

Integrating Human- Elephant Coexistence endeavors through street plays

in Hosur Forest Division of Tamil Nadu, India



One of the folk dances "Kolattam"

In 2015, International Elephant Foundation *IEF* funded a project to conduct 10 street plays and teacher training workshop intending on human elephant coexistence in Sathyamanagalam Tiger Reserve areas. On the success of it, in 2016, we planned to conduct 20 more Human Elephant Coexistence street plays in Hosur Forest Division, Tamil Nadu, India which is one of the most human elephant conflict areas of Tamil Nadu with the support of *IEF*. We received the funding and conducted the street plays very recently. Here is the short report about the project execution.

Objectives and goals

The main objective of the project was to promote human-elephant coexistence for the communities. The short-term goal was to conduct 20 street plays in the HEC villages. The long term goals were: a) to bring attitudinal and behavioural changes among the villagers to learn

and appreciate the elephants c) Community will understand to take responsibility for their lives through the street-play. b) to learn coexist with elephants to make them understand human elephant coexistence is the only solution for human elephant conflicts d) to share their learning experience with other people and engaging them in elephant conservation.

Project Activities

Pre-visit

A pre visit was made to Krishnagiri and Hosur Forest Division on 02-05 May 2016. During the trip, met our local coordinator, SWORD NGO and he is also the in charge of Adhiyamaan Kalaikuzhu which performed the street play. Discussed with him in detail about the implementation of the project. Then we met District Forest Officer who is the supporter and host of the project and discussed with him in detail how we further



Introduction to street play by the organiser

move forward the project. He advised us to visit the HEC villages in all the ranges and choose the villages the street plays had to be done with the help of field level forest officials. With his suggestion, we visited Royakottai, Denkanikottai, Hosur, Anchetty, Jawalagiri and Urigam forest ranges and met the field level officers. The officers explained about the ground level human elephant conflict situation with the particular range and suggested us few villages for performing the street plays.

Street play production and rehearsal

Krishnagiri based SWORD-Adhiyaman Kalaikuzhu performed the street play. Prior to performance a three-day production and rehearsal camp was held at Forest Guest House, Krishnagiri from 6-8 March 2017. The previous script was revised and new script was developed. The script covers song on HECx, elephant facts, tips for the people on do's and dont's in the HEC areas, the importance of growing alternative crops which elephant does not like and also including other folklore arts *paraiyattam* (beating drums), *kolattam* (stick dance) and *karakattam* (water pot dance) for enriching the play. Required costumes such as t-shirts, long pants, mask, other dress materials, make-up items and equipment such as mike set, and spotlights were procured. Two eminent street play trainers



Human-animal coexistence in the past



Scene on do's and dont's in Elephant range areas

were engaged to train the street playgroup. Both of them trained the group perfectly. After the training, the rehearsal was held more than once.

Street play performance

Twenty villages (20) from Royakottai, Hosur, Denkanikottai, Anchetty, Jawalagiri, Urigam forest ranges of Hosur Forest Division were selected. The selection was made on the basis of the frequency of conflicts. The villages are: Periya Mallahalli, Berapalli, Belupatty, Kesthur (Urigam Forest Range); Kunthukottai, Vannathipatti, Seenkottai, Erumuthanapalli (Anchetty Range); Akalakottai, Jawalagiri, Achupalam, Devarapetta, Ulibenda, T. Shoolagunda (Jawalagiri Range); Bettamugilalam, Ayyur (Denkanikottai Range); Berathurpudur, Durakurkai (Royakottai Range) and Sanamavu and Naickenpalli (Hosur Forest Division).

The street plays were held from 14-24 March 2017. Two plays were performed in each day in the evening. It was due to most of the villagers are daily laborers and return after the work only at dusk. On an average about 500 villagers watched the street play in each village. However community size ranged from 500 - 1000. At the end of each show we gave a hand out containing information on do's and don'ts in HEC areas. The villagers were evaluated randomly about



The forest officials welcoming the villagers



Villagers watching the streetplay



the street play performance and mostly commented that they understood the concept of the drama and the importance of human elephant coexistence.

Engaging community in elephant conservation is most important thing. Most of the human deaths are occurring in HEC areas due to their negligence and also misunderstanding of the animal's behavior and its strength. If you want to protect the elephants it is imperative to engage them in wildlife conservation. So, in the street plays, more information provided appreciating the species, which is linked to our culture and do's and don'ts in elephant areas in order to protect their own life. This program definitely made an impact in their attitude and developed a high tolerance towards elephants. They came forward in saving elephants and in future never they confront with elephants and in the meantime they learned and spread the message on HECx to others how to save their life. This definitely would help long-term survival of the species.

Conservation outcomes

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Future plan

During the project, we had a chance to interact with people in various levels at the villages and also forest department personnel. The forest department very much favour of this kind of HECx awareness programmes and requested us to conduct the same in other HEC villages of Hosur Forest Division to reach out the concept as many as people. Another thing is the villagers need some basic

equipment to drive away the elephants such as flashlights, crackers, drums etc. So, Zoo Outreach Organization will raise the funds to conduct few more street plays and supply of basic equipment to the farmers to drive away the elephants with the support of forest department and other non-governmental organizations.

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