

## CEPF SMALL GRANT FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

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| <b>Organization Legal Name:</b>              | Keystone Foundation   |
| <b>Project Title:</b>                        | Barefoot Ecologist for Ecological Monitoring in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve |
| <b>Date of Report:</b>                       | 28 February 2015  |
| <b>Report Author and Contact Information</b> | Dr. Snehlata Nath, Anita Varghese   |

**CEPF Region:** Western Ghats (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.**

**Grant Amount:** \$ 19,000

**Project Dates:** 1st June 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014

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

The implementation partners for this project have primarily been-

1. Three indigenous communities across four villages in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The Irulas of Sigur, Todas of Kotagiri and the Soligas of Chamrajnagar. The communities were part of the formulation, design and implementation of the project. Decisions on method of monitoring were based on the communities' traditional knowledge, and location of monitoring sites were based on ancestral domains of the communities.
2. The Gram Sabhas of the villages were engaged in the planning and execution of the project. Barefoot ecologists and location of monitoring sites were selected by the Gram Sabhas.(see Appendix 1)
3. Interactions with the State Forest Department of the two states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu were held during the formulation of the protocols for ecological monitoring and result sharing sessions. Conservator of Forest/ field director BRT Tiger Reserve was part of all the initial discussions and we were advised to go forward with the local Range officers and ACF. The DFO's and Range Officers of the Nilgiris were appraised of the methods and protocols. Oral consent was given to undertake the work and final results were shared with the Conservator and DFO's Coimbatore circle.

### Conservation Impacts

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

Investment Priority No: 1.1. Test pilot models of community and private reserves to achieve conservation outcomes at priority sites and critical links in unprotected areas in the priority corridors

Our project has engaged with indigenous communities through their gram sabhas and local governance structures to enable the utilization of their skills and traditional knowledge to improve conservation awareness and contribute to conservation action. The difference between the FRA implemented villages and Non-FRA villages was that the villages where the FRA rights were given (Srinivasa Colony & Bedaguli) the Forest Department were supportive to the barefoot ecology monitoring, whereas in the case of non-FRA villages (villages in Tamil Nadu) the work couldn't progress to the next level

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

1. Barefoot ecologists across three communities in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve were trained to observe, record, analyse and communicate changes to their community and relevant stakeholders. This has increased stakeholder participation in conservation of ecologically sensitive areas in biosphere reserve areas especially between indigenous people and state forest departments.

2. Protocol with appropriate ecological indicators for ecological monitoring developed, combining traditional ecological knowledge and scientific information has been developed and tested (see Appendix 2.)

3. The results of the monitoring have helped to create inventories of flora and fauna and record ecological events like phenology, migrations, nesting etc. The documentation has brought together scientific and traditional knowledge systems. The observations made do have direct links to their daily use of forest. The phenology observations include those of species that are NTFP, fuel wood, fodder etc. Grazing and instances of fire have been recorded. The focus of the monitoring was intended to be on forest health and changes to the ecology and ecosystem around, as mentioned in objectives of the grant proposal.

**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.***

We have been able to achieve our objectives of increasing stakeholder participation, implementing a protocol for monitoring and creating an information base about ecosystem functions using traditional and scientific knowledge.

Our objective to lobby for long term financing of this effort in the region and integrate the monitoring activity with provisions in the Community Forest Rights of the Forest Rights Act (2006) and with FD field personnel like guards and watchers and other forest officials has not yet been achieved. The FRA is not being implemented in Tamil Nadu therefore to operate within its provisions seems to be a distant possibility. The Coimbatore division has come forward to finance this initiative in their areas and we are following up with them on this. Efforts are being made towards this. The STR management had agreed in principle to include the stipends of barefoot ecologists within their management plan.

***Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?***

Not applicable.

## 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.***

There is a lot of scope to integrate local stakeholders in the implementation of conservation projects. This needs to go beyond token participation and move towards involving them at all stages of the project. Eg: Having the barefoot ecologists do the data sorting themselves and making the results was crucial to the boldness with which they spoke with the Forest department about their work. The barefoot ecologists were also better equipped to speak with their own village people about their work once they had undertaken the result preparation **exercises**. There are four barefoot ecologists supported through the CEPF project and four barefoot ecologists are supported through co-funding towards this project. Interactive sessions are held on a regular basis where data and observation are shared among the barefoot ecologists. The sessions are held across villages, giving an opportunity for the barefoot ecologists to familiarize themselves with other landscapes and communities.

People feel empowered when they use new technologies but it is important to take them through the fundamental principles of the application for that empowerment to be sustainable. Eg: It is not difficult to use a GPS but it is important that users understand basics of mapping and then they are not limited by the technology but can contribute by going beyond.

Traditional knowledge offers an opportunity to record ecological events at a scale which we need to consider and include in our efforts to capture the big picture. There are many hypotheses that can be better arrived at if we choose to include the local knowledge. Eg: The observations by elders that the Mango trees have flowered for three years without fruit setting warrants an in depth study on climate patterns, fire occurrences or pollinator deficiencies.

Having a test project and it's results in place makes dialogue with the forest managers much more easier and positive. Eg: It was not easy to convince the foresters at the outset of the project but now with results to show they seem to be more forthcoming in their suggestions and co-operations.

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

The project was successful in achieving its objectives, in terms of involving the communities and the relevant stakeholders from the inception of the project. The communities contributed to the protocol adopted for the ecological monitoring and expressed interest in sharing of information. The Forest department did not object to the project but were not able to see where it was headed, but today with tangible results they are showing a lot more interest to participate and take this forward.

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

The barefoot ecologists were chosen by the community and trained by Keystone Foundation on various aspects of ecological monitoring. The project relied on collating information from the communities on the changes observed in the region. The willingness of the people to share critical information can be attributed to their involvement in the project from its inception stage.

Frequent interactions and result sharing sessions at the Gram Sabha was a crucial aspect of the project, which enabled the community to take ownership of the information collected. The information maintained through registers were in the custody of the community at all stages of the project, which was an important factor that contributed to the success of the project. The result sharing sessions involved relevant stakeholders who provided their inputs towards to improvement of the protocol for ecological monitoring.

**Other lessons learned relevant to conservation community:**

As mentioned earlier

**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.**

| <b>Donor</b>               | <b>Type of Funding*</b> | <b>Amount</b> | <b>Notes</b>   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|--|
| Both Ends, The Netherlands | B                       | \$960.00      | Additional funds for extending work in more villages (4) |
|                            |                         |               |  |
|                            |                         |               |  |
|                            |                         |               |  |

**\*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.**

The project was replicated in four other villages in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The villages were a part of a similar exercise carried out by Keystone Foundation. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department (Erode Circle) gave a commitment to continue the barefoot ecology programme within the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR). Four villages were chosen to select barefoot ecologists and train them to collect relevant information. The department committed towards paying a stipend to these barefoot ecologists. Following the meeting at Coimbatore, discussions were held with the Field Director of BRT, work is yet to resume within BRT.

**Summarize any unplanned sustainability or replicability achieved.**

NIL

## **Safeguard Policy Assessment**

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

The project involved interactions with three indigenous communities of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve namely the Irulas, Todas and Sholigas. Several meetings were held at the villages/project sites at the start of the project and at regular intervals during the course of the project. Result sharing sessions were held with the Gram Sabha of each village on a quarterly basis. The project did not have a field implementation component that negatively impacted the indigenous communities and the natural resources of the region. The project was carried out with oral informed and prior consent of the communities. As mentioned earlier also, the team from the FRA granted villages were more confident and have emerged as leaders to this process.

## Performance Tracking Report Addendum

### CEPF Global Targets

### 1st June 2013 to 31st December 2014

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 1st June 2013 to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2014 (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                         | 0  | 0   | 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?   | No                         | 0  | 0   | 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. | Yes                        | 90   | 90  | These are based on approximate extent of land/forests around the four villages that people have access to. The official CFR extent of the two villages in Karnataka (Srinivasapura Colony, Bedaguli) is not known |
| 4. Did your project effectively introduce or strengthen biodiversity conservation in management practices outside protected areas? If so, please indicate how many hectares.                                    | No                         | 0  | 0   |   |
| 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                         | 0  | 0   |   |

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



## Additional Comments/Recommendations

None

## 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](http://www.cepf.net), and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

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### List of appendices:

1. Appendix 1 – Map showing gram sabhas where Barefoot Ecologists were trained
2. Appendix 2 - Protocol with appropriate ecological indicators for ecological monitoring, combining traditional ecological knowledge and scientific information