

**THE KUNO PROJECT
MADHYA PRADESH**

**Progress Report IV
(May 2001- October 2001)**

**SAMRAKSHAN TRUST
NEW DELHI**

| CONTENTS | | PAGE |
|----------|---|------|
| I. | Introduction | 2 |
| | • Current status of village relocation | |
| | • Facts at a glance | |
| II. | Main Findings | 3 |
| | 1. Water-related issues | |
| | • Watershed development | |
| | Structures created by the community | 3 |
| | Structures created by the sanctuary management | 4 |
| | Structures created by the panchayat | 4 |
| | • Irrigation | 5 |
| | Irrigation wells | |
| | Lift irrigation | |
| | 2. Land-related issues | 5 |
| | • Uncultivable plots | 5 |
| | • Grant of title deeds or <i>patta</i> | 6 |
| | 3. Empowerment-related issues | 6 |
| | • Formation of <i>gram vikas samitis</i> (VDCs) | |
| | 4. Bank-related issues | 7 |
| | • Grants for house construction | 7 |
| | • Interest loss at Chambal Bank | 8 |
| | • Micro-credit and SHGs | 8 |
| III. | Current crisis in five villages | 9 |
| | • Nature of the crisis | 9 |
| | • Immediate causes | 9 |
| | • Perspective | 9 |
| | • Possible solutions and Samrakshan's strategy | 10 |
| IV. | Status of the overall lion reintroduction project | 11 |
| | • Prey-base augmentation | 11 |
| | • Meeting of the Central government committee | 11 |
| V. | Annexures | |
| | 1. List of original villages inside the sanctuary | 12 |
| | 2. Details of utilization by the sanctuary management of central assistance | 13 |
| | 3. Status of drinking water availability in relocated villages | 14 |
| | 4. Provision of wells for irrigation in the rehabilitated villages | 15 |

INTRODUCTION

The Kuno project of Samrakshan Trust aims to improve the conservation potential of Kuno wildlife sanctuary in a socially just manner, through participatory conservation and development activities in villages that are displaced from the sanctuary. Through these activities, the sanctuary would be prepared in a conflict-free manner for receiving a population of the endangered Asiatic Lion from Gir National Park in Gujarat, where its last free-ranging population is found presently. Kuno sanctuary has been selected as the site for lion reintroduction, but unless the livelihood security of people dependent on the sanctuary is taken care of, chances of success of lion reintroduction are remote.

Samrakshan has been acting as a catalyst in making the villagers self-reliant and independent, and enabling them to deal with the government machinery on their own. The Samrakshan team is focusing on building the capacity of the community to enable them to effectively participate in and influence critical development decisions in their own favour. We hope that over time, sustainable community-based organizations or village *samitis* would take forward the work that is currently being done by Samrakshan.

Current status of village relocation

Out of the 24 villages¹ that were originally located inside the sanctuary, the Kuno sanctuary management has shifted out 17 villages. Another three villages have shifted out on their own due to various hardships being faced inside the sanctuary. An additional 1263 hectares of land have been denotified for rehabilitation of families from these villages, as well as others families relocated earlier who had received agricultural land of unsatisfactory quality. Four villages are still inside the sanctuary (villages Parond, Masaoni, Chak Masaoni and Pipalbaodi). Of these, the sanctuary management is considering shifting the first three (consisting of a total of 122 families) to another relocation site in the Karahal block of the same district. Village Pipalbaodi is likely to be shifted near the present relocation site.

RELOCATION: FACTS AT A GLANCE

| | |
|--|--|
| Total number of villages to be displaced | 24 |
| Total population to be displaced | approx. 7,000 |
| Total number of families | approx. 1,400 |
| Number of villages already relocated officially | 17 (approx. 1,300 families) |
| Facilities already provided to these villages | Housing Agricultural land Drinking water Fair weather road Electricity (6 villages) Irrigation wells (60) |
| Number of villages that have shifted without official sanction | 03 ² |
| Number of villages still inside the sanctuary | 04 ³ |
| Number of hand-pumps dug for drinking water purposes | 49 |

Watershed-related Developments

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of large water harvesting structures created by the forest department | 03 |
| Number of <i>nallahs</i> on which the community has created loose stone structures | 02 |
| Number of villages that have participated in such water-harvesting activities | 03 |

Utilization of Central Assistance⁴ by the PA management for the Lion Project⁵

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development (BOTD) | Rs 7,92,82,800 |
| Eco-development (starting from 2000-2001) | Rs 1,39,18,000 |
| Development of National Parks & Sanctuaries (DNPS) | Rs 2,06,25,000 |

¹ List of these villages is provided in Annexure I

² Villages Basantpura, Bamanpura, and Padri

³ Villages Pipalbawdi, Parond and Masaoni

⁴ Funds received from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India

⁵ See Annexure for a detailed scheme-wise and year-wise break-up of these funds.

MAIN FINDINGS

Water-related issues

Good pre-monsoon showers in the region around May 20th mitigated, to some extent, the acute water scarcity that the area faced in the summer. Further, these rains also helped to ease the drinking water and fodder situation for cattle, and as a result, the number of cattle deaths observed this year is significantly lower than last year.

However, towards the end of the monsoon season, rainfall became erratic again, and a long dry spell near the end resulted in drying up of the *bajra* and *tilli* crops for the third year in succession. This is where the absence of irrigation facilities was felt most acutely, because most farmers were unable to save their crops for want of assured water supply.

Watershed development

Structures built by the community:

- The water harvesting structures (boulder checkdams) that had been built by the people of Khallai and Chhoti Khajuri last year (see *Progress Report III, Samrakshan Trust, April 2001*) have been successful in retaining some water even from these initial showers. Once irrigation wells are ready, recharge of rainwater into these wells through the water retained in these checkdams would raise irrigation prospects for the area.
- In 10 villages, nearly 70 open wells were dug using funds disbursed by the forest department. Some of these wells have been completed, but most are still unfinished because of delays in fund disbursement. The wells are being dug as part of the provision of irrigation facilities under the R&R package; one well is sanctioned between every three families. The wages that these families received for digging wells (about Rs.2189 per meter of well depth, as per revised government rates) have been an important source of ready cash, which has helped these families tide over the dry season without having to resort to borrowing from the local moneylenders.
- Moreover, the earth and stones excavated from the well site have been used by some villagers for bunding their agricultural fields. This would help to retain rainwater in the fields, helping to enhance soil moisture and groundwater levels.
- In addition to the checkdams built in Khallai and Chhoti Khajuri, the villagers of Ahirwani have also got together to form their own village development society (or *samiti*, as the villagers call it). The first task that they undertook was to construct a series of 10 checkdams on a *nallah* that flows through their agricultural fields. Again, in the ensuing rains, the checkdams initially managed to retain some water, but due to problems in design and location of these boulder checks, most could not survive the heavy rains that the area received subsequently. An important factor responsible for the failure of these structures was that at the time of their creation, the Samrakshan team was unable to provide assistance to the villagers in site selection and design, due to heavy rains that cut off access to the village on the stipulated day. The field team now plans to revive village mobilization in Ahirwani, for re-construction of these structures, once again with labour contribution by the community.

Community-based watershed development in village Ahirwani

For Ahirwani, the process of construction of checkdams was extremely interesting. Discussions on the merits of constructing checkdams had been going on in Ahirwani for at least a month before the actual construction happened. The villagers fixed the date, June 6, for starting work on check-damming, and requested the Samrakshan field staff to be present in the village on that day, along with the forest guard R.K. Narwaria, so that the site selection could be done in advance for the checkdams. However, on the morning of the 5th, there were heavy rains in the area, as a result of which Ahirwani got cut off from Agra due to swelling of a *nallah* in between, as well as the heavy water flow in Kwari. It was figured that the work would now have to be postponed by at least a week. However, the people of Ahirwani went ahead, and constructed 10 checkdams on the Ahirwani *nallah* on their own on the 6th itself. First the women and children got out with their pickaxes and shovels, and encouraged the men to proceed to the *nallah*. The villagers then proceeded to select sites on their own, and spent the entire day working on the checkdams. Apparently, old women, who could do little by way of carrying stones to the site, also helped out by ferrying drinking water to the other workers. Subsequently, the same evening, Ahirwani experienced rains, which resulted in retention of water in the newly constructed checkdams.

Structures built by the sanctuary management:

- The other water harvesting structures that have come up in the region includes three structures constructed by the forest department with technical advice from Action Aid India's NRM expert. These include two dams constructed on the river Kwari near Agraa and Meghpura (the Kushwaha dam and the Meghpura dam respectively), and the *johad* constructed near village Jakhoda. Both dams (built at a cost of Rs 6 lakh to 7 lakh each) have now retained rainwater in their natural ponding area, and this water body stretches in each case up to at least a kilometer upstream of the dam site. At most places, the average depth of the water body is between 1.5 to 2.5 meters (the dams themselves are around 1 meter high), and in places, water up to the depth of 4 to 5 meters is also accumulated. This effectively means that in the next dry season there would be water in these bodies till at least the month of May. Moreover, this water would also be available for use in the lift irrigation systems that the forest department is planning to lay out for villages whose land lies next to this water body.
- The third water harvesting structure, the Jakhoda *johad*, is a semi-circular earthen structure built (at a cost of about Rs.5.5 lakhs) on the foothills of the Karkera hill that lies above Jakhoda's agricultural land. Its purpose again is to retain water that flows from the hill and the surrounding catchment area, which would have flown unchecked into numerous *nallahs* and eventually into the Kwari, and would have taken with it the valuable topsoil and nutrients. The *johad* (which is about 120 meters in length, two meters high, five meters wide at the base, and about a meter wide at the top) would retain water in a huge pond, and this water would again recharge wells in the fields of Jakhoda lying downstream. The *johad* would be very useful for cattle from the relocated villages. In fact, many villages are already using the water stored from the first few rains for their cattle, as well as for washing and bathing purposes. Moreover, the enhanced soil moisture is also resulting in good growth of grass in the surrounding area, which is being used for grazing cattle. Incidentally, the location and design of this structure was initially suggested by experts from Tarun Bharat Sangh, and thereafter, Action Aid's NRM expert also provided inputs related to the design of the structure.
- An important aspect of the watershed works in general has been that wages for laborers working on these structures came at a time when the displaced villagers were facing acute scarcity due to the twin pressures of drought and displacement. Since there was a large component of earthwork in all three structures, at least 60 per cent of the funds spent on these structures have gone to the villagers in the form of wages. All these can be counted as the direct and indirect benefits of the watershed process that has been put in place in the displaced villages.
- In addition, the sanctuary management also initiated work on a series of boulder checks on a *nallah* that runs through the agricultural fields of village Palpur. Experts from the NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh had suggested the concept and location of these structures. However, in terms of the execution of work on these boulder checks, the performance of the forest department has been less than satisfactory. As against the participatory methodology advocated by TBS experts as well as Samrakshan, work on these structures was actually carried out with no consultation with the inhabitants of Palpur (who were intended to be the beneficiaries). Instead of eliciting community participation in the form of labour contribution, funds meant for resettlement and rehabilitation were spent and labour was taken on contract for construction of these structures. Moreover, the final site-selection and design was not in consonance with the suggestions made by the TBS experts. Eventually, none of the boulder checks created by the forest department on Palpur *nallah* managed to survive this year's monsoons, and in effect, their contribution to water harvesting and groundwater recharge was minimal.

Structures created by panchayats

As part of drought relief activities taken up in Vijeypur *tehsil* during the summer of 2001, two panchayats, Palpur and Parond undertook construction of a series of water harvesting structures. These include

| Structure | Numbers | Location |
|----------------|---------|--|
| Retaining wall | 02 | Ahirwani, Palpur |
| Pond | 05 | Chak Parond, Paira Kushwaha, Laddar, Ahirwani, Khallai |

However, these structures were created without any assistance from Samrakshan, and in fact, in some cases, the location and design of these structures was not in accordance with the suggestions of our external experts. This has highlighted the crucial importance of coordinating the efforts of all government and non-government agencies working in the area, so as to avoid duplication of funds and efforts.

Irrigation

As all families in the displaced villages have been given plots of land that were hitherto uncultivated, there are no existing sources of irrigation available on these plots. Possible sources of irrigation in the area include:

- Irrigation wells for agricultural plots located away from surface water sources
- Lift irrigation for agricultural plots that are located adjacent to rivers and streams

Irrigation wells

Under the rehabilitation package, the sanctuary management has made provision for grants for one irrigation well between three families. Subsequently, it is planned that these families would be given subsidized access to diesel pumps to lift water from these wells.

Lift Irrigation

In order to provide irrigation facilities to agricultural fields located along the river Kwari, the forest department is proposing to initiate three lift irrigation schemes during 2000-2001. Intake wells would be sunk in the riverbed, and water will be lifted from these wells through pumps to a tank located at the highest spot in the area. This water would then feed the agricultural fields along the riverbank through a network of pipes. At present, two companies have been given pilot projects for these lift irrigation systems, and it is only after these prove to be functional that the system would be extended to other relocated villages. By September 2001, pipes had already been laid in one lift irrigation scheme (in village Palpur), while pipes are being laid for villages Durreddi and Laddar.

So far, the coverage of families for provision of irrigation facilities is only partial, and many families have not received any funds at all for digging irrigation wells. (Ten of the 17 villages relocated so far are receiving irrigation-related funds, and a total of nearly 60 wells have been sanctioned so far.)⁶ However, because of uncertainties relating to the final design and coverage of the lift irrigation (LI) schemes, and due to partial coverage of villages under dugwell-based irrigation, there is a lot of confusion among the villagers about when and in what form they will receive irrigation facilities.

It is therefore clear that more irrigation wells should be sanctioned for families with good agricultural plots, in order to cover all households in a village at the same point of time. No financial limits should be placed on the number of wells that the sanctuary management can sanction every year, as had happened in the year 2000-01.

Moreover, the villagers should be clearly informed about how many and which families would be covered under the LI schemes and which would be covered by dugwells. In order to be able to do so, the sanctuary management must avail of the services of experts in lift irrigation, who would assist it in designing and implementing these schemes in a technically sound manner. On its part, the Samrakshan team can extend all possible cooperation to the management in identifying and bringing in such experts.

Land-related issues

Uncultivable plots

- The quality of land allotted to the displaced families is not good, especially when compared to the land in their original villages. Although agricultural experts say that this land is potentially cultivable, in general the soil depth and soil moisture conditions are much poorer than what was available inside the sanctuary. While there are instances of allotment of alternative land in lieu of poor agricultural plots, the forest department finds this an uphill task, since the number of such cases is quite large and there is very little extra land available.
- The process of changing rocky plots has been rather tricky. This is especially true of villages like Meghpura and Paira Adivasi, which have been out at the resettlement site for over two years now.

⁶ For details of villages and families covered by irrigation wells, please see Annexure 4.

The problem is that because of inexperience of the forest department in the early period, and poor rains in the past two years, identification of rocky plots and subsequent changing of plots has been hanging fire. There have been instances of four or five plots having been changed in a village, but other villagers having been left out of the process because things were proceeding on a case-by-case basis and many people either did not come forward or their claim did not get due attention.

- Another problem is that some plots have very low topsoil depth, after which one reaches the base rock, while other plots have adequate topsoil but too many loose stones and boulders, which require arduous cleaning over a long period of time. The forest department's current policy is to change the plot in the former case, but not in the latter. In any case, by August end, there was again an increase in the intensity with which the villagers begun demanding that their rocky plots should be changed, and assurances to this effect were repeatedly given to them by the authorities.
- However, despite these assurances, very little was actually done on this front till the end of August. Matters came to a head by early September, when five of the worst affected villages served notice to the sanctuary management of their intention to return to their old villages inside the sanctuary. These villagers intend to ease their economic distress by collecting non-timber forest produce from the sanctuary for sale or exchange for food grains, in order to tide over the current crisis. The important thing to note here is that the desperation to go back to the sanctuary is greatest in those villages where problems relating to land quality are more severe.

Grant of title deeds or *patta*

The process of granting *patta* to the villagers has not made any progress since we last reported on this issue in April 2001. In the absence of *patta*, it becomes difficult to involve district level departments to provide basic facilities to the relocated villages. The absence of the title deed with the people is causing problems on multiple fronts. For instance, the agriculture department has refused to distribute improved seeds to the villagers in the absence of *patta*.

Another very serious problem that is arising increasingly in the absence of *patta* is of encroachment on land meant for the displaced villages by persons from other nearby villages. In the absence of a *patta*, the intended beneficiaries as well as the local police department cannot take any legal action against the encroachers. Hence it is imperative that the sanctuary management must hasten the process of granting *patta*.

Samrakshan has continuously brought to the notice of the revenue and forest departments the urgency of this issue, and at different points of time, various authorities have assured that work on this would be speeded up. In the course of his visit to the field in the last week of July 2001, the district collector had also given an assurance to this effect. However, in the absence of accelerated effort by the forest and revenue department, this process is likely to proceed at a very slow pace, as has been the case so far.

Further, once the displaced villagers have *pattas*, they are likely to feel secure at the rehabilitation site and the incentive for them to return to the sanctuary would be considerably reduced. The speedy grant of *pattas* would automatically reduce the intensity of any move by the community to return to their original villages inside the sanctuary.

The office of the district collector has already issued a notification for starting the process of survey of land that has been denotified for resettling the displaced villages. Such surveys are the first step in identification of plots for grant of title deeds. However, since then the process has slowed down because of lax coordination between the revenue and forest departments in actually carrying out these surveys. Thus, to speed up this process, the SDM (Vijaypur) and the DFO (Kuno sanctuary) must speedily coordinate their efforts to form a joint team of surveyors from the revenue and forest departments. This team needs to complete field surveys at the earliest and submit its findings so this task can be completed.

Empowerment-related issues

Formation of *gram vikas samitis* (VDCs)

The process of formation of *samitis* in each village takes place through a duly summoned meeting of the entire village body, and this can be seen as a formal *gram sabha* meeting. Samrakshan is now focussing on the formation of such *samitis* in each of the displaced villages, so that increasingly, the

samitis can articulate and direct the future course of action for the village as a whole. Technically, there is no question of a *gram sabha* being 'set up' because the *gram sabha* is nothing but the entire body of voters in each village. The challenge is to get the *gram sabhas* to function as vibrant institutions that guide the course of development of the village; this is precisely what Samrakshan is beginning to work on now.

Rudimentary *samitis* have started operating in five villages, namely Taparpura, Khallai, Paira Kushwaha, Silpura and Ahirwani. The strength of the *samiti* varies between 7 and 11 members. These *samitis* maintain a register and convene their meetings either fortnightly or monthly. Another new development is the increasing familiarity of these *samitis* with paperwork, as witnessed by the spate of *panchnamas* (or resolutions) which they have submitted to the concerned authorities on various matters of concern. Another noteworthy development is the inclusion of women in at least some *samitis* (for instance, in Ahirwani the Vice President of the *samiti* is a woman). This is a crucial first step towards their enhanced participation in community decision-making. The following table gives a gender-wise break-up of members in various *samitis*:

| Village | Male members | Female members |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Taparpura | 5 | 2 |
| Khallai | 7 | - |
| Paira Kushwaha | 6 | - |
| Ahirwani | 6 | 4 |

Bank-related issues

Grant for house construction

In most villages that have been shifted out officially, the process of construction of houses is nearly complete, and the people have been given nearly all installments of the house construction grant of Rs 36,000. However, exceptions to this are to be found in the following cases:

- In villages like Jakhoda, Meghpura and Barrer, there are some families (eight out of 40 in Jakhoda, and some in Barrer) that have used up their initial house construction grant for other purposes, and have not completed the first stage of construction. As a result, they have not been found eligible for availing of the next installment(s) of this grant as per the rules.
- In some villages, there are a few families (14 out of 21 in Taparpura, 3 out of 35 in Khera) where the full house construction grant has not been given so far. In some cases this was because the names of these families were added to the list of beneficiaries at a later stage (after settlement of objections, for instance). These families therefore have started house construction much later than the rest of their village, and are lagging behind insofar as payment of installments is concerned.

The process: Once construction is complete, and this has been duly certified by the concerned Range Officer after physical verification, the villagers are handed over the remaining amount of money held in their bank account, and the accounts are closed. This procedure has been termed *khata mukti*, and for most of the 16 officially relocated villages (barring Khera and Taparpura), the forest department had duly completed this process by mid-June 2001. Additionally, for all villages that had their bank accounts either in the State Bank of Indore (Vijeypur branch) or the Punjab National Bank (Dhobni branch), the account-holders were also given interest on the amount deposited in their savings accounts. For most of the displaced families, this money has come in extremely handy in buying seeds for the current *kharif* crop, which they were in the process of sowing in the third week of June 2001.

Interest loss at Chambal Bank

However, for the account holders from five villages that had their accounts with the Vijeypur branch of the Chambal Kshetriya Grameen Bank (namely Meghpura, Jakhoda, Paira, Khallai and Barrer), there has been no payment of interest on the amount deposited by the forest department. The reason for this, according to the manager of the bank's Vijeypur branch (Shri Khandelwal) is that there had been a verbal agreement between him and the previous DFO (Shri L.K. Choudhary). As per this agreement, apparently the DFO had agreed not to claim interest accruing to the accounts of the displaced families, in return for which the Bank agreed to waive outstation collection charges to be levied on cheques received from the forest department.

The Samrakshan team took up this matter with Shri Khandelwal on two occasions (18th May and June 1st), and pointed out that the bank had acted in an ad hoc manner in depositing all funds received from the forest department in the nominal account of the bank. Instead of this, the funds should have been put in the savings accounts of the individual account holders, as had already been instructed to them in writing by the current DFO, Shri J.S. Chauhan. It was further pointed out that this ad hoc decision had resulted in a loss of interest to the tune of nearly Rs.1,000 per account holder. The Samrakshan team was asked to take the issue up with the bank's Head Office in Morena.

On June 14th, two members from Samrakshan met the Chairman of Chambal Bank (Shri Deshpande) at Morena and explained the situation to him. The Chairman immediately (on telephone) instructed the Branch Manager to rectify the mistake, so that at least for the current financial year, due interest could be received by the account holders. He further agreed to examine the entire transaction in detail, and explore possible ways in which the account holders could be given pending interest for the previous period too.

However, no action has been taken subsequently by the Chambal bank management to ensure that account holders receive the interest due to them. The Samrakshan team had also raised this issue with the district collector during his visit to the field in the last week of July 2001, and he had instructed the DFO to look into the possibility of filing an FIR against the bank management for recovery of dues. However, no further action has resulted on this front either.

The sanctuary management should initiate immediate action for pressurizing the Chambal Bank management to pay its dues to the people, either by lodging an FIR, or through other action with the mediation of the district collector.

Micro-credit and SHGs

The Chairman of the Chambal Kshetriya Grameen Bank also discussed with the Samrakshan team the possibility of assisting his Bank in initiating micro-credit schemes through the formation of self-help groups in Samrakshan's programme area. The team held discussions with relevant officers of the Bank on this issue, collected documents pertaining to their micro-credit schemes, and discussed the possibility of holding a workshop in Agra in collaboration with the Bank for familiarizing the villagers with this concept.

Nature of the crisis

On 7th September 2001, 5 relocated villages [Paira (Adivasi), Jakhoda, Meghpura, Laddar and Durreri] held a meeting, reportedly attended by around 250-300 tribals (all men). This was actually a culmination of a number of small meetings of the Sahariya tribals that had been going on for quite some time. During the meetings, the displaced people were vehemently of the opinion that these were the major promises made by the forest department to lure them away from their original villages and gain their consent for relocation. However, in not even one village have all these promises been fulfilled in totality till date. In the 7th September meeting, the people unanimously decided that they would return to their villages inside the sanctuary if their demands were not immediately met. These demands included

- fertile land, defined by the farmers as land with a soil depth of at least four hands
- irrigation facilities for each agriculture plot
- education facilities
- electricity

There have been reports subsequently of follow-up meetings, held to consolidate the earlier decision and to plan strategies for tackling different circumstances that may arise. Even the Sahariya women, who have not participated in any of the meetings, are very vocal, and express their anger and their keenness to take action in no uncertain terms. They complain of lack of fuel and fodder in the new settlement, and compare this with their earlier lives when they had ample access to land, cattle, and milk and milk products.

This meeting was also followed up by a rally (*padyatra*) to Sheopur, the district headquarters, organized by the displaced villagers between 1st-10th October 2001, to draw attention to their plight and to present a memorandum to the district collector outlining their main demands.

Immediate causes

The immediate provocation for these moves has been the failure of crops in the region for the third consecutive year. This time, it was rain failure towards the end of the monsoon that resulted in drying up of the *kharif* crop. Two other man-made factors have added to the woes of the displaced villages. Firstly, the quality of land allotted to the displaced families is not good, especially when compared to the land in their original villages. Although agricultural experts say that this land is potentially cultivable, in general the soil depth and soil moisture conditions are much poorer than what was available inside the sanctuary. While there are instances of allotment of alternative land in lieu of poor agricultural plots, the forest department finds this an uphill task, since the number of such cases is quite large and there is very little extra land available. The important thing to note here is that the eagerness to go back to the sanctuary is greatest in villages where problems relating to land quality are more severe.

The second factor that has precipitated the present crisis is lack of assured irrigation. Last year, the sanctuary management distributed funds among the villagers for digging around 60 irrigation wells. However, none of these could be completed in time for the *kharif* crop, due to delays in disbursement of funds. This coupled with the fact that none of the three proposed lift irrigation projects were functional before the end of August (this was the time when the *kharif* crop needed water to survive) made matters worse. This year, there have been no effective emergency support programmes (like food-for-work) to help the villagers to tide over their difficulties. The villagers had no savings to fall back upon while their crops matured, so they have borrowed heavily against their standing crops. Now, since both *bajra* and *tilli* crops have died, moneylenders are unwilling to extend any further loans to these farmers.

Perspective

The most striking part of the entire village relocation at Kuno is that if one looks at the overall picture, it seems much better than other attempts at rehabilitation elsewhere in the country. This is clear from the fact that only five of the sixteen villages relocated so far have taken the extreme step of threatening to return to the sanctuary. The rehabilitation package being offered to the people is among the most comprehensive in the country, and even in its implementation, the degree of sensitivity and commitment shown by the Kuno sanctuary management is way above ordinary.

However, the flip side is that a project of such vital national importance as the lion reintroduction project of Kuno was set into motion with so little planning at the state as well as central level. There are practically no institutional support mechanisms that were devised for assisting the implementing agency at the field level. There is virtually no active coordination between the sanctuary management and the office of the district collector (to whose direct jurisdiction the relocated villages will eventually be transferred). And while adequate funds have been made available to the sanctuary management, complementary support in terms of adequate and efficient staff, which is specially hand picked to carry out the diverse tasks that the project requires, is completely missing. It is thus a classic case of a good and viable idea going awry due to overall apathy at the level of planning and implementation.

The displaced villagers do not deny the fact that the forest department is trying hard to fight the impending crisis, and even grant that some day it may succeed. However, they argue that they do not have the economic strength to hold out till then, and so the department should allow them to go back and inhabit their former villages, until the government manages to gather all the necessary facilities. These villagers know better than anybody else does that life inside the sanctuary is no bed of roses. The area is cut off from development infrastructure, and also has a serious dacoit problem, being part of the infamous Chambal belt. Moreover, all these villages have been shifted out as part of preparations for the lion reintroduction project, under which Kuno wildlife sanctuary is being readied to receive a small population of the threatened Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*) from Gir National Park in Gujarat. Already, the sanctuary management has spent about Rs.11 crores on the lion project, and the people know that their shifting back to the sanctuary would not be welcomed.

The wheel now seems to have turned full circle for the Sahariya tribals of Kuno, who are left with no option but to go back inside the sanctuary and pick up the threads of their lives where they left them over two years ago. Meanwhile, it is clear that a move back to the sanctuary by the villages would be a setback to the entire lion reintroduction project, and would also render futile the huge effort put in by the sanctuary management over the past three years in the rehabilitation process.

Possible solutions and Samrakshan's strategy

From its vantage position at the grassroots level, the Samrakshan team finds that it is possible for the authorities at the state and central government levels to initiate a number of immediate and long-term steps that would help to diffuse the current crisis. These points are relevant not only for the five villages that are currently agitating, but also for all the other displaced villages. These include

- initiation of wage employment opportunities for immediate support
- speeding up grant of land title deeds (*pattas*) to relocated villages
- speeding up changing of uncultivable agricultural plots
- speeding up provision of irrigation facilities

The Samrakshan team has already met the Secretary to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Shri Jaikrishnan, on 3rd October 2001, to apprise him of the situation and ask for prompt action on the points outlined above. We are also trying to set up meetings with various members of the state bureaucracy in Madhya Pradesh, as well as with peoples' representatives at the state level (the local MLA, MP, the state forest minister and so on) to apprise them of the situation and demand action. Simultaneously, we have also offered all possible assistance to the local DFO in areas like implementation of appropriate wage employment works and identification of families for changing of poor agricultural plots. In addition to this, our team would continue to extend its support and assistance to the community in any further moves they may plan to bring public attention to their plight through meetings and media contact.

Prey-base augmentation

There has been some progress with regard to restocking prey base in the sanctuary. Three Neelgai (2 females and 1 male) have been captured from the ravines of Chambal and released in the sanctuary. This was a joint operation of the Wildlife Institute of India and the MP forest department. The animals are being monitored in Kuno and this is the pilot phase of a much larger effort to improve the prey base at Kuno for the lions.

Though the WII is now working on placing a team of researchers in the sanctuary to monitor various ecological parameters on a regular basis, there has been virtually no further progress on this front since the translocation of neelgai (which took place between February and June 2001).

Meanwhile the PA management has also initiated monitoring activities in the sanctuary. The Wildlife Institute of India had conducted training for the field staff of Kuno for this purpose in December 2000. It may be mentioned here that the monitoring work carried out by the sanctuary staff has been greatly facilitated by aid given by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) to the Kuno sanctuary management in February 2001. The WTI has donated 30 bicycles and watches, using which forest guards carry out fortnightly counts in the sanctuary.

Meeting of the Central government committee

Of late, the lion project has been receiving much needed attention from the Ministry of Environment & Forests as well. On 3rd May 2001, the first meeting of the central committee formed to oversee the lion reintroduction project was convened. It is pertinent to mention that the committee was set up over a year ago, but held its first meeting only this year. This is in addition to a committee that has been set up by the government of Madhya Pradesh to oversee and guide the lion reintroduction project. However, in terms of actually meeting and providing direction to the sanctuary management, both committees have contributed precious little in the single meeting that each has had thus far. It is disappointing that in terms of actually providing a forum for smoothing out the problems faced by the sanctuary management and providing guidance and thrust to the lion reintroduction project, neither committee has shown much efficacy. The most striking fact that highlights this is that the management plan for the sanctuary is still pending approval with the state government. Meanwhile, at the central government's level, no effective steps have been initiated yet to bring the forest department of Gujarat on board the project.

Later in the same month, a team comprising of the forest secretary, Government of India; Director, Project Tiger; and the Chief Wildlife Warden of MP visited the sanctuary and the village rehabilitation site on May 26, 2001. The team met the PA management as well as relocated villagers, and gave a number of assurances for action regarding immediate problems like staffing, and funds for land development and irrigation. Since then, the state government has made some changes in the sanctuary staff, with some significant transfers and additions. A new Assistant Conservator of Forests has been appointed to Kuno wildlife sanctuary in place of the earlier incumbent, and three new Range Officers have been deputed. It is hoped that with the infusion of new strength in the staff, the sanctuary management would be better equipped to handle the range of tasks it is called upon to undertake as part of this ambitious project.

List of original villages inside the sanctuary

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

ANNEXURE II

Details of utilization by the sanctuary management of central assistance

Funds have been received from the Centre under three schemes of the Ministry of Environment & Forests:

1. Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development (BOTD)
2. Eco-development
3. Development of National Parks and Sanctuaries (DNPS)

| Scheme | Year | Amount (in Rs) | Expenditure Head |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---|---|
| BOTD | 1997-98 | 90,19,265 | Land development, construction of houses, community facilities, pasture and fodder plantation, etc. |
| BOTD | 1998-99 | 3,00,79,879 | |
| BOTD | 1999-00 | 2,65,37,932 | |
| BOTD | 2000-01 (upto March) | 1,26,55,727 | |
| Eco-development | 2000-01 | 84,45,000 (sanctioned) | Ecological restoration, agricultural development works, community facilities, renewable sources of energy and energy saving devices, etc. |
| | | 64,15,000 (net central assistance) ⁷ | |
| Eco-development | 2001-02 | 54,73,000 (sanctioned) | |
| | | 54,58,000 (net central assistance) | |
| DNPS | 2001-02 | 10,00,000 | Land development (meant for villages already relocated, for families that have got poor quality land) |
| DNPS | 1995-96 & 1996-97 | 85,70,000 | Funds spent on sanctuary development |
| DNPS | 1997-98, 1998-99 & 1999-00 | 77,55,000 | Funds spent on sanctuary development |
| DNPS | 2000-01 | 18,00,000 | Funds spent on sanctuary development |
| DNPS | 2001-02 | 15,00,000 | Funds spent on sanctuary development |

⁷ This is the amount sanctioned for the current year, less unspent amount from the previous year

ANNEXURE III

Status of Drinking Water Availability in Relocated villages (as of July 2001)

| S. No | Village | Handpumps | Wells | Tanker |
|-------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Paira Kushwaha | 2 | - | - |
| 2 | Chak Parond | 1 | 1 | - |
| 3 | Barrer | 1 | - | - |
| 4 | Khallai | 1 | - | - |
| 5 | Chotti Khajoori | 1 | - | - |
| 6 | Durreddi | 4 | 1 | Yes |
| 7 | Chaprait | 2 | - | Yes |
| 8 | Silpura | 1 | - | Yes |
| 9 | Laddar | 7 | 1 | Yes |
| 10 | Ahirwani | 2 | - | - |
| 11 | Badi Khajuri | 3 | 1 | - |
| 12 | Kheda | 2 | 1 | - |
| 13 | Taparpura | 1 | 1 | - |
| 14 | Meghpura | 4 | 1 | Yes |
| 15 | Jakhoda | 3 | 1 | - |
| 16 | Paira Jatav | 2 | 1 (old & Govt. owned) | - |
| 17 | Paira Adivasi | 5 | 1* | - |
| 18 | Palpur | 4 | 1 | - |
| 19 | Nayagaon | 3 | - | - |

(*under construction)

Total number of hand-pumps dug: 49 (out of these 28 are not working)

Total wells for drinking water purposes: 11

ANNEXURE IV

Provision of wells for irrigation in the rehabilitated villages (as of July 2001)

| S. No | Village | Total Families | Details of the family & group involved in digging of wells provided / sanctioned by the forest department for irrigation | Details of family/ persons involved in digging of wells without the help of the forest department |
|-------|-----------------|----------------|--|---|
| 1 | Paira Kushwaha | 62 | 1. Shyamu S/O Mangaliya 2. Khacchu S/O Shankariya | 1. Rakesh S/O Ramswarup 2. Ramlakhan S/O Lutti 3. Jagdish S/O Shankar |
| 2 | Chak Parond | 49 | 1. Sujan S/O Sundara | |
| 3 | Barred | 21 | 1. Tunda S/O Devjeet 2. Lalaram S/O Lukki 3. Hotam S/O Lukki | |
| 4 | Khallai | 45 | 1. Samanthi S/O Kissu 2. Suru S/O Birju 3. Nabbu S/O Moru 4. Kishanlal S/O Banshi 5. Anthu S/O Siriya 6. Badri S/O Lalu 7. Narayan S/O Durjan 8. Gailiya S/O Banshi 9. Khairu S/O Madan 10. Naktu S/O Gyasa 11. Lalaram S/O Kishu 12. Naktu S/O Devjeet | 1. Puram S/O Banshi |
| 5 | Chotti Khajoori | 23 | 1. Janved S/O Kanja 2. Chaitu S/O Kudra 3. Murga S/O Cheema 4. Natoli S/O kunja (Not received the money) | 1. Mahesh S/O Raghu 2. Ramcharan S/O Bhaga 3. Murari S/O Ajanu 4. Kasturi W/O late Ghamandi |
| 6 | Jakhoda | 57 | 1. Harjeeta S/O Nabloo 2. Kishori SO Gyaasi 3. Lalaram S/O Mangaliya 4. Kishanlal S/O Chaitu 5. Sitaram S/O Bansi 6. Batua S/O Sona 7. Lalu S/O Mangaliya 8. Khairu S/O Chintoi 9. Mandoo S/O Balua 10. Dhammu S/O Baghri 11. Dinesh S/O Shivcharan | 1. Bansi S/O Harbakas 2. Anand S/O Rattu (controversial, payment stopped after first installment) |
| 7 | Meghpura | 88 | 1. Daroga S/O Kisnu 2. Nandlal S/O Shravan 3. Ranglal S/O Kissu 4. Keshav S/O Bansi 5. Ramesh S/O Manau 6. Munni S/O Sugan 7. Karu S/O Sugan 8. Shrilal S/O ghamandi 9. Munna S/O Raghu | |
| 8 | Palpur | 171 | 1. Mahesh S/O Murli 2. Suresh S/O Murli | |

| | | | | |
|----|---------|----|---|--|
| | | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Shyambabu S/O devilal 4. Nandu S/O Ghamandi 5. Gendya S/O Bhaddu 6. Parmu S/O Nripati 7. Hargyan S/O Balwant 8. Dhamola S/O Amarchand 9. Pooni S/O Jaggu | |
| 9 | Laddar | 93 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kaliyan S/O Ranglal 2. Hateela S/O Samliya 3. Parsadi S/O Sundara 4. Dassa S/O Kissoo | |
| 10 | Durredi | 71 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ghanshyam S/O Jagram 2. Babu S/O Karanje 3. Gulab S/O Kariya 4. Ramjilal S/O Debilal 5. Mangliya S/O Murli | |

No. of wells sanctioned by the forest department: 60

No. of beneficiary families:180

No. of wells not sanctioned by the forest department: 10

No. of beneficiary families:25

Total no. of wells: 70

Total no. of beneficiary families:205

SAMRAKSHAN TRUST

Delhi Office

Arpan Sharma, Asmita Kabra, Rumman Hameed
c/o C-II/2, I.I.P.A. Campus
Indraprastha Estate, Ring Road
New Delhi 110002
Tel. # 279 5088, 335 1648, 371 5382
Email: asmitak@vsnl.com, arpan@samrakshan.org
Web site: www.samrakshan.org

Field Office

Syed Merajuddin, Vijay Kumar, Ritesh Pandey, Kanshi Ram
Village Agraa, *Tehsil* Vijeypur
District Sheopur - 476332
Madhya Pradesh
