank with research capabilities. This team is lead by Mr. Romen Bora as General Secretary and Mr. Prodip Kr Sharma as President. This team has an eight member executive body. Fifty RVMs members under this project and around hundred and fifty general members and supporters were identified</p>
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	<p>and their capacity enhanced.</p> <p>5. Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary: Mehao Conservation team is lead by Mr. Epra Mikola, a local person as General Secretary who had an interest in wildlife though not exclusively for its conservation. With our further counseling and strengthening of his local knowledge for the best utility towards conservation, he finally evolved as a good grassroot conservation worker. Mr. Eko Mimi is the President of this team. The team had five executive members, and 20 RVM under this project. They had around thirty other general supporters and members. This team is coordinated by Mr. Hemanta Gohain.</p>
<p><i>Indicator 1.3: Levels of threats to biodiversity stabilised or reduced at 5 KBAs in NBL by end of year 3</i></p>	<p>This is not very easy to judge but certainly due to CEPF project, there is perceptible change in the thinking of local people towards biodiversity, and increase in some biodiversity. For example, poaching of birds in Jhajhimukh-Missamari wetland complex has decreased and birds can now be approached very at a close distance. Similarly, thanks to the efforts of Natures Banyapran, poaching and tree cutting have been reduced in Behali RF. Similarly, in the Panidihiing Sanctuary, the situation is much better than what is was 3-4 years ago thanks to the active involvement of Natures Cares and Friends SSG. This organization has also taken up the issue of misuse of pesticides in the tea garden that was killing common birds.</p> <p>Unfortunately, due to political situation and insurgency, we could not do much in Sonairupai Sanctuary. However, efforts are being made to restore the Gilgili grassland which used to have Bengal Florican at one time. The forest, however, is still intact, particularly on the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, Mehao Sanctuary is also quite difficult due to socio-political-cultural situation. Most of the people are natural hunters in that area. A beginning has been made to involve them in conservation through establishment of Mehao Conservation Team. The Sanctuary is still</p>

	intact with only little encroachment.
<i>Indicator 1.4: Funds for conservation activities raised from private sector or donors by atleast 2 SSGs by end of the project</i>	Capacity building workshops were held with SSGs Ketekee , Natures Banyapran and Nature Cares and Friends . They have also submitted project proposal to local tea estates. Nature Cares and Friends was able to raise some funds for a tea estate. Ketekee has contacted the local Member of Parliament to give funds from M.P. Local Area Fund.
Output 2: Protection of 5 KBAs strengthened through the initiation of site monitoring programmes	
<i>Indicator 2.1: Standardized KBA monitoring protocols developed and monitoring manual produced</i>	Standardized monitoring protocol were developed and explained to SSGs. The copy of monitoring protocol is be given the final report.
<i>Indicator 2.2: Monitoring database established with baselines and atleast one year monitoring data for 5 KBAs in NBL</i>	Through the involvement of five SSGs and RVMS, we are able to collect very good data from all the five sites on mammals and birds. We the help of SSGs, volunteers and experts, we have noted 54 mammals species and 378 birds species in the Mehao Sanctuary, 35 mammals species and 346 birds species in Sonairupai Sanctuary, 32 mammals species and 335 birds species in Behali Reserved Forest, 219 birds species in Panidehing sanctuary and 228 birds species in Jhanimukh wetlands. <i>Details are given in our extended report.</i>
Output 3: Site-based conservation initiatives supported by an effective civil society network	
<i>Indicator 3.1: Indian Bird Conservation Network has 200 grassroot level members in the Eastern Himalayas by end of year 3</i>	All the five SSGs have been involved with IBCN. More than 200 grassroot level Rural Volunteer Members (RVM) were developed in all the SSGs. <i>Their names and addresses are given in the final report.</i>
<i>Indicator 3.2: A communication mechanism for sharing IBCN established</i>	Three issues of Assamese Mistnet were published. The objective was to facilitate better dissemination of local conservation knowledge and building the documentation capacities of our SSG team members and RVMS. The field workers as well as other local conservation supporters were encouraged to write in this local newsletter on wide ranging topics concerned with the respective sites as well

	<p>other relevant conservation topics. This newsletter was produced quarterly. We have achieved a good result as the basic grass-root workers who had till now had never written in any magazine or newsletter got the opportunity to express their views as well as bringing out their own field study literatures. We have helped them in their writings by guiding their pattern of writing skills and enhance their field study write-ups. In the beginning their writings were amateurish but gradually their writing improved. These newsletters were basically meant to be circulated among the Rural Volunteer Members and SSG partners. This objective of ours had the desired effect of encouraging the grassroot workers to think about more seriously towards conservation of their respective sites. By looking at their own literary works on their own conservation sites they have cultivated a sense of responsibility and belongings to the cause of conservation. Apart from the articles by local writers, the <i>Assamese Mistnet</i> also has regular <i>Mistnet</i> articles of the All India English issues. These English articles were translated into Assamese for better understanding among our grassroot readers. The newsletter also had colour photo plates showing our works and activities by our SSGs.</p> <p><i>Copies of Assamese Mistnet were submitted to CEPF.</i></p>
<p>Output 4: Management recommendations to enhance conservation of globally threatened bird and mammal species formulated and advocated for selected protected areas</p>	
<p><i>Indicator 4.1: One KBA recommended for declaration of community conserved area by the end of the project</i></p>	<p>We worked with our SSG partner, <i>Ketekee</i> for Jhanjimukh site and developed a Community Conservation Area proposal. To develop this proposal we had three rounds of discussions with our partner and their advisors and formulated a plan to develop the proposal. This plan consists of intensive discussion on different</p>

	<p>parameters to be considered while preparing the proposal like (1) main objective of the proposal, (2) specific roles of different stake holders associated with the Jhanjimukh wetland conservation efforts, (3) benefits to be achieved through development of a community conservation area, (4) final area demarcation of the total wetland complex, (5) benefits that could be provided by different government schemes to the area, (6) cessation of the fishery lease given to commercial lessee, (7) whether local level of sustainable fishing activities could be allowed, (8) how the long term monitoring of the bird life of the wetland could be carried out, (9) How could be the future status of Jhanjimukh be upgraded under international norms and criteria.</p> <p>We have prepared the proposal consisting a main letter of proposal, proposal core documents consisting of site outlines, history, land ownership, land area, land utilization, wildlife of the area, efforts made so far for conservation, proposed activities and plan for the future. A map and a bird checklist of the area had also been included in the proposal fact documents.</p>
<p><i>Indicator 4.2: Improved management recommendations made for 3 KBAs by the end of the project</i></p>	<p>This has been done but too long to describe here. It has been done for Jhahjimukh-Missamari wetlands, Behali RF, Panidihing Sanctuary and Mehao WLS. We could not study Sonairupai due to insurgency problems. However, according to Forest Department, a proper management plan has been developed under Project Elephant. All the sites have been geo-referenced mapped by us.</p> <p><i>Details are given in the main final report.</i></p>
<p>Output 5: Protected area gap analysis undertaken and results used to advocate network expansion.</p>	
<p><i>Indicator 5.1: Status of endangered mammals and birds including their habitat determined in 5 KBAs by the end of the project</i></p>	<p>Identifying grassland corridors at two sites for network expansion:</p>

	<p>As per the project requirements we have taken up Mehao sanctuary and Jhanjimukh wetlands for identifying grasslands corridors contiguous to these sites. For actual assessment of existing contiguous grasslands we had carried out ground surveys at respective sites.</p> <p>In case of Mehao we had carried out surveys from the foot of the mountains northwest of Mehao from the point where the Debang river debouches into the plains from the Himalayas at Nizamghat up to the Assam border southward at Sibia Chaponi, and then further continuing into Assam in a south westerly direction along the grassy islets of the Brahmaputra, northeast of Dibru Saikhowa up to its northern parts. We interviewed the cattle graziers and settlers. We also consulted government maps. Finally we had prepared maps of the existing grasslands belts.</p> <p>In Jhanjimukh we had surveyed the entire north eastern riverine parts along Brahmaputra and along the south eastern boundry of Majuli island. In the west also we had surveyed upto Nimati ghat. We had interviewed local settlers and graziers. We had prepared maps of the whole area.</p> <p><i>Geo-references map is given in the extended final report.</i></p>
<p><i>Indicator 5.2: Advocacy for improvement of conservation of at least 3 KBAs conducted by the end of the project</i></p>	

Describe the success of the project in terms of delivering the intended outputs.

- 1) The main success of the project is involving local people, identifying them, supporting them financially and building their capacity and exposing them to new techniques and methods of conservation. More than 200 Rural Volunteer Members were identified through five SSGs. Regular communication was maintained to SSGs but it was not possible to communicate to all RVM due to language and network problems. We also exposed SSGs to advocacy methods with the decision makers.

- 2) Building their writing skills was another achievement. We were able to publish *Assamese Mistnet* with articles written by local people.
- 3) Second most important success is that we were able to gather some good information on birds and mammals through the SSGs and RVMs which will be used in our future publications and advocacy material.
- 4) Development of geo-referenced maps of all the IBAs and identification of important corridors for further conservation action.

Were any outputs unrealized? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project?

- 1) Fund raising capacity of the SSGs could not be realized due to various reasons (including recession and near collapse of tea industry in Assam – our potential local source of funding).
- 2) Leaving of staff of the project was a drawback which hampered the delivery of the intended outputs somewhat.
- 3) Insurgency and regular *bandh* (strikes) were some external factors that were beyond our control and frequently disrupted our work, mainly due to the fact that we were dealing with civil society. Our field plans used to go haywire due to sudden declaration of strike in Assam or some parts of Assam. Threat of kidnapping and insurgency in some areas (e.g. Sonairupai) was the major factors that disrupted our work.

V. SAFEGUARD POLICY ASSESSMENTS

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

Social safeguard policy in such project

- 1) Have a strong insurance policy for the project team that should cover accident, social unrest, kidnapping and ransom threats.
- 2) Have flexible time frame and areas of operations. If some selected area becomes disturbed and unreachable due to insurgency or political instability, we can take up other areas to implement the project.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT

Describe any lessons learned during the various phases of the project. Consider lessons both for future projects, as well as for CEPF's future performance.

- 1) Select a strong and committed field team with capacity to learn. Without a good team, do not start the work. Tell the funding agencies your problems (lack) of proper staff.

- 2) CEPF reporting process is very tedious and being online, it is not possible to send the report on time due to network problem in remote areas.
- 3) For performance assessment, CEPF should ask for hard copy of the final report and papers published from the work. That should be a good performance indicator.

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

Project designing problem was our main problem. We should have assessed our own capacity and also kept in mind the limited man-power available in Assam, and also the logistic of supervising the work from Mumbai. This is the biggest lesson that we have learnt from this project. *We should have developed achievable objectives and targets considering all these problems*

Project Execution: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/failure)

Some of the failures of this project were due to the externalities that we had not taken in consideration at the time of project designing. For example, logistic was a big problem for us as all the five sites were quite far from each other. We were also dealing with different habitats (wetlands, lowland forest and mountain forests). Another problem was that we had to deal with two states – Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. For going to Arunachal Pradesh, we had to take permission all the time.

At the state level, we have been in touch with the Chief Minister of Assam on various conservation issues (e.g. grassland, threatened species, Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve, Jhanjimukh, Behalli RF)

At the Government of India level (mainly MoEF) we have actively taken up the conservation of various forest/grassland areas of Assam (e.g. Dibru-Saikhowa, Jeypore Forest, Behali Forests) and threatened species (Bengal Florican, White-winged Duck, Greater Adjutant, and many grassland birds).

VII. 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.

Not much fund could be raised but we have submitted three project proposal (see below)

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes

****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 Complementary funding (Other donors contribute to partner organizations that are working on a project linked with this CEPF project)*
- C Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)*
- D Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

Provide details of whether this project will continue in the future and if so, how any additional funding already secured or fundraising plans will help ensure its sustainability.

We will try to continue this programme through funding from IBCN/RSPB. Our project activities in the five different sites had opened up new networks and partnerships and we are positively hoping to carry on with these partnerships beyond the CEPF investment period and secure a guaranteed future for these sites. They are now part of our IBCN activities.

We have developed the following three new project proposals and submitted them for funding:

- a) Biodiversity inventorization of Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve,
- b) Status and Distribution of threatened birds in and around Kaziranga NP,
- c) Impact of climate change and ecology of threatened grassland birds of the Brahmaputra Valley.

VIII. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major project success was developing five SSGs and through them hundreds of Rural Volunteer Members. If we are able to protect **Behali** RF and **Jhajimukh-Missamari** wetland complex, and grassland corridor as officially protected areas, it will be a great success (these days most state government are very vary of declaring new protected areas). However, we can try through the central government and the National Board for Wildlife.

Mehao Sanctuary is situated in the centre of three proposed mega Hydel projects: Debang Project, Lohit Project and Siang project. We are working with *Kalpavrishk*, an NGO, to monitor the dam projects in Arunahcal Pradesh.

We have also mapped point-locality distribution of 300 species of birds in the north-east (>8,000 records) and the distribution of existing and future dams in Arunachal Pradesh. We are working on a research papers based on this data.

CEPF Project will:

- Help in drawing attention of the government to the ecological significance of the area
- Inspire locals to look to the issue of mega dams with much consciousness and sensitivity.
- We hope to present to the government a document on biodiversity and the negative impacts and irreparable damage that may be caused by these dams

We will try to make the government take a more reasonable and pragmatic approach towards this issue.

VIII. INFORMATION SHARING

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned and results. One way we do this is by making programmatic project documents available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and by marketing these in our newsletter and other communications.

These documents are accessed frequently by other CEPF grantees, potential partners, and the wider conservation community.

Please include your full contact details below:

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