

**THE KUNO PROJECT
MADHYA PRADESH**

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**SAMRAKSHAN TRUST
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SECTION I

DESCRIPTION OF THE SANCTUARY¹

GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Location

Kuno wildlife sanctuary, located between latitudes 25°30' N - 25°53' N and longitudes 77°07' E - 77°26' E, is situated in the Sheopur district of north-west Madhya Pradesh. Covering an area of 344.686 sq.km in the Sheopur and Vijaypur *tehsils* of Sheopur district, the Kuno wildlife sanctuary was notified vide Government of Madhya Pradesh Forest Department's Notification No. 15/8/79/10/2, Bhopal, dated 16.1.81.

The sanctuary is located about 80 km north of the city of Shivpuri, and about 30 km off the highway connecting Shivpuri to the town of Sheopur (which is the district headquarters). The nearest airport and railheads are Gwalior (101 km from Shivpuri) and Jhansi (111 km from Shivpuri).

The sanctuary headquarters are located at Pohari, which is about 65 km from the periphery of the PA.

Physiography and Drainage

The sanctuary falls in the semi-arid zone and has a typical terrain of Central Indian highlands, interspersed with woodlands and meadows. The soil is sandy and sandy-loam, showing a spatial variation in depth. The thickness sometimes reduces to only few centimeters. However, near deep gorges, locally known as *kho*, the soil depth is sufficiently good to support a luxuriant growth of *kardhai* (*Anogeissus pendula*) and other mixed tree species.

River Kuno, a tributary of River Chambal, vertically bisects the sanctuary from north to south. It occupies an area of 5.90 sq.km in the sanctuary. The river is perennial and maintains flow even during the driest summer months. A number of major *nallahs* like Kudikheda, Lankakhoh, Durreddi, Aamkhoh originate from the gorges located on the west, join river Kuno. Similarly, the Dabhona *nallah*, Naharkunda *nallah*, Gangoli *nallah* etc., originating from the eastern *khohs*, meet the Kuno river at various sites. The sanctuary also has a number of water holes scattered throughout the area.

Climate

The average rainfall in the area is 750 mm per year. The maximum temperature can rise up to 49°C while the minimum temperature recorded has been 2°C.

LEGAL STATUS

Kuno wildlife sanctuary was established in 1981 under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 vide Government of Madhya Pradesh Forest Department's Notification No. 15/8/79/10/2, Bhopal, dated 16.1.81. The total area of the PA is 344.686 sq.km, out of which 313.984 sq.km is forest land and 30.702 sq.km is revenue land.

BIOLOGICAL PROFILE

The forest

According to the Champion and Seth's revised classification of the forest types of India, the forests of Kuno sanctuary can be classified into the following types:

- i. 5A: Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous forest
- ii. 5B: Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous forest

The Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous forests can be further classified into the sub types given below:

5B/E-1: *Anogeissus pendula* forest

5B/E-1/DSI: *Anogeissus pendula* scrub forest

¹ Information in this section is based on data available with the PA management in 1998, which was meant for inclusion in the management plan.

5B-2: Boswellia forest

Flora

The Kuno sanctuary consists of dry deciduous forests interspersed with grasslands. Khair (*Acacia catechu*), salai (*Boswellia serrata*), ghunja (*Lannea grandis*), kardhai (*Anogeissus pendula*), dhwada (*Anogeissus latifolia*), roonjha (*Acacia leucocephloea*) are the dominant species found in the sanctuary.

Fauna

All the faunal representatives of the dry deciduous forest of the Central India can be found in Kuno. According to forest department sources, the deer family is represented by spotted deer (*Axis axis*), sambar (*Cervus unicolor*) and barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), and antelope by chinkara (*Gazella gazella*), blue bull (*Tragocamelus bos alaphus*), chowsingha (*Tetracerus quadricornis*) and blackbuck, (*Antelope cervicapra*). Hanuman langur (*Presbytis entellus*) and rhesus monkey (*Macaca mulatta*) represent primates. Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*) can also be seen.

Among carnivores, jungle cat (*Felis chaus*), wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), and a small number of tigers (*Panthera tigris*) are also present.

A survey of avian fauna has reported approximately one hundred and ninety species of birds of various orders. Some of these have been reported to be migratory as well.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The PA is under the control of a sanctuary superintendent of the rank of Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF). Currently the management plan of the sanctuary is under preparation and a special officer of the rank of Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF) has been appointed in order to prepare the management plan. The Range Officer stationed at Sesapura, which is situated on Shivpuri-Sheopur road 24 km towards from Pohari, looks after the sanctuary. It is further divided into two sub ranges, which are comprised of sixteen beats.

The sanctuary has not been handed over to the wildlife wing, though a proposal to create a separate wildlife division for this area has been submitted and is being processed by the state government.

Staff

The sanctuary has one ACF, four range officers, one deputy ranger, seven foresters and thirty-two forest guards. However, not all this staff is available for deployment inside the sanctuary as a number of them are retained for office duties as well.

Equipment

The sanctuary management has 25 fixed sets, out of which eight sets are functional at present, 25 handsets and five mobile sets. There are five 0.12 bore DBBL guns available with the field staff.

SECTION II

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE LION REINTRODUCTION PROJECT (LRP)

NATURAL HISTORY OF THE ASIATIC LION (*Panthera leo persica*) IN INDIA

According to the report of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun[#], the world's only free-ranging population of Asiatic lions exists in the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park in the state of Gujarat in western India. The Asiatic lions once had an extensive distribution ranging from Syria, through Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and most of northern and central India. The Asiatic lion attained its most extensive distribution in India, having ranged over the present day states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, with stray reports from Bihar. The river Narmada seems to have marked the southern limit of its distribution in India. The lion population, which numbered in thousands in undivided India, saw a steep decline due to uncontrolled shooting, and the destruction and fragmentation of its habitat by human activities (largely conversion into agricultural settlements). The decline and extinction of Asiatic lions was more pronounced in areas outside India. By 1885, the lion had become extinct in Syria, and by the year 1891, it had been exterminated from the entire Asia Minor region. A few lions managed to survive till 1942, in the region north of Dizful in Iran. The last lion in central India was reported in Guna in 1873. Latest by 1888, the last lions in India, but for those in Gir, had been shot.

The Asiatic lion is an endangered sub-species which has staged a remarkable recovery in India in terms of its population size, from a low of less than 20 individuals at the turn of the century, to the present population of over 200 animals. This recovery in their numbers, however, does not mean that the long-term future of the Asiatic lion as a free-ranging wild animal is secure. Animal populations that are restricted to single sites and which are also relatively small in size face a variety of extinction threats, genetic and environmental. An epidemic could well result in the extinction of an endangered species when it is restricted to a single site. That this threat is very real has been demonstrated in the case of the lions of Serengeti National Park in Tanzania. In a recent outbreak of canine distemper, it was estimated that 75 per cent of the lions got infected, and at least 30 per cent of the lion population died due to the infection. Compared with Gir, the lion population in Serengeti is large, numbering about 3000, spread over an extensive area. If an epidemic of this scale were to affect the lions in Gir, it would be very difficult to save them from extinction, given the much smaller area of Gir, and also the relatively smaller lion population. Further, a particularly severe forest fire or cyclone, the likes of which are not unknown in this part of the country, could also well mean the end of this sub-species. Such potential threats more than justify the need to translocate some Asiatic lions from Gir to other areas, with the objective of establishing a second free-ranging population.

In fact, such an attempt was made in 1957 in the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh. However, lack of understanding about factors like adequacy of prey-base and crucial habitat requirements, and the insufficiency of protection/ habitat management support as well as the failure at monitoring (which could have led to timely corrective action) resulted in failure at Chandraprabha.

The idea of creating an alternate home for this highly endangered species was again revived in the year 1989-90 when the Research Advisory Group of Wildlife Institute of India stressed upon the need to create a second free-ranging population of Asiatic lions. Towards this end, experts from WII conducted systematic surveys and research. An Expert Committee appointed by the Government of Gujarat to study the problems of lion conservation in Gir has also endorsed the necessity of establishing alternative home(s) at suitable site(s).

[#] "Survey of the Potential Sites for Reintroduction of Asiatic Lions", Final Report by WII, Dehradun, 1995

The state forest departments (FD) of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan presented a list of potential sites for lion reintroduction. During the Population Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA) workshop, held at Baroda in October 1993, all the proposed sites were evaluated based on existing data, and the following three sites were shortlisted for more detailed surveys:

1. Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan
2. Darrah-Jawaharsagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan
3. Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh

The comparative analysis of the three potential sites, conducted by the WII experts on the basis of various parameters, yielded the following ranking of the sites:

Comparative Ranking of Potential Sites for Lion Reintroduction

S.No	Parameters	Kuno Sanctuary	Sitamata Sanctuary	Darrah Sanctuary
1.	Area & Shape	7.5	8.5	5
2.	Climate	6	7	6
3.	Temperature	6	6.5	6
4.	Terrain	8	9	9
5.	Water	7	6	7
6.	Vegetation	7	8	7
7.	Canopy cover	8	6	7
8.	Shrub and Grass	7	4	7
9.	Riverine Forest	8	8	5
10.	Disturbance	6	4	3
11.	Prey-base	9	3	3
	Total points	79.5	70	65

Kuno was thus selected as the site for establishing a second free-ranging Asiatic lion population. The WII made a range of recommendations, the implementation of which was considered crucial for translating the vision of the Lion Reintroduction Project (LRP) into ground reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE WII

1. Complete acceptance of the proposal of the reintroduction of Asiatic lions is needed from central as well as state governments. A long-term commitment of resources and personnel, as well as for adequate support, should be made. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the central government and the state governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat may be desirable.
2. A systematic drive should be initiated for data collection about the human population resident in the forest tract, their social and demographic composition, their lifestyle and dependence on forest resources, and allied information. This information would help in planning for suitable alternatives as part of an ecodevelopment scheme for the local people.
3. An effective education campaign on the proposed lion translocation should be launched, specially targeting the people living in and around the Kuno forests. Adequate information should also be provided to the general public to remove any misconceptions about this conservation effort. The perceptions of the local people about the proposed lion reintroduction should be ascertained to clear any misgivings, and also to address any problems that they foresee. There should also be information dissemination among local people about the past distribution of the lion, its endangered status, and the fact that it is a large carnivore and a potentially dangerous animal. Since the lion would be an unfamiliar animal to these people, and since they would be likely to encounter it in the course of their stay at the periphery of the forest, they also need to be advised regarding how to behave if confronted with one. The people should also be explicitly informed that

there is scope for conflict, especially on account of livestock predation, in order to prepare them for such eventualities.

4. The area of the proposed Conservation Unit in Kuno should be increased to about 3,700 sq. km, of which a minimum core area of about 700 sq. km should be declared a National Park. This would require the translocation of all human settlements and stoppage of livestock grazing from the core area. A comprehensive rehabilitation package should be planned with the participation of the affected people. Adequate care should be taken to ensure that the people are fully informed, and are involved with the planning and the implementation of their translocation, to ensure the success of the human resettlement and the establishment of the national park.
5. Right from the beginning of this project, a special team of forest department personnel should be identified, trained and entrusted with the duty of implementing the scheme. Currently, the management of Kuno suffers from the lack of adequate staff and facilities, and poaching is a major problem. It must be ensured that the problem of poaching is dealt with effectively, before the process of restocking of wild herbivores is initiated for boosting the prey-base.
6. The resident wild ungulate populations need to be supplemented with additional releases of chital and nilgai, to quicken the build-up of an adequate prey-base for the reintroduced lions. A suitably long quarantine period should be enforced, prior to the release of the translocated ungulates in the sanctuary.
7. Translocated animals, both herbivores as well as lions, should be released (albeit for as short a period as possible) into a holding pen, to enable them to recover from the trauma of capture and transport.
8. Habitat improvement measures should concentrate on weed removal, and on enhancing the availability and distribution of water. A survey of perennial sources of water in the summer would enable the judicious location of water holes in areas without any uninterrupted water supply.
9. A monitoring and research programme should be commenced almost immediately in the area. The subjects it should look at should include human resettlement and ecodevelopment, status of protection, habitat improvement and ungulate reintroduction. Data should be collected right from the initiation of the project, to enable comparison over time. This would help in evaluating the efficacy of the various management actions that would be implemented as part of this project.
10. A regular assessment of the relative abundance of the various prey-species should be carried out, to gauge the readiness of the sanctuary to sustain a lion population. There is a long lead-time between the commencement of the project and the actual release of the lions, owing to various essential site preparation activities. Therefore the decision to capture, transport and release lions should be made only after it is ascertained beyond doubt that the national park has been established, animals are not being poached, and the wild ungulates have attained the minimum prescribed number.
11. The following procedure should be followed for the capture, transportation and release of the lions in Kuno:
 - i. A free-ranging stable pride having 5 to 8 adult lions (2-3 males and 3-5 females) should be identified after a few weeks of field research in Gir.
 - ii. Capture, transport and release of this pride should be done during the cool season, and the entire capture operation should not exceed five days.
 - iii. The captured animals should immediately be transported by road in special transportation boxes. The possibility of air lifting the lions can be explored with the Indian Air Force.
 - iv. A circular holding area with a radius of about 60 meters, fenced with strong lion-proof chain links, needs to be constructed at the release site. At this site, the released animals (first the ungulates, and later the lions) can be released from the transportation boxes and allowed to settle down, over a week or ten days. This is essential to allow the animals to recover from the trauma resulting from capture and transportation. All the captured lions should be fitted with radio collars.
 - v. All the captured lions should be released simultaneously, and should be monitored regularly by radio-tracking.

- vi. Initially, artificial feeding can be done for few days, but it should be withdrawn gradually, within three to six months of the release of the lions.
- vii. Collection of data on the movement, habitat use, diet, predation ecology, social organisation and reproductive performance of the lions should be carried out to assess the success of the programme.
- viii. The released lion population should be intensively monitored and managed.
- ix. In order to avoid the adverse effects of inbreeding among the lion population at Kuno, their population should be supplemented later by lions captured from the fringes of Gir.
- x. It has also been suggested that fresh male lions should be moved from Gir to Kuno every 3 to 5 years, and the resident males in Kuno selectively captured for zoos.

SECTION III

AREAS OF CONCERN IN THE LRP

A number of concerns regarding the LRP have been outlined below, along with some suggested action points.[§]

1. A crucial prerequisite for the success of the LRP is "complete acceptance of the project by the central government, as well as the state governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat", as the WII report had highlighted. A glaring lacuna in this context is the complete absence of participation of the government (and specifically, the forest department) of Gujarat in the project. This has resulted in the peculiar situation where the government of Gujarat has actually gone on record that they will not allow lions to be taken from the Gir National park, even as preparations are in full swing in Madhya Pradesh to receive them.

Moreover, field level observations indicate that initiative for the LRP from the MoEF and the senior forest bureaucracy in Bhopal has been lacklustre, and almost the entire onus of the project has fallen upon the sanctuary management in Kuno. This impression, that the ownership of the project is not sufficiently broad-based, stems from the fact that no forum exists for bringing together on a regular basis the numerous actors crucial to the LRP.

The Lion Reintroduction Project involves, from the conceptualisation to the final implementation stage, a number of agencies like the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), the Wildlife Institute of India, the Gujarat forest department and the Sheopur district administration, apart from the Madhya Pradesh forest department (MPFD). It is, therefore, critical that a formal mechanism is evolved to streamline the interaction between these multiple agencies. Such a mechanism will be useful in the following ways:

- i. It could help to speed up critical decisions that involve more than one agency.
- ii. The expertise needed for the diverse tasks involved in the different stages of the project could be pooled together more efficiently under such an arrangement.
- iii. The ownership of the project, and responsibility for its smooth implementation would be broad-based as a result of such an arrangement, and this would help to reduce some of the pressures on the already over-stretched physical and human resources of the sanctuary management.

Action points: A steering committee may be constituted for the lion reintroduction programme, consisting of:

- a. Representatives of MoEF, MPFD, and Gujarat forest department.
 - b. Scientists of the Wildlife Institute of India
 - c. NGOs and anthropologists who can assist in implementing the village relocation plan, and in creating awareness on the periphery of the park about the lion project.
 - d. Representatives of the project affected local communities
2. The problems arising from the lack of ownership of the project are further compounded by the complete absence of any wildlife research inputs in the implementation of the project. Even the WII, which was instrumental in conceiving the project, and in the selection of Kuno as the site for its execution, has discontinued its active association with the project thereafter. This is despite the fact that the report of the WII itself underscored the critical importance of such research for the success of the LRP. Apart from the initial PHVA, and the survey of potential sites conducted by the WII, there has been no further work on parameters like

[§] This section is based primarily on interaction with the management and staff of the Kuno sanctuary, along with first-hand observations in the field. Discussions were also held with senior bureaucrats in the MoEF, individuals of standing in the conservation community, concerned scientists from the WII, as well as NGO representatives.

- (a) Habitat monitoring, to judge the suitability of the habitat to sustain a viable herbivore population, which can in turn support a pride of lions
- (b) Monitoring herbivore numbers in the sanctuary, which will serve as a pointer towards the number and species of wild ungulates that may need to be translocated to Kuno as part of the process of restocking.

Action Points: The M.P. forest department should approach the WII to undertake a long-term research and monitoring project in Kuno sanctuary, to gather vital baseline data which will form the backbone of the reintroduction effort. In fact, the draft project profile prepared by the MPFD had actually envisaged the establishment of a permanent Research Station in the sanctuary, and it is now crucial to give concrete shape to this vision.

3. The WII recommendation that a larger Conservation Area be created and a part of it be declared as a national park needs to be acted upon on a priority basis. Along with this, the staff strength also needs to be enhanced considerably.
In this context, a proposal from the sanctuary management for the creation of a wildlife division for Kuno sanctuary has been pending with the office of the CCF (Working Plan), Bhopal. This proposal needs to be cleared speedily, in order to
 - augment the human resource available to the Sanctuary management, so that various activities of critical relevance to the Lion Reintroduction Programme can be initiated. At present, the entire staff is fully engaged in just the village relocation exercise, with the result that the regular management activities as well as the additional activities that need to be undertaken for the LRP are suffering.
 - augment the funds available to the department for carrying out these activities.
 - give the area much needed protection, which in turn is a pre-requisite for a rise in herbivore numbers to meet the needs of translocated lions

4. An important recommendation made by the WII had been the creation of a "special team of FD personnel" for implementation of the project. It had proposed training of the forest staff at Kuno in chemical restraint of animals, tracking of radio collared animals, monitoring the behavior of lions, detecting behavioral aberrations etc. Some progress has taken place on this count, with a number of staff having been sent recently for an exposure visit to Kanha National Park. It is further proposed by the DFO to send the staff on similar visits to Gir. While these steps are commendable, the senior bureaucracy in Bhopal, on its part, needs to ensure that the LRP is treated as a special project, and for its duration, transfers of the staff are kept at a minimum. This is critical for ensuring continuity and coherence in the project, through a specialised implementing team.

5. All activities pertaining to the LRP, as well as the regular management activities of the sanctuary are being carried out by the present DFO in the absence of a management plan. The responsibility for preparing the management plan rested with the previous incumbent, who was transferred from this sanctuary in mid-1998. It is of critical importance that the process of preparation of the management plan is speeded up, for the following reasons:
 - A vision document should be available to guide the sanctuary management regarding the LRP
 - No conflicts should arise between the decisions taken by the present DFO and the policies outlined in the management plan prepared by his predecessor
 - Given the advanced stage of village relocation, other important tasks pertaining to the LRP (like prey base augmentation, proposed habitat regeneration measures, habitat monitoring and management etc.) need to be initiated as per the management plan

It is further recommended that all other documents relevant to the project (for instance, the socio-economic survey of villages, the hydrogeological study of the relocation site, the GIS study of the sanctuary by Madhya Pradesh Council of Science and Technology, all relevant maps, waterhole survey etc.) should be made available to the PA management at the sanctuary office. These documents have apparently been removed for the purpose of preparing the management plan, as

a result of which the current sanctuary management is functioning in the absence of such basic documents.

6. A significant WII recommendation was with regard to increasing the conservation consciousness of the people. The report specifically emphasises that "...an effective education campaign on the proposed lion translocation should be launched, specially targeting the people living in and around the Kuno forests. There should also be information dissemination among local people about the past distribution of the lion, its endangered status, and the fact that it is a large carnivore and a potentially dangerous animal. Since the lion would be a new animal to these people, and since they would be likely to encounter it, they also need to be advised regarding how to behave if confronted with one."

In the course of discussions with the villagers, it emerged that they have almost no knowledge about the reasons behind their relocation. Some do have a vague idea that animals are going to be brought in and released in the newly constructed enclosure and hence they are being moved out, but the rest believe simply that the government has ordered them to move out and so they have to.

Moreover, at present, even basic awareness about the importance of forests and their conservation is completely lacking among the people. Needless to say, they do not have the remotest knowledge about lions, and associated issues (particularly issues such as the possibility of conflict). Such consciousness is going to be imperative if, in the future, initiatives like establishment of Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) are to be taken up. Such FPCs, in turn, would be important in the later stages of the reintroduction programme, if conflict-free cohabitation of humans in the vicinity of a mega-carnivore like the Asiatic lion is to be achieved.

Action points: Awareness needs to be created among the relocatees about the lion reintroduction programme, in order to increase their conservation consciousness. The MPFD may consider initiating an NGO intervention in the villages on the periphery of the sanctuary, for awareness building and conservation education.

SECTION IV

THE RELOCATION & REHABILITATION OF VILLAGES

The inhabitants of the 24 villages slated for relocation are being rehabilitated outside the sanctuary, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests (Project Tiger) vide its letter no. 3(3)-1/94, dated 12 June 1995, under the Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development (BOTD).

FEATURES OF RELOCATION

According to the MPFD[§], the salient features of this relocation are:

- A Cabinet Sub Committee of the M.P. Government visited Palpur village on January 14, 1996, to extract the views of the villagers regarding their willingness to relocate. The Sub Committee, in its report, adjudged the relocation voluntary, and recommended relocation and rehabilitation.
- The relocation of villages situated inside the limits of the sanctuary to a suitable site outside the sanctuary has been approved by the MP Cabinet, vide its item no. 10, dated 28th of February 1996.
- The relocation of villages will be based mainly on the Relocation Plan for the relocation of villages of Kuno sanctuary, which has been prepared by the MPFD. As per the provisions of the cabinet approval, the affected families have been identified, and the requirements of land for various purposes have also been calculated. The proposed site for the relocation of villages has been selected by the affected villagers themselves.
- Since the proposed site of resettlement falls in various blocks of protected forests, their use for rehabilitation purposes involves a legal obligation to obtain prior sanction from the central govt. under section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, as amended in the year 1988. The Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi, vide its letter No. 8-56/96-F.C. dated. 20.01.97 has sanctioned the use of 3720.9 hectares of forest land in Agra, Dondaikala, Chetikheda and Umrikala, protected forests for the rehabilitation of 1374 families from eighteen villages situated within the limits of the Palpur-Kuno Sanctuary.
- Relocation of villages has been divided into two phases, with seven villages comprising of 663 families proposed to be resettled in the first phase, while the families of the remaining eleven villages will be relocated after rehabilitation of Phase I villages is completed.

THE REHABILITATION PACKAGE

A relocation plan* was developed by the MPFD according to the guidelines issued by the Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi vide its letter No. 3(3)-1/94-PT, regarding Centrally Sponsored Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development. The average expenditure to be incurred for relocation of villages and their rehabilitation to suitable sites has been enhanced to Rs 1 lakh per beneficiary family. The total amount is to be sub-divided among different categories of expenditure according to the following scheme:

Land development (two hectares)	Rs 36,000
Building material	Rs 36,000
Transport of household goods	Rs 1,000
Community facilities	Rs 9,000
Woodlot and fuel reserves	Rs 8,000

[§] "A Brief on Reintroduction of Asiatic Lion Project, Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary, MP", MPFD, April 1998, by Shri L.K.Chaudhary

* "Scheme For Rehabilitation Of Villages From Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary (M.P.) under the Centrally Sponsored Beneficiary Oriented Scheme For Tribal Development", MPFD.

Pasture and fodder plantation	Rs 8,000
Cash incentive for shifting	Rs 1,000
Miscellaneous activities	Rs 1,000
TOTAL	Rs 1,00,000

A section of the relocation plan that details the basic facilities proposed for the beneficiaries is reproduced, below:

Land Development

Two hectares of cultivable land would be allotted to each affected family. Since the forest land to be diverted to cultivation is virgin, it becomes a moral obligation of the user agency to make the area suitable for raising agricultural crops. Towards this end, all vegetational growth from the allotted land would be uprooted and the terrain would be made plain. Deep-ploughing will be done with the help of mechanical instruments, and various blocks of two hectares each, bunded along the boundary, would be created. Other efforts would also be done to make the area appropriate for agriculture. As per the norms, the maximum expenditure to be incurred in various works under this head has been fixed at Rs 18,000 per ha., to be borne by the forest department. No cash amount would be given directly to the beneficiaries.

Supply of Building Materials

An area of 5600 sq. ft. would be allotted free of cost to each family for construction of their houses. In addition to this, a maximum of Rs 36,000 per family will be provided in cash for procuring building materials. This amount would be provided in installments, with each subsequent installment being released subject to the utilisation of the previous one. On request by any beneficiary in writing, building materials can be supplied to him in lieu of the above admissible amount.

Transport of Household Goods

The household goods of the beneficiaries would be transported from their earlier dwelling site to the new rehabilitation site at the Government's expense, subject to a maximum of Rs 1,000 per family. If any beneficiary transports his belongings by his own means, a cash compensation would be provided to the said beneficiary subject to the above fixed ceiling.

Creation of Woodlots and Fuel Reserves

To ensure sustained supply of fuel and other minor wood for day to day use, a provision has been made to create woodlots on wasteland. Suitable areas fit for this purpose would be given accepted treatment, which includes the complete closure of the area by erecting dry rubble wall, digging of contour trenches to retain maximum rain water, plantation of fast growing indigenous fuel species, and other site-specific operations. Complete protection of such areas would also allow the regeneration and rejuvenation of the suppressed seedlings and pollared stumps. The expenditure ceiling for the creation of woodlot and fuel reserves would be Rs 8,000 per family.

Fodder and Fuel Plantations

The demographic and livestock survey of the affected area has revealed a humans to livestock ratio of around 1:1. Thus, to support these huge heads of livestock at the relocation site, pasture and fodder plantation are proposed to be created in nearby wastelands and degraded forest lands. The selected areas would be provided complete protection, and soil and water conservation measures would also be implemented to allow maximum percolation of rainwater, to obtain sustained yield of fodder for supporting the livestock population at the new site. The maximum expenditure for these operations would be Rs 8,000 per family.

Cash Incentive for Shifting

A provision for cash incentive has been provided in this scheme, subject to a maximum of Rs 1,000 per family. This cash incentive would be given after the affected families have transported their belongings to the new site.

Miscellaneous Activities

A number of unforeseen expenses may arise during the relocation of villages from the protected area. A budgetary provision to meet such contingency expenditure has been kept in the plan, subject to a maximum of Rs 1,000 per family.

Facilities for Community Use

A provision has been made in the scheme to create basic infrastructure and other facilities for community use at the relocation site. The important works to be undertaken in this head include construction of approach roads, digging of nistar ponds, installation of handpumps, sinking of dug-wells, development of cremation grounds, construction of community hall, and other site-specific facilities. Expenditure to be incurred for these community facilities has been fixed as Rs 9,000 per family.

Drinking Water Facilities

Installation of a sufficient number of hand pumps, as per the norms fixed by the State Government, is proposed (preferably one for each major cluster of villages). Priority would be given to dug-wells, wherever possible. If the demand for drinking water is not met by hand pumps and wells, water supply schemes will be evolved for using the water from the nearby river. In an effort to ensure availability of drinking water to the villagers, handpumps have already been made available at the seven sites where the villages of Phase I are to be resettled.

Supply of Electricity

The nearest electricity sub-station is situated near Agraa village, which is the nucleus of the relocation activities. It is proposed to extend transmission lines to each cluster of relocated villages, for domestic consumption as well as for operating electric pumps for irrigation.

Communication Facilities

For smooth and easy communication round the year, the following construction works are proposed:

- ☞ W.B.M. road:
 - From Pipalbaodi to Arrood (8 km)
 - From Agraa main road to clusters no. 7, 8, and 9 (10 kms)
- ☞ Construction of Hume-Pipe Culverts:
 - Two-row hume-pipe culvert near Pipalbaodi (3 in number)
 - One-row hume-pipe culverts (6 in number)
- ☞ Construction of Submersible Causeway:
 - Over Kunwari river
 - Over Nala near Parvati Baroda
- ☞ Conversion of W.B.M. to Bituminous Road:
 - From Pipalbaodi to Arrood (8 km)
 - From Arrood to Vijeypur (8 km)

Irrigation Facilities

A water survey conducted in April 1995 revealed that a huge volume of water is available in the area in twenty pools, and this can be utilised for lift irrigation at the new sites. In addition to this, if necessary, dug-wells and bore-wells would also be provided, and water-lifting pumps would be installed at suitable places.

Education Facilities

One primary school and one middle school is proposed to be started in each sector. Since Agraa would be only 4 to 5 kms from the new sites, one secondary school at Agraa, with hostel facilities, would be adequate for the relocated villages. Accommodation for school teachers is also proposed to

be created near school buildings, to enable them to stay in villages. All other educational facilities that the state government normally provides would also be made available to these schools.

Miscellaneous Facilities

The construction of one medium-sized community hall, a playground, and crematoriums is proposed for each cluster. Community space would also be provided for installation of religious deities near the village habitation.

Agency for Execution of Works

Village Development Societies (VDS) would be formed for each village to oversee the distribution of agricultural lands and house plots among the beneficiaries. The local forest guard would be the ex-officio member-secretary of these committees. The VDS would also be responsible for the maintenance of community structures, disbursement of cash (as incentives for relocation, and for purchasing building materials to the displaced families) etc. Thus, the VDS would be the key agency for implementation of the developmental works in each village.

Proposed Site for Rehabilitation

Since suitable patches of revenue lands are not available in adjoining areas, it has been decided to relocate these villages on the degraded and sparsely covered protected forest blocks of Agraa, Umrikalan, Dondaikalan, Chetikheda. The distance of the new sites of settlement from the boundary of the sanctuary is between 5 to 15 kms. As this region falls on the normal route leading to Vijeypur, the villagers are familiar with the area.

The nucleus of the relocation site is the village Agraa, where some infrastructural facilities already exist. This village is linked to Vijeypur, the nearest town, by a fair weather road, on which regular buses ply twice a day, except in the rainy season. An electrical sub-station and a police station are also functional at Agraa.

The most vital factor that led to the selection of this site is the adequate availability of water from the adjacent (perennial) Kunwari river and its tributaries. A water survey conducted in April 1995 revealed satisfactory water availability, with substantial water pools at 20 sites.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE REHABILITATION PACKAGE

Any relocation process should be guided by certain overreaching principles, an outline of which is sketched out in the following. These principles are based on the Report of the Expert Committee on Rehabilitation and Environmental Aspects of the Tehri Hydroelectric Project[#]. These principles have also been accepted by the Government of India, as per its affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court of India in the course of hearings on the Tehri case.

1. The policy should be governed by the principle of total rehabilitation. Rehabilitation should not only extend to financial compensation or providing means of livelihood, but should be multi-dimensional. It should include social, environmental and cultural aspects as well. The policy package should be fair, and should lead to improving the level of living of the affected people. The idea is to look for a wide variety of measures to ensure better living after rehabilitation.
2. The aim should be to minimise hardship of the displaced persons during the process of rehabilitation. Resettlement must provide for an improved resource base, so that the displaced in their new place can have access to not only shelter, but also food and income-generating systems, communications and social infrastructure not inferior to that of their original habitat, within a reasonable period of time.
3. The settlement site and the resource base should be large enough to accommodate the natural growth in population, and to generate incomes to provide for a progressive rise in standards of living.

[#] Volume I, New Delhi, October 1997, pp 21-22

4. For smooth and effective resettlement, principle of geographic continuity, cultural homogeneity and ready adaptability must be considered in choosing and planning the resettlement unit and sites.
5. The displaced community must be individually and collectively compensated for all losses. This includes lands, trees, houses, community amenities and services, and access to natural resources. The aim should be to enable the displaced people and communities to re-establish in the new place as quickly as possible.
6. Where the displaced are resettled among already settled communities, they must be resettled in such a manner that they are integrated with the host community on the basis of equality, mutual respect and understanding.
7. The displaced people must be involved in the implementation of the rehabilitation programme. It is necessary to organise the affected people and give adequate space for their fullest participation. All phases of planning, execution and monitoring must involve the representatives of the affected people.

In the light of the above, an attempt is made to evaluate the village relocation exercise in Kuno sanctuary, enumerating both its main achievements and prominent lacunae.

At the outset, it must be mentioned that the package adopted for Kuno is a major improvement over many other relocation packages adopted so far in various R&R projects across the country. It does not suffer from the obvious lacunae of "land for land" type compensation packages, which have had a history of marginalising the most vulnerable strata of rural society, particularly the landless. However the package does have certain shortcomings and deficiencies, as enumerated below:

1. A major drawback that the project suffers from is the lack of a detailed Relocation and Rehabilitation (R&R) Plan. The MPFD document entitled "Scheme for Rehabilitation of Villages" is merely an adaptation of the financial and other details of the MoEF's Centrally Sponsored Beneficiary Scheme for Tribal Development for the villages affected by the LRP. A comprehensive R&R plan must ideally cover not just these, but also other aspects critical to the R&R process, like
 - i. It should spell out and justify the rationale behind the overall policy of the implementing agency towards the concept of relocation, so that it is clear what it considers the status of the relocatees to be. For instance, a relocation exercise in a PA like Kuno can view the shifting out of sanctuary dwellers as removal of encroachments, or as a sacrifice in the wider societal interest of conservation, or in any other manner. A clear enunciation of this overall approach would be a precondition for judging the R&R package and its implementation.
 - ii. The Relocation Plan should spell out in detail the process of decision-making and implementation that would be followed in the relocation exercise, so as to make it transparent, participatory, comprehensive, and scientific.
 - iii. It should anticipate and outline the institutional structures that would need to be created in the area to enable the relocation exercise to be implemented effectively on the ground. This includes both governmental and non-governmental structures. The former are essential to enhance the capacity of the implementing agency to deliver the promised facilities to the project affected persons (PAPs). The latter, on the other hand, are crucial for building the capacity of the PAPs to get their grievances redressed at suitable fora.
 - iv. It should outline mechanisms for monitoring the progress of the R&R process and for post-execution evaluation and follow up.
2. The BOTD package fixes the compensation for each affected family at Rs 1 lakh. This is an arbitrary figure, as this amount may or may be sufficient for giving each family access to the various facilities it is designed to provide (as detailed in the expenditure break-up on page 37). In the present case, for instance, the total amount earmarked for 'land development' is Rs 36,000, which is meant for various activities like clearing and deep-ploughing of land, removal of stones and boulders, bunding of plots, as well as provision of irrigation facilities. However, given the prevailing cost of these activities in this region, the entire amount will be exhausted in making the

land cultivable, leaving no surplus for the provision of irrigation facilities. Thus the government is in a situation where it has promised irrigation as part of the relocation package, but is unable to finance it from the budget allocated to it for relocation.

As a stop-gap measure, the PA management is planning to tide over this situation by tapping the irrigation funds of the district administration under various schemes, and dovetailing this expenditure with that of the FD to provide all relocated villages access to irrigation.

However, a more permanent solution to such problems lies in modifying the guidelines for relocation in such a way that the rehabilitation package is specified not in terms of maximum permissible expenditure per affected family, but in terms of the minimum physical facilities to be provided per family. This would enable the government to enforce certain basic minimum standards for all R&R projects, in a manner that is scientific and equitable, rather than ad hoc and affected by local price variations.

3. Another deficiency of the BOTD, of relevance directly to Kuno, as well as in the larger context of relocation from PAs, concerns the eligibility criteria for a defining a 'beneficiary'. In the present case, all adult males (that is, males who have attained the age of 18 before 1995) are eligible to the R&R package under the LRP. This definition is arbitrary and oblivious to gender concerns. It has led to the exclusion of

- widowed women who have an adult son(s) as also other children who are minor and dependent on the mother
- unmarried girls above the age of 18
- divorced or separated women who have returned in their original villages inside the sanctuary

A more comprehensive and gender sensitive definition might be the one proposed in the Draft National Policy, Packages and Guidelines for Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Project Affected People, 1998. According to this definition, " Every major male adult member and every adult female member when unmarried, widowed or divorced, along with minor children if any, would be considered a separate family unit."

SECTION V

AN EVALUATION OF VILLAGE RELOCATION

CURRENT STATUS OF VILLAGE RELOCATION

There are a total of 19 village clusters, comprising of 24 villages, inside the sanctuary. The sanctuary, which is vertically bisected by river Kuno, has eight villages in the western half, and sixteen in the eastern half. The relocation plan covers 23 villages. The twenty-fourth village, Nayagaon, is at the north-western periphery of the sanctuary.

At the time of formulation of the relocation plan, this village was not included in the list of villages to be shifted out, as it was already on the edge of the forest. Nayagaon is located at the bottom of a valley with rich and undisturbed forest around it, which makes it an ecologically sensitive and important area. Therefore, it is now being felt by the sanctuary management that if this village is also moved out in conjunction with the remaining 23, this will free the entire western half of the sanctuary from human habitation and the related disturbance it causes.

The other two villages initially not covered by the relocation plan, namely Padri and Bamanpura, came into being only after 1995, which has been earmarked as the cut-off year for identification of bonafide sanctuary-dwellers. The inhabitants of these villages could therefore not have been included officially in the list of bonafide residents eligible for rehabilitation. They have, however, been clubbed together with the residents of the neighbouring village of Taparpura, which is slated for relocation in Phase II.

The villages surveyed for the purpose of this study fall into three distinct categories:

1. **Villages which are being moved out in Phase I of the relocation plan:** Seven villages, namely Palpur, Paira, Meghpura, Jakhoda, Chapret, Laddar and Durreddi, have moved out completely in the last month, or are currently in the process of moving out.
2. **Villages from Phase II which are moving out without the FD's consent:** A number of villages scheduled for relocation in Phase II have begun to move out to the relocation site, without having been allotted land plots, and without suitable land preparation having been completed for them.
3. **Villages which had moved out in 1998:** Two villages (Khalai & Barred), which were scheduled for relocation in Phase II of the Relocation plan, were actually shifted out in May 1998 due to various reasons. These villages have been studied as a separate category because the relocation exercise is in a relatively advanced stage here, compared to the other villages.

In the relocation plan, an expenditure of Rs 1 lakh was proposed for the rehabilitation of each displaced family. This amount was to have been utilised for providing the relocatees facilities like cultivable land, drinking water, housing, electricity, fuel wood and fodder lots, and community facilities like schools, primary health centres etc. The progress in the relocation for each village has therefore been evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Land preparation
2. Settlement of objections
3. Provision of other facilities, like
 - irrigation
 - housing
 - drinking water
 - electricity
 - community facilities
 - fuel wood and fodder lots

CATEGORY I VILLAGES

Of the seven villages of Phase I, four (Meghpura, Jakhoda, Chapret and Laddar) have moved out completely, while the remaining three (Palpur, Paira and Durreddi) are in the process of moving out. A significant observation is that the tribal population of most villages has shown a tendency to move out much earlier than the non-tribal population.

Housing: All villagers have been allotted plots for house construction, near which they have put up temporary shelters, and are now in the process of house construction. The progress of house construction is in different stages in different villages, depending upon the time elapsed since they moved out, the number of house construction installments released by the forest department, and the availability of water for construction purposes.

Land preparation: The following steps are involved in land preparation:

- Clearing of trees, scrub etc. using bulldozers, and manual removal of debris
- Deep ploughing of land
- Cleaning of land and removal of stones, rocks etc., along with bunding of plots

Step 1 has been completed for almost all villages, while the removal of debris is currently in progress in some villages. Steps 2 and 3 have been accomplished for some villages (most notably Palpur), and the cultivable land has been distributed among the villagers. However, for the other villages, these steps have not yet been completed. These villages run the risk of not having cultivable land available at the onset of the monsoon. As a result they may not be able to initiate cultivation at the relocation site this season. The forest department (FD) has given these villagers the option of continuing to cultivate their original land inside the sanctuary to tide over this period. However, the villagers have expressed almost unanimously, in the course of interviews with the researchers who conducted this study, their inability to do so, as this would involve leaving their families (women and children) outside the sanctuary at the relocation site, while the males are engaged in cultivation inside.

While the FD has assured the villagers that rocky and uncultivable land plots will be changed, this process has not yet begun. Once again, the risk is that the villagers with such plots may stand to lose the monsoon crop if their land is not changed before the onset of the monsoon.

Action Points:

1. Since it does not seem feasible for the villagers who have shifted outside to simultaneously cultivate land inside the sanctuary, it is suggested that the FD could seriously explore the possibility of providing these villagers wage employment opportunities. One option could be to use them as labourers in the land preparation activities, which would be carried out for the next round of villages to be moved out. This would help these villagers to tide over the interim period till their land is ready for cultivation, without running the risk of indebtedness and impoverishment.
2. Changing of uncultivable plots of land must be carried out on a priority basis for those villages (for instance Palpur) where the plots have been distributed and the land preparation process is otherwise nearing completion. In villages where plots have not yet been distributed among villagers and the land preparation process is not nearing completion (for instance Meghpura), the land changing process need not be initiated immediately, as it is not very likely that these villagers would anyway be able to cultivate their land this monsoon.

It is very strongly recommended that the process of certifying plots as rocky and uncultivable, and hence determining their eligibility for changing, must involve the services of agricultural expert(s). This will be instrumental for ensuring that the FD does not draw unnecessary flak for the land changing process on grounds like arbitrariness, favouritism etc.

CATEGORY II VILLAGES

The inhabitants of villages located on the eastern side of river Kuno (slated for relocation in Phase II) have started fleeing their original residence, and have begun to camp at the relocation site. This has happened because of a rising level of dacoit activity inside the sanctuary, and the increased isolation of villages owing to the shifting out of neighbouring villages. Thus, all villagers from Khajuri Khurd, Khajuri Kalan and Chak Parond have moved to the relocation site, while a number of families from Parond have also shifted out. These villagers have also reported that the inhabitants of the rest of the interior villages (like Ahirwani and Masaoni) have also fled to other areas outside the sanctuary. Hence, effectively, only those villages of Phase II which are on the eastern periphery of the sanctuary remain inside, while the rest have either moved out already, or are likely to do so in the near future.

Since the finances for the relocation of these villages of Phase II would be released by the central government only after satisfactory completion of all Phase I activities, the FD is in no position to arrange for proper rehabilitation of these villages in the near future. As of now, these villagers are camping in makeshift shelters on plots of land that may not necessarily be the ones earmarked for them, without even basic facilities like drinking water. Land has not been identified and earmarked for these villages, and no land preparation can commence in the absence of funds. Thus these villagers will not be in a position to begin cultivation at the relocation site this season. Moreover, the threat of dacoits and the increased isolation inside the sanctuary because of the mass migration of villages will ensure that they are not in a position to cultivate their original land inside the sanctuary either.

It is recognised that the FD is presently not equipped to mitigate the conditions of these villagers, due to a severe shortage of financial as well as human resources to tackle simultaneously the relocation of both Phases. However, it cannot be over-emphasised that the situation in Kuno is a unique one, wherein the villages are eager to move out of the sanctuary, even in the absence of any facilities. If adequate resources can be made available to the FD at this juncture, it will be able to capitalise on the situation and properly resettle these villages, instead of having to adopt stop gap measures. On the other hand, if steps are not taken urgently to tackle the situation, these villagers are in danger of falling into a debt-trap in the interim period between their shifting out and being properly rehabilitated by the FD. This is an eventuality to be avoided, as it would create inequality and poverty among the relocatees, and can also jeopardise the success of the entire LRP.

Action Points:

1. The district authorities, in conjunction with local organisations, can tackle the immediate problem of lack of drinking water sources by tapping district funds to provide tankers and water storage tanks at the present camping site of these villages.
2. Moreover, various employment generation schemes of the district administration can also be initiated for these villagers by the district authorities, in conjunction with local organisations. The FD, too, can explore the possibility of providing wage employment to these people in various activities being undertaken in the course of village relocation, for instance land clearing, construction of community facilities etc.
3. Simultaneously, the local community mobilisers as well as the FD need to clarify to these villagers that their present camping sites need not eventually be the sites actually allotted to them for their habitation. This is important to ensure that no future conflicts arise on this count, and also to ensure that cultivable land is not diverted for habitation purposes.
4. Most importantly, to strengthen the hands of the FD for dealing effectively with the situation, the funds for rehabilitation of Phase II villages need to be cleared on a priority basis by the Government of India. A possible way in which this can be done is to merge the two Phases of the relocation exercise into one, and proceed with the release of funds for villages according to the sequence in which villages are shifting out.

CATEGORY III VILLAGES

In both these villages, i.e. Khalai and Barred, the process of settlement of objections has been completed, and the people have already cultivated the winter crops at the new sites. Whereas the crop yield has been much lower than it used to be inside the sanctuary, the people have still been able to repay the loans they had raised during the initial few months of their relocation.

The construction of residential units in Khalai is in an advanced stage of progress, while in Barred, this process is lagging behind. This is despite the fact that the two villages have received identical number of house construction installments.

A comparison of the situation in these two villages between the previous field visit (in October) and the present one reveals that the position of these villages has improved significantly insofar as factors like house construction and cultivation are concerned. However, it is crucial at this juncture to initiate work in these villages for the provision of other basic facilities like irrigation, electricity and fuel wood and fodder lots. In fact, these villages can be developed as models, on the lines of which future activities in the remaining villages can be carried out.

Action Points:

1. The community mobilisers in this area can help to liaison with the district authorities for dovetailing various district level schemes for the provision of basic amenities to these two villages. The role of community mobilisers is important here because of the extreme pressure on the human resources of the FD.
2. For the provision of fuel wood and fodder lots, the FD can explore the development of partnerships with the villagers for sharing the responsibility for the land and funds earmarked for this purpose. Such an arrangement can be worked out on the basis of Joint Forest Management (JFM) guidelines. The role of community mobilisers is once again crucial here, in order to suitably organise the people for this purpose.

PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN THE RELOCATION PLAN

In order to gauge the level of peoples' participation, the following indicators were used:

- i. Awareness of the rationale behind and facets of the relocation plan
- ii. Meetings between forest staff and villagers, which includes:
 - location of venue
 - purpose of meetings
 - attendance of villagers
- iii. Formation and functions of Village Development Societies (VDSs)
- iv. Access of PAPs to relevant documents
- v. Creation of conflict-resolution mechanisms

MAIN FINDINGS

Awareness

In the course of discussions with the villagers, it emerged that they have no knowledge about the reasons behind their relocation. Some have a vague idea that wild animals are going to be brought in and released in the constructed enclosure and hence they are being moved out. The rest believe simply that the government has ordered them to move out and so they have to.

As regards awareness about the package of entitlements of the villagers in the relocation plan, the information possessed by the people is random, variable and unsystematic. This can be attributed to the fact that

- Information dissemination was verbal, not written.
- The Village Development Societies, which were supposed to be the nodal agencies between the people and the FD staff, have been non-functional in this regard.

Village Development Societies (VDS)

The manner of formation of these *samitis* has been ad hoc. For instance, instead of going to each village to initiate *samiti* formation, a meeting of all Phase I villages was called at Palpur for this purpose. This obviously restricted attendance, and hence reduced the representative nature of the *samitis*.

It flows from the above that most of the *samitis* are non-functional, and are characterised by apathy and indifference towards their tasks. In fact, the only exception to this is the village *samiti* of Palpur, where the meeting for VDS formation was held. Owing to the suitable location of the meeting venue, attendance by villagers of Palpur was substantial, and this is reflected to some extent in the working of the *samiti*.

Access to Documents and other Information: Copies of the relocation plan are not available either to the VDS or to the villagers in general. There is very limited, unsystematic and often misleading information available to the PAPs about their entitlements in the R&R package, the procedures for filing of objections, the criteria for eligibility for rehabilitation benefits, etc.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: No formal mechanism or institutional structures exist for resolution of conflicts of any kind between the people and the FD.

Thus, almost all indicators of peoples' participation have shown poor results. On the ground level this lack of participation has resulted in gradually rising levels of resentment among the PAPs. While the MPFD had claimed that a salient feature of this relocation exercise is that it is participatory in nature, and that even the selection of the site for village relocation was made with the consent of the villagers (see page 34), these claims are not borne out by the evidence on the ground as it has emerged in the course of our field work.

Here, it may be stressed that some steps are now being undertaken by the sanctuary management to try and redress this situation. For instance, the FD is now trying to make available copies of the expenditure break-up of the BOTD package to all affected villages. Also, there have been some attempts at involving the people in planning and implementing some aspects of the R&R package like creation of fuel wood and fodder lots through JFM-type institutional arrangements.

It must be understood, though, that the PA management is operating under a severe crunch of human as well as financial resources. In this light, the time-consuming and specialised task of organising and mobilising the local community for a more participatory and equitable R&R process would probably be best tackled by a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) capable of bridging the gap between the FD and the PAPs.

EPILOGUE

This study was undertaken initially with the purpose of assessing the forest department's efforts at relocating and rehabilitating the villages of the Kuno sanctuary. It was meant to serve as feedback for the MPFD, and to provide constructive suggestions towards improving the rehabilitation effort. We, however, soon realised that very often, the sanctuary management itself was aware of the lacunae in their effort. In fact, they also seemed more than willing to correct these deficiencies, but could not do so due to various extraneous factors and constraints that are typical of the institutional structure which has been entrusted in the task of conservation in our country.

Thus we found the scope of our study growing, to incorporate not just various aspects of village relocation, but also those of the larger LRP. Also, our role in this exercise grew from just one of critically reviewing the functioning of the PA management from the outside, to very often even lobbying on their behalf to try and ease the constraints that they are working under.

The most lasting impression that one brings back from extensive fieldwork in Kuno is that the entire project, on the ground, stumbles from one fire-fighting measure to another. This is painfully clear from the fact that the project is in the fourth year of its implementation, and still has no vision document, or even a management plan to guide it. And that there is no single agency or institutional structure which is responsible for, or has overall ownership of the different components of this pioneering project. And that the government of the state from which the lions are finally to be brought to Kuno is not just not represented in the entire exercise, but is in fact refusing to allow lions to be taken out in the first place!

It is then very ironical, that the dedication of the sanctuary management in trying to implement the project, and the hardships that the people of Kuno are facing may ultimately amount to nothing, in view of the uncertainty about whether lions will eventually even be made available by Gujarat.

At the time of its inception, the LRP could boast of some significant advantages that projects of this nature do not always command. The foremost among these was the near complete unanimity of opinion among the villagers of Kuno, all of whom have repeatedly expressed their desire to move out of the sanctuary, if all the facilities promised to them in the rehabilitation package can actually be translated into ground reality. It will not be an exaggeration to say that a part of this advantage has already been squandered away, owing to the general lack of direction and co-ordination in the project. It is therefore imperative that the concerns highlighted in the previous sections of this report are taken up for action at the earliest in New Delhi as well as in Bhopal.

We believe that the LRP as well as the village relocation exercise still have the potential of becoming pioneering projects, lessons learnt from which can be applied to similar exercises elsewhere. If prompt corrective measures are taken, then this project can, at the very least, give a new lease of life to the endangered Asiatic lion. In a best case scenario, it can also point a way to how the twin and equally pressing objectives of conservation and equitable human development can be simultaneously achieved.

ANNEXURE I

Land use/Land cover statistics for Kuno Sanctuary

Serial No.	Category	Area (in sq. km)	Area (as percent of total Sanctuary area)
1	Agricultural Land	48.58	14.04
2	Closed Forest	157.72	45.59
3	Open Forest	52.70	15.23
4	Degraded Forest	78.96	22.82
5	Forest blank	2.13	0.62
6	Gullied /Ravinous land	0	0
7	Land with / without scrub	0	0
8	River	5.90	1.70

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