

**THE KUNO PROJECT  
MADHYA PRADESH**

**Progress Report II  
(September 1999 – November 2000)**

**SAMRAKSHAN TRUST  
NEW DELHI**

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## CHAPTER I RELOCATION OF VILLAGES

### Current Status of Village Relocation

The official plan for the relocation of villages, prepared by the forest department, provides for the resettlement and rehabilitation of 18 clusters of villages, out of the 19 that existed in the sanctuary. These 18 clusters consist of 24 villages, all of which are slated for relocation around village Agraa, on the north east periphery of Kuno wildlife sanctuary. A complete list of all the 19 villages and village clusters located

inside Kuno wildlife sanctuary is as follows:

List of Original Villages inside Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary

Villages and village clusters originally located inside the sanctuary are as follows:

- |              |                                  |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Jakhoda   | 12. Parond                       |
| 2. Meghpura  | Chak parond                      |
| 3. Paira     | 13. Khallai                      |
| 4. Palpur    | 14. Barrer                       |
| 5. Laddar    | 15. Badi Khajuri (Khajuri kalan) |
| 6. Durreri   | Choti khajuri (Khajuri khurd )   |
| 7. Chaprait  | 16. Basantpura                   |
| 8. Masawni   | 17. Pipalbawdi                   |
| Chak Masawni | 18. Taparpura                    |
| 9. Ahirwani  | Bamanpura                        |
| 10. Khera    | Padri                            |
| 11. Silpura  | 19. Nayagaon                     |

As is evident, there are 19 clusters, comprising a total of 24 villages, with a population of about 5,000 people (according to the 1991 census).

Till November 2000, 16 of these 24 villages had been shifted out to the relocation site. However, some of these villages were given permission to cultivate the Rabi crop in the years 1999 and 2000 on their original lands inside the sanctuary, because of inadequate progress in handing over cultivable plots of land to them at the relocation site.

Out of the villages that have shifted out to the new site, two villages, Khalai and Barred, had moved out in May 1998 (although as per the original relocation plan, they were scheduled for relocation in Phase II of the relocation process). This was followed by the relocation of 7 villages of the Palpur *panchayat*, which were originally located inside the sanctuary on the western bank of river Kuno. Recently, 8 villages out of the 11 village clusters of the Parond *panchayat* (located originally inside the sanctuary on the eastern bank of river Kuno) have also moved out to the relocation site. Again, some of these villages have shifted out at the behest of the forest department after delineation of their land and other facilities. However, some of these villages have shifted on their own volition, and are camping at the relocation site without any facilities for livelihood. The main reason behind their move lies in their relative isolation inside the sanctuary, due to the shift of the major villages that were earlier located around them.

Among the villages that have shifted out of the sanctuary, none has so far received the full complement of rehabilitation benefits promised to them under the relocation plan. This is because the forest department is initially focussing on providing all villages with basic facilities such as drinking water and cultivable land, and would, only later, start work on provision of other facilities like irrigation, power supply, community fuel and fodder lots, and community infrastructure. This sequencing of rehabilitation benefits is governed by a number of factors. Chief among these, is the fact that the villages left inside the sanctuary are very anxious to move out, and all available resources (human as well as financial) of the forest department are being channeled into shifting them out at the earliest. A shortage of trained human resource with the forest department further limits the speed with which rehabilitation benefits can actually be delivered to the relocatees. Moreover, any land that is prepared for receiving new inhabitants must be occupied without delay, otherwise there is a danger of it being illegally occupied or encroached upon by the host community that resides in the original villages present around the relocation site (like Agraa, Chetikheda and so on). This has already been experienced in a few cases in this project. Therefore, it seems logistically impossible for the forest department to first prepare each village and equip it with all rehabilitation facilities and then move the villagers out from their original residence inside the sanctuary.

## Methodology

The involvement of the present team in the resettlement of villages goes back to 1997. The following is a brief description of the methodology of Samrakshan's intervention in the field since September 1999:

- ◆ Village meetings were held for building rapport with the people in the eight villages relocated during the first phase of relocation.
- ◆ Information dissemination about the salient features of the rehabilitation package was among the first activities undertaken by the field personnel, so as to spread awareness among the relocatees about their entitlements. For this purpose, we also got the salient points of the rehabilitation package translated into Hindi, simplified and distributed among villagers.
- ◆ Problems facing the relocated villages were identified, prioritized and brought to the notice of the forest department. Some common problems that emerged in almost all the villages were: inadequacy of drinking water at the relocation site; non-inclusion of some individuals in the list of families eligible for rehabilitation facilities; poor quality of agricultural land allocated at the rehabilitation site; inadequate treatment of forest land to make it cultivable; absence of irrigation facilities; lack of adequate employment opportunities immediately after relocation (till the time when agricultural incomes from the newly allotted land are stabilized), and so on
- ◆ Meetings were then organized with various forest department functionaries to elicit their views about the issues raised. It emerged that the authorities were often unaware of specific details and individual problem-cases. In such situations, the field team was able to assist the villagers in bringing their individual and village-level problems to the notice of the authorities. On some of the individual problems so highlighted, the forest department has already taken action to the satisfaction of the villagers. Similarly, our field team has often also helped to convey relevant information regarding relocation from the forest department to the affected people.
- ◆ Our field team has also been interacting with district officials of the area to help resolve problems like non-availability of health facilities, non-attendance of schoolteachers etc. Moreover, the field team is also exploring the possibility of initiating various district level development schemes in the area.
- ◆ We have been involved in an intensive process of building the capacity of the local community, and in development of local leadership. Promising individuals have been identified from relocated villages, to serve as nodal persons in their respective villages and form the focus of training inputs and information dissemination about key issues affecting their lives, including rehabilitation. We have also taken a team of local persons from these villages in April 2000 to the NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh in Alwar district of Rajasthan, to learn about watershed and water-harvesting techniques.

The work done so far in Kuno has found support from the villagers, as well as the forest department. That we have established a relationship with the people of the relocated villages is clear from the fact that we are regularly approached by the villagers to interface between them and the forest department, for registering complaints and suggestions of the people with the officials and staff of the department. We have also been able to resolve a number of individual and village-level problems of the relocated villagers through interaction with concerned government (forest as well as revenue department) officials.

On the other hand, we have also been asked to attend the first meeting of the state level committee set up by the MP government to monitor the lion reintroduction project, as special invitees, and our suggestions have been recorded and acted upon by the department. This amply demonstrates our credibility vis-a-vis the forest department. The local Forest Officer too, has regularly sought our intervention and assistance in the relocation process. As a result, there has been a distinct improvement in communication and flow of information between the forest department and the community, which has helped villagers to avail of rehabilitation benefits and get their problems addressed more smoothly.

Project progress since September 1999 has been categorized under two main heads. First, a detailed account is given of work progress with regard to solving problems of the relocated villages relating to the delivery of the R&R package. Subsequently, a detailed description has been given of attempts at mobilizing villagers in selected villages on crucial issues like regeneration of common property resources, and provision of water for irrigation and drinking purposes. We consider such mobilization integral to any

community based work, as this is the only way in which the local community can be empowered to take decisions that affect their everyday life. This, we believe, will be in the long-term interest of both the local community as well as conservation.

### **Work Progress (Rehabilitation of Villages)**

As can be expected, the task of shifting the entire population of 24 villages to another location and recreating their lives and livelihoods anew is a complex and delicate one. A range of hurdles and problems have been (and indeed, are being) encountered in the course of this operation. The foremost of these are problems relating to water availability, land quality, access to social and economic infrastructure, and problems of distribution of R&R benefits between households. A good part of the time and energy of the field team during its first year of full-time field presence has been taken up by fire-fighting measures to tackle emergent problems. Given their critical nature and the preponderance of time devoted to them, progress in regard to these has been listed out in detail in the following section.

#### **WATER RELATED ISSUES**

Among the relocatees, drinking water and irrigation are one of the most important issues requiring priority attention. Sources for drinking water and irrigation at the relocation site are:

Surface Water: The area has two rivers, Jhilmil and Kunwari, in addition to a number of seasonal streams and rivulets. The rivers cease to flow during summers and form stagnant pools of water in several places. Most streams dry up completely during the dry season.

Some of the relocated villages that have been resettled in close proximity to these rivers and streams depend on them to varying degrees to meet their drinking water needs. Further, some farmers, whose agricultural plots are located close to such water sources, can potentially irrigate their fields using diesel-operated pumps. However, there are very few farmers using such water for irrigation, because most are unable to afford the cost of hiring pumps and buying fuel. Low availability of water during the dry season is another limiting factor. The forest department intends to provide lift irrigation facilities for displaced families whose land adjoins rivers and streams.

Ground Water: The relocated villages have been provided hand pumps to meet their drinking water needs. A number of these hand pumps periodically become unserviceable due to mechanical defects. Additionally, a number of them have also dried up, or show erratic water supply. Thus, initially, our work focused on resolving these problems. A strategy of regular monitoring, personal site visits by our team, and bringing problem cases to the notice of the concerned forest officials and mechanic at the relocation site has enabled us to make a significant contribution in resolving these problems in the short run.

A team from the Central Ground Water Board had camped in the area during March 2000, and identified 13 sites for installation of handpumps for drinking water. Of these, at 6 locations the forest department has installed handpumps. While water supply in some of these is regular, in others it is erratic. As a consequence of acute water scarcity in this part of the state owing to drought, access to drilling machines has been hindered. This has made it very difficult to sink wells immediately at the remaining 7 sites identified by the CGWB team.

It has gradually become evident that hand pumps alone will not be able to adequately meet the drinking water needs of relocated villages. To augment drinking water availability, the forest department has proposed that a number of dug wells (open wells) be made available to the relocated villages. In some of these villages, the people have started work on digging these wells, and in some others, work on wells has been completed already.

Another critical issue is that of provision of irrigation facilities at the relocation site. The people, while living inside the sanctuary, had access to agricultural land that was highly productive, because of the ripple effects of the healthy forest that surrounded them. The quality of agricultural land allotted to a number of people at the relocation site is not comparable to the land they had inside Kuno sanctuary. Thus irrigation is necessary to ensure that the income levels (and hence living standards) of the people do not fall below the pre-relocation levels.

A major lacuna of the Government of India's Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development is that it does not have any explicit earmarked funds for irrigation purposes. Irrigation is supposed to be provided out of the funds available under the category of land improvement. Therefore, it is essential to involve other agencies like the revenue department and NGOs so that additional financial resources can be garnered to make irrigation available to the relocatees.

The forest department has given grants to families in many villages to dig wells, such that between three households, one open well is available for irrigation. Subsequently, after *pattas* are received for land, these families would be given subsidized access to pumps to use these wells. However, it is very important to note that the area does not have very good groundwater availability, and even surface water is available only till the onset of the dry season. The water table in the area is not very high, and all these facts point towards the need for a medium to long-term strategy of augmentation of ground and surface water.

In order to solve the problem of water scarcity on a long-term basis, we have initiated rainwater harvesting activities on a modest scale in the region. One of our field team members received basic training in watershed management at Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Dewas, MP with the assistance of CAPART in September 2000. We had also organized a visit in April 2000 by a team of local people and field personnel to Tarun Bharat Sangh in Alwar, Rajasthan, to study the water harvesting practices initiated there. As a follow up to this visit, experts from TBS also visited the relocation site in October 2000, to help the forest department and villagers to initiate much needed water-conservation and water harvesting practices in this area. We are now attempting to prepare a comprehensive watershed management plan for the area that will address both the drinking water as well as irrigation needs of the people through augmentation of both ground and surface water resources. Once such a plan is ready, we hope to be in a position to assist the local people in implementing the plan with support from the forest and revenue departments.

#### LAND RELATED ISSUES

1. A significant finding of our previous surveys in the area was that the single most important apprehension expressed by the displaced persons, even before shifting to the relocation site related to the quality of land being allotted to them for agriculture, under the rehabilitation package. Subsequently, in each relocated village, people have voiced a number of objections regarding quality of land allotted to them. After exhaustive meetings with villagers, and a physical survey of almost all rocky plots of land by members of the field team, an initial list of uncultivable plots was submitted to the forest department. A detailed database was subsequently prepared on a village-wise basis, listing out these problems, and submitted to the forest department for suitable corrective action. A number of such cases have already been settled to the satisfaction of both the people as well as the forest department. Action on many of the remaining cases is either being taken currently, or is expected soon. The forest department has also devised a fairly detailed and comprehensive procedure for checking the validity of each complaint and settling it. The field team has made information available from time-to-time to the villagers about this procedure, as well as timings of objection-settlement meetings. In fact, the forest department has regularly sought help from our field team in disseminating this information among the displaced villagers. Their assistance was also sought regularly in ascertaining the facts relating to many individual complaints regarding land quality.
2. Another important land related issue that has emerged in recent months pertains to intra-village distribution of land, and its impact on equity and livelihood security. A pattern of distress migration of relocated families has been emerging as a result of famine conditions having broken out in the area since October 2000. In villages Palpur, Meghpura and Laddar, we have found that migration is confined to those families that have been allotted land away from the nearby Kunwari river and Jhilmil *nala*, and such families constitute a majority of households in all three villages. [The approximate number of such families is as high as 95 out of 125 in Palpur, and 70 out of 85 in Meghpura]. A possible solution to this urgent problem is the re-distribution of land in these villages in such a manner that all villagers get at least some land adjoining the river, which they can cultivate despite rain failure, by pumping water from the river. In fact, in other villages (like Taparpura) that have shifted out in the past year, the intervention of the field team has ensured that plot distribution is done in exactly such a

manner. In response to this crisis, the field team is planning a multi-pronged strategy to reduce distress migration:

- intensive attempts to mobilize the villagers of Palpur, Meghpura and Laddar to agree to the land redistribution proposal
- immediate relief to the drought-affected families through provision of wage-employment on public works, as well as on new works to be started under the drought-relief plan of the district authorities
- coordination with the forest department to carry out land-redistribution once villagers have been mobilized for this

3. Many villagers have been dissatisfied with the quality of cleaning and ploughing of agricultural land (i.e. land preparation) by the forest department. This has resulted in a situation where even as the forest department has exhausted the funds earmarked for this purpose, villagers have had to incur this expense all over again to get the work done to their satisfaction. A possible solution to this problem is to give the funds earmarked for this purpose directly to the villagers, and allowing them to get the work done on their own. This has been attempted in a few instances, but many villagers have complained of delays in release of earmarked funds by the Forest Department.

The task of leveling of cultivable land being undertaken by the forest department for the relocatees is still generating numerous complaints in many of the villages that had been relocated earlier. Our field team is continuing to engage in solving these problems for the villagers on an on-going basis. However, it is important to note that in those villages that have shifted out in the past year, the number of such complaints is very low. A large part of the credit for this goes to the Samrakshan field team, which has regularly monitored this activity and pre-empted many of the potential problems

#### SETTLEMENT OF OBJECTIONS

A number of cases of persons whose names were not included in the list of people entitled to rehabilitation have been reported from the relocated villages. Some of these are cases of people whose names may have been left out in the process of compilation of beneficiary lists inadvertently. Others are disputed cases of individuals who may possess land elsewhere, or who may not have been bona-fide residents of displaced villages for the stipulated number of years prior to displacement. The process of settlement of objections involves villagers putting in their applications with suitable documentary evidence in favour of their case. These objections are then heard and settled by a dispute-settlement committee which has, among others, representatives from the forest department, revenue authorities of the district, as well as an official from the Sahariya Vikas Abhikaran (a district agency looking after tribal welfare).

Samrakshan's field team has played a crucial role in assisting displaced villagers to get their cases heard in these committee meetings. The team members assist villagers with preparing their applications and compiling suitable documentary evidence, as well as disseminating information about dates of committee meetings among villagers. Again, as was the case with changing of uncultivable land, the team has also been approached regularly by the forest department to ascertain the bona-fide of the complainants by virtue of their familiarity with the villagers. After a meeting with the district collector in August 2000, names of widows have now been included in the list of beneficiaries for accessing old age pension benefits. Thus the field team has effectively built bridges between the people and the authorities.

#### INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Our previous studies had revealed that the people being relocated from the sanctuary had very little information about a number of important factors, like

- reason for their relocation
- time frame of the relocation process
- the package they are entitled to, as part of the rehabilitation programme

It was felt that for the overall lion reintroduction project to have a realistic chance of success, the affected people must have complete information about the rationale for their relocation and also about their entitlements under the rehabilitation package. In view of this, leaflets in Hindi, detailing the rehabilitation package and its financial details, have been prepared and distributed in the relocated villages. Several

meetings have also been held in each village where the package has been discussed, and people's doubts clarified.

A number of meetings have been held in the relocated villages to discuss a wide range of issues associated with relocation. Apart from such formally organized meetings, details of the relocation programme have also been discussed with individual villagers and groups of villagers from time to time. As a result of these efforts, there has been a marked increase in people's awareness about their entitlements under the rehabilitation package. This is evident not just from interaction with villagers, but also from the fact that the people are now actively approaching the forest department for accessing their entitlements under the package. The displaced villagers have also started approaching the field team on their own, in order to seek additional information and clarifications about various aspects of the relocation programme.

#### OTHER ISSUES:

1. At the time of initiation of the project, the MP government had recommended transfer of 3,700 ha of protected forestland to the revenue department, to be used for the rehabilitation of the villages displaced from Kuno wildlife sanctuary. This proposal was cleared by the central government in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Forest Conservation Act of 1980. The DIG (Forest Conservation) visited the area in 1999 and recommended the final de-notification of this land, and its transfer to the revenue department. This was carried out mid-2000, and the final step of grant of *pattas* (title deeds) to the relocated families by the district administration is now awaited. Some portions of the 3,700 hectares of de-notified land were found unfit for cultivation, and hence need to be supplemented by additional land transfer, so that each displaced family can be given 2 hectares of cultivable land as specified in the rehabilitation package. The PA management has proposed that additional land be cleared so that the process of resettling the remaining eight villages can also be initiated at the earliest. The state government needs to speedily process this proposal, to ensure smooth relocation of villages from inside the sanctuary to the new site.
2. In some villages, compensation has been demanded to replace individual or common property or infrastructure that existed in the vacated villages. This includes the village watchtower or outpost (for early warning about dacoits), wells etc. The department is planning to initiate surveys in order to ascertain the monetary value of such immovable property and a committee has been formed for the purpose.
3. Satisfactory settlement was facilitated for a complaint from village Chapret, regarding non-payment of transportation allowance at the time of shifting. Money has now been deposited in individual accounts of the villagers.
4. The field team has been monitoring regularly, personally as well as through the local community, schools in the relocation area. The scope of this monitoring extends to functioning of hostels as well as performance of teachers assigned to the relocated villages. District authorities are regularly informed about any anomalies found in the functioning of these institutions. A survey conducted by the field team in villages Ahirwani and Laddar showed a number of children of school-going age, who are unable to access education. The nearest school is approximately 5 km from both villages. A request to the district administration for a primary school to be opened under the Education Guarantee Scheme of the Madhya Pradesh government has received a positive response. Schools are now functioning in both these villages.
5. It needs to be emphasized that once implementation of the relocation package has been completed, the Forest Department would cease to play a role in development of the relocated villages. Moreover, the rehabilitation package does not cover adequately some important developmental needs of the relocatees, like irrigation facilities. It is therefore crucial to evolve linkages between the relocatees and other departments of the district government. In this light, a number of officials at the district, *tehsil* and *panchayat* level have been approached regularly for initiating developmental activities in the relocated villages. It has been attempted to dovetail the financial and other resources of the forest and revenue departments, such that both complement each other's efforts without duplication, to deliver various developmental services to the displaced villages.

6. There is a Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Agra, which is supposed to cater to Agra village, as well as to the relocated villages. However, until August 2000, the PHC was severely understaffed, with no doctors, and only some junior staff and meager facilities. Our field team has been monitoring the hospital, and has been successful in motivating the staff to visit relocated villages with medicines, vaccines etc. We have also been providing regular feedback to concerned authorities (i.e., the Chief Medical Officer, the District Collector and the Sub Divisional Magistrate) regarding the current status and health needs of the area. The field team also visits villages with the paramedical staff during pulse polio and other vaccination drives, to increase confidence of the local community and to monitor the performance of the health staff. After repeated recommendations to the SDM, a doctor has been posted now to the Agra PHC. On the team's recommendation, the district collector has also agreed to provide electricity to the PHC at Agra.
7. Recently, the field team observed an increased incidence of foot and mouth disease in cattle in the Agra region. Team members therefore requested the SDM and the Veterinary Officer to arrange for vaccination against this disease. In response to our request, a vaccination drive was initiated in the region in March-April 2000. We are also trying to initiate a drive for sterilization of bulls, and are motivating the concerned veterinary staff for this. We are hopeful that this will, over time, result in a fall in the number of cattle and improvement in cattle strains in the area. Most of the cattle currently owned by the people yield very little milk and are a drain upon the already meager natural resources surrounding the villagers.

### **Work Progress (Empowerment of the Community)**

Our intervention is based on the belief that over time, the local community should be empowered to be able to make decisions regarding a range of issues affecting their everyday lives. Legal sanction for such community-based decision making exists already in the form of recognition granted by the Constitution of India to *Gram Sabhas*. We are working with the villages displaced from Kuno sanctuary with the vision that over time, the community would be able to take important decisions, as well as get these acted upon through the institutional sanction accorded to gram sabhas. A vibrant gram sabha would, in the long run, also enhance accountability and improve the functioning of elected representatives as well as the local bureaucracy.

Towards this end, a series of community mobilization activities are being planned for these villages. These include

- initiation of community-based activities in target villages, aimed at increasing collective decision-making and action
- selection and training of promising individuals for intensive capacity-building exercises
- training these individuals to access information from relevant authorities, submit individual and collective complaints, initiate follow-up action on complaints, and so on
- holding training programmes aimed at exposing the local community to the concept and wide scope of the powers of the gram sabha as an institution of direct democracy

A brief account of progress so far in the community mobilization activities is enumerated below:

1. Members of the target community have been encouraged gradually to take their problems, predominantly related to relocation, to the authorities directly for necessary action. For instance, some villagers were sent to the SDM for problems relating to their ration-cards. Through such interaction, we believe that the relocatees would eventually gain the necessary confidence and experience to deal with the official machinery on their own.
2. As a part of the capacity-building process, in April 2000, a team of selected villagers was taken for an exposure visit to Tarun Bharat Sangh at Bhikampura, district Alwar, in Rajasthan, to study rainwater harvesting and watershed management activities of this organization. This was done with the objective of exposing the target community to sustainable irrigation practices, of which they seem to

have had no history or tradition in their original habitation inside Kuno sanctuary.

3. Relocation from the biomass-rich sanctuary to the relatively biomass-scarce relocation site is likely to change drastically the availability and usage pattern of the community for fuel-wood and fodder. Moreover, almost all the standing forests at the relocation site have been cleared in order to accommodate the villages. Hence the funds allotted to the relocatees for the creation of community fuel-wood and fodder lots need to be carefully utilized to create sustainable plantations for meeting long term fuel and fodder needs.  
As a first step towards building community ownership and management of the common property resources that would be so created, we have initiated a tree plantation drive on the boundaries of agricultural fields and around the habitation of the resettled villages, with active assistance from the forest department. Initially two villages, Khallai and Chhoti Khajuri have been identified for intensive plantations related work. The forest department has given five saplings to each family. The villagers have collectively decided that each family would be responsible for the care of the saplings that they had received. Samrakshan will carry out an evaluation exercise in December 2000 to gauge the impact of this programme.
4. Our team has been working with the forest department to minimize clearing of standing forests for the purpose of resettling people. These forests would help, to some extent, to meet the immediate fuel and fodder requirements of the relocatees. During the exposure visit to TBS in Alwar, the relocatees were shown examples of community management of forests, as a preliminary step towards introduction of such practices at the relocation site.

## CHAPTER II LION REINTRODUCTION: LARGER ISSUES

### **Lion Reintroduction Project: Current Status and Areas of Concern**

The current status of the project, and the progress made over the past year or so is described below:

#### **CREATION OF A WILDLIFE DIVISION**

An important recommendation of the WII pertained to upgrading the status of the present wildlife sanctuary to a national park, surrounded by a buffer area of about 900 sq. km. Thus, the total area of the proposed conservation unit would be about 1250 sq. km. However, there is as yet no concrete progress regarding enhancement of the protected area status.

Further, staff strength of the sanctuary also needs to be enhanced considerably, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. In this context, a proposal from the sanctuary management for creation of a separate wildlife division for this area has been pending with the state government. This proposal needs to be cleared speedily in order to augment the human resource available to the PA management. At present, a large proportion of the sanctuary staff is engaged in village relocation and related activities, with the result that regular management activities as well as additional activities that need to be undertaken for the LRP are suffering. Creation of a separate division would not only address this, but also augment the funds available to the PA management. It would also improve the protection accorded to the area, which is a pre-requisite for rise in herbivore numbers to meet the needs of the translocated lions.

#### **CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INPUTS**

The PA management needs critical inputs and expertise with regard to

- long-term monitoring of vegetation, herbivores, and carnivores
- wildlife health related issues
- capture, transport and release of wild herbivores for prey base augmentation

Regarding prey-base augmentation, a team from WII visited the sanctuary and its surrounding areas in December 2000 to assess the possibility of translocating Neelgai from the ravines of Bhind, where they are causing considerable damage to crops, into Kuno. If all goes well, initially 4-5 animals will be translocated to Kuno and their post-release behaviour in Kuno will be monitored. Based on the findings, up to 100 additional Neelgai may be imported into Kuno.

During the course of the same visit, the WII team also conducted a training programme for the staff at Kuno to equip them in basic skills of monitoring. This would reduce the dependence of the PA management on outside research inputs, as it will be able to generate much of the data it needs for day-to-day management activities. With this step, the biological aspects of the project, that had so far been neglected, have also begun to be addressed. This adds further momentum to the project and is cause for optimism about the success of the project.

The institute also proposes to initiate long term monitoring activities addressing the areas referred to earlier.

#### **BASELINE DATA COLLECTION**

The Madhya Pradesh Council for Science and Technology (MPCST) was commissioned by the forest department to carry out a GIS study of the area. This study has mapped hydro-geological attributes of the area, habitat and vegetation types, and other such characteristics vital for the LRP. A review of this report by scientists from WII has brought out glaring deficiencies in the report, and has expressed grave doubts about its practical utility. The WII has also advised the Madhya Pradesh forest department to procure certain raw data generated as a part of the study, for making better interpretations that can be of relevance to the PA management.

An exercise for collection of baseline data about social and economic parameters of the relocated villages is to be initiated in the near future by the field team of Samrakshan, to supplement the data on biological aspects.

#### **CONSERVATION EDUCATION**

The PA management has enunciated a desire to involve premiere conservation education organizations like the Centre for Environmental Education, Ahmedabad, and the Bombay Natural History Society's conservation education centre to undertake awareness activities in villages on the periphery of the sanctuary. A nature interpretation centre has already been constructed outside the sanctuary and it is proposed to involve the agencies mentioned above in equipping this centre.

#### INTER-AGENCY CO-ORDINATION

The LRP involves, from the conceptualization to the final implementation stage, a number of agencies like the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Wildlife Institute of India, the Gujarat Forest Department and the Sheopur district administration, apart from the MP Forest Department. 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:

- it could help to speed up critical decisions that involve more than one agency
- expertise needed for the diverse tasks involved in the different stages of the project could be pooled together more efficiently under such an arrangement
- ownership of the project, and responsibility for its smooth implementation would become more 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

In this light, two important developments have occurred in the past year. Firstly, the government of Madhya Pradesh has constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Shri J. J. Dutta to supervise and co-ordinate the LRP. The Dutta committee, which has representatives from the state forest department and WII, held its inaugural meeting on February 18, 2000, and made a number of important recommendations. It also served as a forum where different players involved with the project could come together to forge the path ahead. However, the state government is yet to take action on some of the main recommendations of the committee, which include creation of a separate wildlife division, early submission of the Management Plan, and so on.

Meanwhile, the government of India had also announced in early 2000 its intentions to constitute a similar committee, to facilitate inter-state co-operation for the lion reintroduction projects of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This committee was meant to have formally brought on board the government of Gujarat into the lion reintroduction project. However, this committee is yet to hold its inaugural meeting. As a consequence, the crucial issue of involvement of the state government of Gujarat in the LRP is still missing. In the days to come, this may emerge as the single most important limiting factor for the project, and as such, the need to address this issue cannot be over-emphasized.

#### Tasks Ahead and Projections for the Future

As an NGO involved with the LRP, Samrakshan envisages a range of tasks that need to be initiated or pursued in the near future in villages around Kuno. The delivery of the entire range of rehabilitation facilities to the relocated villages is expected to take at least another three years. Continued presence in the field is crucial to ensure proper delivery of the peoples' entitlements. Moreover in the villages on the periphery of the sanctuary, intensive work needs to be initiated to harmonize the resource-use pattern of the local communities and the conservation objectives of the sanctuary.

An indicative list of the tasks to be initiated in this area includes:

1. An exhaustive participatory study of the status and pattern of use of natural resources of the peripheral villages, to identify unsustainable resource use practices;
2. Preparation of micro level participatory action plans to evolve substitutes for unsustainable practices;
3. Preparing a peoples' biodiversity register in order to document indigenous knowledge about natural resources available in the surrounding area and their potential uses for meeting people's livelihood needs;
4. Initiating a conservation education programme in the peripheral villages;
5. Mobilization of particularly vulnerable groups like women and tribals on issues like liquor and land alienation;
6. Carrying forward the work initiated on building peoples' institutions (like gram sabhas) in the relocated

villages, and initiating use of laws relating to right to information as an instrument of people's empowerment;

7. Initiating micro-credit schemes for reducing dependence on moneylenders

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