

Process Framework
CEPF large-grant project
“Empowering Local Communities for Conservation in Newly Declared Conservation Reserves in the Western Ghats”
Implemented by the Snehakunja Trust

Project details

Social context:

The major part of the population living in and around the project site belongs to communities like Havyaks, Khare Vokkals and Namdharis. These are not originally or traditionally forest-dwellers, nor are they scheduled tribes. However, they are presently cultivating land in and around the Conservation Reserves. These communities, except the Havyaks, have been recognized and categorized as “backward communities”, as per the Government of Karnataka norms.

The proposed CEPF large-grant project would not be an obstruction to the day-to-day activities of surrounding communities, such as livestock grazing or fuel wood collection. The project does not intend to acquire any land by fencing out the local communities. The proposed project does not adversely affect the right of these communities and collection of any of the natural resources that they are legally entitled to.

Rather, involvement of these communities in conservation of surrounding forests would provide them additional occupation and, gradually, they will be encouraged to reduce dependency on forest resources.

Awareness and training on sustainable use of forest resources would not only enable the above said communities to use the forest resources for their livelihood purpose but also would help in proper management of the resources.

Entire project would be participatory with local representatives from Village Forest Committees and women groups, where all the communities in the region are involved. The project objectives would be explained to them and project planning, activities and implementation shall be done with the involvement of these communities.

Further, apart from these VFCs and Women Groups, community leaders and local governing bodies such as Village Panchayats and Taluk Panchayats are consulted for the participatory planning and execution of the project.

Project components: The project will have three major components ecological, social and awareness programs.

Component 1

Priority ecological research undertaken and results fed into development of management plans for the three Conservation Reserves.

Component 2

Local communities empowered to play an active role in management of the Conservation Reserves and to share benefits from the sustainable management of their resources.

Component 3

Awareness of the values and management objectives of the three conservation reserves raised among key stakeholders

Project design and consultations with local communities and stakeholders:

The project was designed based on earlier work by the project coordinator. It was developed in consultation with local communities and the State Forest Department. Preliminary meetings and surveys were undertaken for prioritization of conservation areas. Participatory approaches were used for mapping the critical corridors and identifying conservation needs.

Communities are currently being involved in raising decentralized nurseries of swamp species and other important species required by the local people and for restoration efforts. Officials at different levels in the Forest Department and other government staff were consulted to ensure their active involvement in implementing the project and for the effective management after the project period.

Impact assessment of the project components

Component 1: Priority ecological research undertaken and results fed into development of management plans for the three Conservation Reserves. This work will involve collection of scientific data and conservation requirements of the focal species. Local knowledge about conservation will be adequately acknowledged. No negative impacts on local people are foreseen.

Component 2

Local communities will be empowered to play an active role in management of the Conservation Reserves and to share benefits from the sustainable management of their resources. All activities will be taken after consultation with local people. Needs-based activities, prioritised and accepted by local people, will be implemented on a priority basis. Any activities that do not have support from local people will not be carried out. Efforts will be made to increase alternative sources of income of local communities to reduce conflicts with collection of forest resources. For these reasons, no negative impacts on local people are expected.

Component 3

Awareness of the values and management objectives of the three Conservation Reserves raised among key stakeholders. These activities will be focused towards people living outside the protected areas. These programmes will be educative programs. No negative impacts on local people are expected.

Measures to monitor negative impact of project activities and budget allocation and Grievance mechanism:

There is no reason to assume that any project activities will have negative impacts on local people. Indeed, the project specifically adopts a management model (Conservation Reserves) that gives ownership to local people, involves them in management decision making, and recognizes local people's rights to access forest resources in a sustainable manner. Only activities with the support of local people will be implemented.

The Snehakunja Trust and other project partners will set up of a management committee to oversee implementation of the project. This committee will involve representatives from Village Forest Committees, Women's Self-help Groups, opinion leaders in the communities, elected members from Village Panchayat, other NGO members, the State Forest Department and scientific institutions like the Forestry College in Sirsi.

We expect that this project management committee, together with Snehakunja staff, will monitor the impacts of the project (expected to be wholly positive) and provide a platform for the local people to express their views and resolve any problems arising out of project activities. At this moment we do not know the exact staff time allocation for the monitoring etc, however, we have allocated US\$ 500 for meetings.

In addition, the project team will prepare a poster, in local languages, explaining the objectives of the project and giving the contact details of the project director, Snehakunja Trust, and the CEPF Regional Implementation Team at ATREE. Should anyone have any grievance with the project, they will be able to contact these persons, and it will be resolved.