



RED PANDA

ATREE – EASTERN HIMALAYA
REGIONAL OFFICE NEWSLETTER

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SHARING LESSONS FROM THE SMALL GRANTS

The first sharing workshop for CEPF Small Grant recipients from the Indian Eastern Himalayas was held on 20th March at Indian Institute of Bank Management, Guwahati.

The meeting brought together 16 grantees working in various sites in Assam, Arunachal and Sikkim. Grantees presented updates of their work and highlighted research findings.

The objective of the workshop was to bring together all the grantees from the region to share their work, get feedback from peers and experts, enable networking and to discuss communication and sustainability issues.

The bulk of the sharing was from the first round of grantees, some of whom will complete their projects within this quarter and the next. It was important to have a sharing session before the completion of their projects. Other grantees and technical experts provided feedback and also shared their experiences from the field.

Many other issues too came up for discussion, including major conservation issues in the region that need attentions, issues surrounding state permissions for scientific research and publication of findings.

The Assam Forest Department was represented by Mr. MC Malakar, PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden. Also present

was Prof. PC Bhattacharjee of Guwahati University. The CEPF Regional Team was represented by Dr. Sarala Khaling, Regional Coordinator, and Ms. Sampreethi Aipanjugly, Communications Officer, CEPF RIT, Kathmandu. The CEPF Technical Review Committee was represented by Dr. Ritwik Dasgupta from Kolkata.



Grantees, technical experts and CEPF Implementation Team members at the sharing workshop, Guwahati, 20 March 2009

NEWS IN BRIEF

The Eastern Himalayas Programme has announced the 'ATREE Small Grants for Research in NE India' The focus for this year: Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas.

www.atree.org

ATREE's fair trade retail outlet 'Products Himalaya' has been renamed 'Life and Leaf'. The outlet has also moved to a new location in Darjeeling.

www.lifeandleaf.org

The Rural Management and Development Department, Government of Sikkim has invited ATREE to conduct an independent study of the environmental and social impact of introducing Solar Water Heaters in North Sikkim.

SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

Ecotourism has been a buzzword in the region and remains for most part only a convenient marketing tool. Reduced to nature tourism, biodiversity conservation and community benefits as the core of the ecotourism ethic have taken a backstage. There is a general lack of understanding of what constitutes an eco-tourism experience, what an eco-tourism venture/initiative entails, and what the underlying rationale for ecotourism is.

Most 'ecotourism' initiatives in the region are conceived as top-down initiatives with little concept of community ownership and active stakeholder participation. Consequently, under these conditions 'ecotourism' provides few incentives for local communities to conserve their natural resources and does not reinforce their cultural values.

Tourism has actual and potential impacts on our work in the region, which aims to promote conservation and sustainable development. We believe that ecotourism, if planned and managed responsibly (to be ecologically sustainable, socially equitable and economically feasible), can

be a positive force for conservation and development in the region. It has the potential to reduce the threats posed by conventional tourism to natural areas and to the people who live in and around them via income generation for conservation, local enterprise and employment, cultural exchange, environmental education, protected area justification and visitor appreciation. ATREE believes that ecotourism can be a win-win development strategy that helps local communities to improve their livelihoods in ways that make use of their natural and cultural resources through renewable and thus sustainable methods of development.

Towards this end, one of the immediate tasks for ATREE will be to empower emerging local community initiatives engaged in tourism by building their capacity in the effective management and operation of ecotourism enterprises for realizing both economic and conservation outcomes. This will also require effectively engaging with policy and decision makers for enacting legal frameworks that empower local communities towards practicing ecologically sustainable tourism.



North Sikkim is one of the many places in the region that sees high visitor numbers

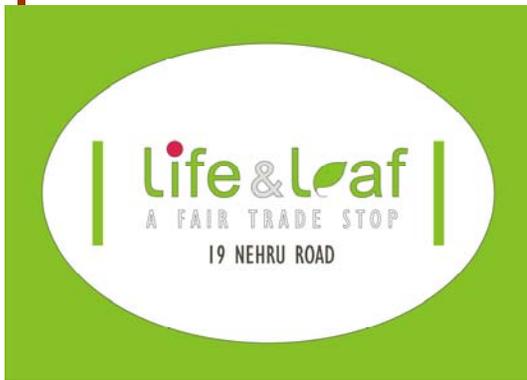
Photos © Samuel Thomas

ATREE's endeavours would be targeted towards correcting the present anomaly in 'ecotourism' in the region, bringing back the much needed focus on biodiversity conservation and community benefits in order to progress towards a more sustainable development in the region.

- Akai Mao

Akai has put together an ATREE 'Position Paper on Ecotourism' in the Eastern Himalayas'

Most 'ecotourism' ventures in the region are top down initiatives with little community ownership and active stakeholder participation



PRODUCTS HIMALAYA IS NOW **LIFE AND LEAF**

The new outlet, renamed LIFE AND LEAF, opened on 24th December 2008 after much anticipation and tiring work. We believe that we have now entered into a new phase of our green product marketing and fair trade venture. A new logo for the store was chosen and the product tags have been redesigned as well.

The new outlet is larger and more accessibly situated which presented new challenges. Thus we have included various new products and have laid emphasis on creative display of the array of products. Keeping this in mind I made a second visit to the North East in February to search for new products and organizations. The trip was fruitful and the products outsourced have a diverse and ethnic chic look which has added to the look of the store. This time we managed to form a contact directly with the SHG members who produce authentic tribal handloom and handicraft items.

To cater to local taste and demand, we have introduced meat pickle, made by Sahara SHG, Rampuria. Smoke dried meat and dry fish pickle have a good local market and we expect create an impact on our customers. We have also started to sell pickles and protein mix of an urban SHG by the name of 'Z Craft' and have

so far received positive feedback on their products. It has to be emphasized here that varieties in food products are being encouraged mainly to have constancy in the local market.

In March we launched our new website: www.lifeandleaf.org The new website is being updated constantly. The brochure design of the store has also been finalized and has been sent to the press.

In March, CHAI Project in collaboration with ATREE provided training on paper craft to four of their SHGs. This was an effort at value addition to the handmade paper produced at the factory at Lingten. The products made by these groups will be marketed by ATREE at the 'LIFE and LEAF' outlet which will ease their market accessibility as well as broaden the choice for our customers.

A training programme spread over eight days was organized for four SHGs, was conducted by a consultant from ATREE in three villages Thapathali-Makaibari, Kalej Valley-Rangbull and at Kolbung, near Lingten. At Thapathali (17 - 19th March) Prayatna SHG members, including five girls and one male, were given training on journals, notebooks and handmade cards of various kinds.

At Kalej Valley (22 - 24th

March) Swarnadeep SHG members, a mixed group of twelve, were taught to make lampshades and toys. At Kolbung (26 - 27th March) two groups of five women each were trained in making photo frames and gift boxes. The two SHGs here from Padeng and Upper Kolbung are yet to name their groups. The groups mostly consisted of women who diligently attended the training and their products are expected at the outlet soon.

Next on the agenda is the making of an audio-visual documentary on all of our SHGs involved in handicraft making which we will use for marketing. This will also be in collaboration with CHAI Project and the logistics are being worked out.

The new store is doing good business and we recorded sales of Rs.1. 25 lakh in March. This is the highest monthly sales figure since we started the operation in 2006. Sales figures for January and February, after the move to the new location, has also been comparatively much higher than the sales in the previous location.

- Reena Chettri

The new outlet
is more
spacious and
more
strategically
located



Trainees from one of the four new
Self Help Groups
Photo © Reena Chettri

LIVELIHOODS TRAINING WORKSHOP

A training programme on “Fundamentals of Livelihoods Promotion” was organized in Gangtok from 23- 28 February 2009. The training was organized and conducted by The Livelihood School (promoted by BASIX group) based in Kolkata in collaboration with a local NGO, Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS).

The objective of the workshop was to provide livelihoods practitioners from different organizations in the Eastern Himalaya with basic understanding of livelihoods

and its promotion processes. The training module was designed especially in the context of North East and Sikkim, and Darjeeling Himalaya. A total of 23 participants from Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills attended the training.

Using appropriate tools and management techniques evolved over time by development experts, the training module was aimed to enhance relevant knowledge and skills for identifying and designing livelihood intervention strategies. Sessions were held on

concept of livelihoods and livelihoods promotion, understanding the livelihood scenario of a particular area, identifying livelihood opportunities using 3E tool, designing livelihood intervention choices, elements of livelihood promotion, understanding risks and estimating their extent, data triangulation and history of livelihood promotion efforts. A one day field based exercise was carried out in Pastanga village to test the tools and findings later presented by participants in four groups. The methods to carry out the sessions were

discussions, group exercises, presentations, lectures and brain storming.

Towards the end of the workshop, certificates were distributed to the participants. A similar workshop is expected to be organized for livelihood practitioners from various institutions in Darjeeling, in June 2009.

- Nishat Rehman &
Santosh Chettri

STUDYING IMPACTS OF SOLAR WATER HEATERS IN LACHEN

The Rural Management and Development Department, Government of Sikkim is shortly initiating the installation of Solar Water Heaters (SWH) at Lachen, North Sikkim.

Lachen is a buffer village of Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve and is located at an altitude of 3000masl. Sikkim Renewable Energy Development Agency (SREDA) will be implementing this programme jointly with the Dzumsa (traditional local government of Lachen).

In this pilot project, 100 Solar Water Heaters will be installed at Lachen. Of the total project cost, the RMDD will invest Rs.35 lakh and Rs.4 lakh is to be drawn from beneficiary contributions in the coming few months.

The major objective of this proposed project is to reduce fuel wood use and improve the lives of the people at Lachen.

Lachen expectantly has high fuel wood consumption at the household level, being located in the sub-alpine region of Sikkim. Also, the farm level production of fuel wood is negligible here as compared to other nearby villages.

RMDD has requested ATREE's support in an independent impact assessment of this pilot initiative, specially the pre- and post- change impact analysis. ATREE has agreed to assess the impacts of use of SWH at the village and it will be taking the lead and supervising this study. This study will not only assess the environmental impacts but also the socio-economic, health and gender related aspects as well.

For the study the control will be Lachen households not using SWH and based on this we hope to estimate the percentage impacts. WWF - Sikkim and

The Mountain Institute - India Office will also be involved in this study.

The output of this 6 month study would be the impact assessment of SWH on (a) lives of the beneficiaries; (b) environment; (c) patterns of fuel wood consumption; (d) social acceptability of this technology; and, (e) functioning of SWH at Lachen.

This independent study is expected to help the government assess the success of this pilot initiative. Based on this study they will examine the prospects of up-scaling this idea and other climate healing activities to other villages in the temperate belt of the state in the next financial year. The study is expected to begin from April 2009 onwards.

- Santosh Chettri



The Solar Water Heater project aims to reduce fuel wood use in North Sikkim

The study will assess environmental, livelihood, health and gender related impacts of introducing solar water heaters in Lachen, North Sikkim

CLIMATE CHANGE AND LIVELIHOODS IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS



In the Eastern Himalayas, warmer ambient temperatures are expected to change the altitudinal distribution of vegetation

For a country with nearly 700 million rural population directly depending on climate-sensitive sectors (agriculture, forests, and fisheries) and natural resources (water, biodiversity, mangroves, coastal zones and grasslands) for their subsistence and livelihoods, climate change is expected to have devastating consequences. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that over the period 1990 to 2100, global average surface

temperatures may increase by 1.4-5.8°C.

In mountain regions such as the Eastern Himalayas, warmer ambient temperatures are expected to change the altitudinal distribution of vegetation. As the ecological zones shift, land use patterns will expectedly be altered triggering the need to gradually change lifestyles and livelihoods in the process.

In July 2008, we conducted a baseline survey in 11 villages spanning three high and middle altitude protected areas in Darjeeling Himalaya. The key objective was to actively involve local communities as possessors of best knowledge about local biodiversity and as direct stakeholders in conservation. Settled under past policies of the erstwhile forest department to bring labour in forest areas, these villages have become permanent now. Average land holding per family is less than 0.50 acres and there is no scope for expansion of land. Still, agriculture and animal husbandry form the resource base, (and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future), and income is diversified with daily wage, forest activities, service and circular migration. Against this background, this note looks at climate change implications on local agriculture to understand economic dimensions of vulnerability in the region.

The micro weather under the influence of climate change is characterised by unseasonal rainfall, thunder, lightning and hailstorms, extreme variation over short duration, overall increase in

temperature and reduced snowfall as well as ground frost conditions. Many respondents also noted an increase in the intensity of summer heat and winter chill. Climate change was found to be a mixed blessing for the primarily agricultural communities. Negative impacts include new crop diseases and overall lower productivity. On the positive side, respondents talked about the ability to grow new crops. In the high altitude village of Upper Chatakpur, farmers were now cultivating winter potatoes and coriander which was not possible earlier. In villages like Rampuria, locals have started growing round chillies (*dallae*) enabled by warmer weather conditions. Traditional crops like squash and cabbage are now harvested earlier. Locals also explained that flowering of Rhododendrons and Magnolia has advanced by almost two months.

For the local communities in the region who are primarily dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, the negative impact of climate change on agriculture is of foremost concern; the signs of impending disaster already evident to them. They have so far shown an admirable capacity to adapt to climatic variability and shocks. On how well they continue to adapt, will rest the future of livelihoods and food security in the region.

This study has drawn attention to the need for a more comprehensive study. Many types of impacts are to be understood and assessed and vulnerabilities addressed, while adaptation strategies have to be developed.

- Nishat Rehman



A view from Rampuria forest village, Senchel Wildlife Sanctuary; and, (below) marginal agricultural lands in the area

A FLOOD OF CONCERNS

The Jia Bholelli River in Assam is called the Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh. The river and its tributaries crisscross the Nameri National Park. Anglers come in search of the Golden Mahaseer.

Upstream, the river is being dammed in two places in Arunachal Pradesh. And when the monsoon came last year, a huge amount of water and debris came rushing down. According to local people it flooded Nameri and its surrounding areas like no flood in living memory. Huge trees lined the path the flood

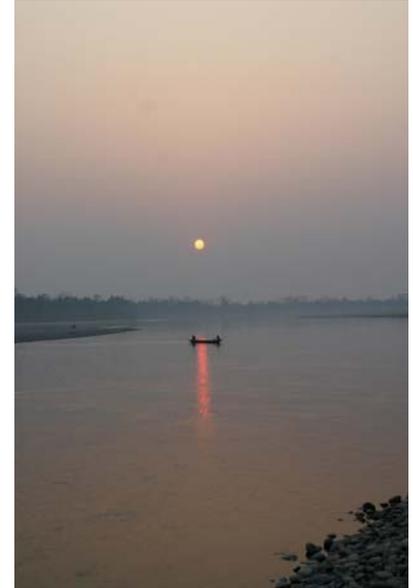
took. There was high fish mortality in the river and the waters almost reached Potasali village where the Range HQ is located. The authorities will not admit this was because of the damming and earthwork upstream but everyone seems to know why the great flood happened.

It may have also had another serious impact: there were anecdotal reports of hispid hare *Caprolagus hispidus* in Nameri NP. The hispid hare is a globally threatened lagomorph, once distributed across the terai grasslands but now extremely rare.

After the flood, a CEPF grantee surveyed the area but found no trace of hispid hare. Forest staff say they don't see the hare anymore when they patrol. The riparian grasslands were heavily flooded when the waters came...did the remnant population of hispid hare disappear in the deluge?

Locals believe that instances of flood are only going to increase because upstream discharges during the monsoon will only aggravate precipitation runoff-generated floods downstream.

- Samuel Thomas



The Jia Bholelli at dawn, Nameri NP, Assam

STUDYING AMPHIBIAN DISTRIBUTION IN SIKKIM

Global decline of amphibians is one of the major concerns to conservation ecologists and wildlife biologists. Most of the amphibian species are threatened and are declining more rapidly than birds and mammals. Habitat loss, pollution and direct intervention by humans are thought to be the prime reasons for their decline.

Eastern Himalayas is among the richest and the most poorly known region in terms of wildlife, and amphibians are the least studied group. The project titled "A study on the distribution pattern and conservation of amphibians in Sikkim, India" is proposed to fill the gaps in information necessary for the implementation of

conservation measures in the Eastern Himalaya.

The major objectives of the project are to gather baseline information on amphibian community of Sikkim, identify major threats including human exploitation, to understand the distribution pattern along the elevation gradient and ultimately to suggest conservation measures. The project also aims to conduct awareness camps and workshops at various levels targeting students, tourist entrepreneurs, students, local people, NGO's, and foresters.

- Basundhara Chettri

CEPF/ATREE Grantee



A view of the study site, the Teesta Valley and (below) *Rana liebighii* a most commonly hunted frog

Photo © Basundhara Chettri



WHBPI SUPPORT FOR YOUNG SCHOLARS



Schoolchildren with their scholarships, Burapahar Range, Kazirangs

As a part of the World Heritage Biodiversity Programme In Assam, a unique scholarship scheme was introduced for students and young scholars from the fringe villages of the world heritage sites of Manas and Kaziranga. In partnership with the park authorities and local NGOs, we organised a series of 'Scholarship Distribution and Awareness Programmes' across the fringe areas of both the national parks during March 2009. These were attended by primary and high school students, their guardians, school teachers and other local guests. Scholarships were handed out to the recipients, while emphasizing the significance of the world heritage sites and conservation consciousness.

- Niraj Kakati

other news



Arunava Gupta joined the WHBPI project in Guwahati, Assam as a Research Assistant in October 2008. He assists in project activities dealing with socio-economic and governance issues, and is responsible for various administrative tasks. Arunava has a Master's degree in Political Science from Cotton College, Guwahati and worked previously on the project titled 'Preservation and Protection of Deepor Beel', a Ramsar site.

Rebecca Ao joined the WHBPI project in Guwahati, Assam as a Community Development Officer in November 2008. She is responsible for undertaking the various socio-economic activities including survey of the fringe villages, alternative livelihood options, engagement with civil society and community-based mechanisms for conservation and sustainability. Rebecca has a MBA from Assam University, Silchar and worked for many years with the IFAD project on Community Based Natural Resource Management in the North Cachar Hills. She is trained in marketing and entrepreneurship, project management and roles of institutions in forest management.



Suman Rai and Samuel Thomas participated in a CEPF Regional Workshop held 24-25th January 2009 in Punakha, Bhutan. The meeting brought together the teams from the Nepal, Bhutan and Indian [Eastern Himalayas] Programmes.

Lisa Dean and Deborah Spayd from Conservation International visited ATREE Eastern Himalayas Programme office on 10th February 2009 to review overall financial performance with emphasis on compliance with CI and CEPF rules and regulations.

Dr. Santosh Chettri and Nishat Rehman participated in a training programme on "Fundamentals of Livelihoods Promotion" in Gangtok from 23- 28 February 2009. The training was organised and conducted by The Livelihood School (promoted by BASIX group) based in Kolkata in collaboration with a local NGO, Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS).

Suman K Rai attended the 'Final Assessment Workshop for the CEPF Investment in the Eastern Arc and Coastal Forests of Kenya and Tanzania' held during 25-26th February at Dar E Salaam, Tanzania.

ATREE organised a one-day 'Sharing workshop for CEPF Grantees' from the Indian Eastern Himalayas on 20th March 2009. The workshop brought together 16 CEPF Small Grant recipients from the region who shared their project findings and progress.

Dr. Sally Duncan, facilitated a one-day writing workshop on proposal and report writing at Darjeeling on 27 March 2009. ATREE Eastern Himalayas Programme staff and staff from partner organisations in Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Mirik participated.

NEWSLETTER

FEEDBACK

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