

Report on activities of the first quarter April - June 2007



Samrakshan Trust – Meghalaya Field Office

The Samrakshan Trust team in Meghalaya works in Rongara block of South Garo Hills District in the state of Meghalaya. The staff strength is fifteen and divided into three programmatic units – Wildlife Monitoring, Environment Awareness and Livelihoods. What follows is a brief report on the progress during the first quarter of 2007-08 under the three programme heads.

- 1) Wildlife Monitoring – The team at present comprises three persons who are mainly involved in working on the elephant monitoring programme and the exercise to identify biologically significant areas in the landscape. The team is also involved in mapping the boundaries of all the villages (including the community forestlands) that lie adjacent to and between the Balpakram National Park (BNP), Siju Wildlife Sanctuary and Baghmara Reserve Forests (BRF). The team also maintains a database, a simple yet fairly detailed format for which has been developed, of various species of faunal sighted during their visits to the field.
 - a) Elephant Monitoring Programme – The programme was initiated as part of the larger strategy to:
 - Identify spaces within the landscape that are used by elephants to meet their ecological needs;
 - Understand various nuances of conflict, the eventual aim being to develop an action plan to try and reduce conflict and retaliatory action on part of the community.Thus information on elephant presence, raids, and numbers in the village lands is recorded. To aid the team in the exercise seventeen informants from eleven villages have been appointed.
 - i) During the period sixty-seven visits were made by the team members to meet with informants and collect information in addition to taking GPS locations of the spots visited by the elephants. One of the villages Panda reported a very large number of sightings, thirty-seven in the past three months. Interestingly it is for the first time that the herd size has been recorded at between sixty to sixty-five animals, prior to this the largest number reported in a herd has been around fifteen animals. Similarly large herds were also reported from two other villages i.e. Hangspal (sixty to sixty-five animals) and Gongrot (thirty animals). Several of the informants believe that the animals could have come from the Khasi Hills.
 - ii) A training programme was held on May 17, 2007 for informants, twelve of who attended. The main objective of the training was to improve the understanding of informants' vis-à-vis the monitoring programmes, clarify their doubts and elicit suggestions from them to better the exercise. Also participating in the training were new informants from five recently associated with villages, these recently appointed informants also signed an agreement for undertaking monitoring work in their village. Some of the older informants asked that members of the Self Help Groups also be made aware of the formers work cooperating with and supporting them when required. Participants were informed of the recent association with the Meghalaya Rural Development Society (See Livelihood section for details), and also shown images of the exposure trip by SHG members of Rewak village to the West Garo Hills. A training report has been prepared both in English and Garo, while the report in English has been sent out to select persons with an interest on the subject; the report in Garo will be shortly shared with the informants.
 - b) Reporting elephant mortality – There was one report during the period. This was from a village, Dambuk Apal bordering Bangladesh. A bull around thirty years of age was reportedly killed for ivory and the meat consumed by the villagers. However upon visiting the place the team found no trace of the carcass and were also unable to elicit any information from villagers on whether an elephant had been killed. Discreet enquiries from a few contacts however revealed that an elephant had indeed been killed. The DFO, Wildlife at Baghmara was verbally informed of the incident.

- c) Identifying biologically significant areas – With guidance and support from Anirban Roy, the wildlife team has initiated an exercise in identifying biologically significant areas within the landscape. The exercise is meant to help identify areas both within the village boundaries as well as the reserve forests that are rich in biodiversity, frequented by animals, and/or preserved by the community. Help for identifying these areas is sought from community elders, hunters and other knowledgeable persons, and members of the wildlife team follow up with visits to these sites. Phase I of the exercise has been initiated and a list of biologically significant areas in four villages has been drawn up. This along with the difficulties and suggestions by the wildlife team has been sent to the resource person, the exercise will be taken further once all doubts have been cleared and the necessary improvements made.
 - d) Mapping village boundaries – An exercise in mapping all the village boundaries is underway. This has been necessitated as no maps are in existence and boundaries remain unclear. All of the above exercises become far more relevant and meaningful once the village boundaries are clear. The boundaries of four villages have been mapped, the exercise has however been temporarily suspended due to technical difficulties in downloading the location readings.
 - e) Participation in the Environment Day Celebrations – Team members also actively participated in the Environment Day Celebrations held on June 5 at the office campus in Baghmara. The team made a slide show on the biodiversity of the Garo Hills in addition to supporting the Environment Awareness Team in miscellaneous programme related tasks.
 - f) Development of an action plan to curb hunting and poaching – Plans had been drawn up to develop an action plan beginning with a survey to understand the subject of hunting, poaching and trade in wildlife. However the team was unable to initiate the survey during the period. It is however necessary that the exercise is initiated as soon as possible and all attempts will be made to begin the exercise and atleast have the baseline information on hunting, poaching and trade before the end of the second quarter.
- 2) Environment Awareness – The environment awareness team has two members. In order to create greater awareness and sensitivity to the threats facing the rich biodiversity of the region the team engages with different sections within the community by employing a variety of media, these include conducting film shows at the hamlet level, conducting awareness programmes for children in primary schools in the villages, and organizing celebrations around the World Environment Day and Wildlife Week. The team is presently associated with 11 villages and has been working intensively with six of the older villages whereas the work on environment awareness is yet to be initiated with the other five villages.
- a) Holding film shows – Though frequently disrupted due to power failures, eleven shows were held in four villages during the period. Five films were shown and the number of viewers added up to 243 (Annex II).
 - b) Conducting environmental awareness programmes – The team is presently associated with 37 primary schools in 11 villages. Based on the time made available which is usually decided after consulting with the schoolteacher, one or more activities are conducted. This includes children spending time colouring wildlife images, playing a game to identify various species of animals and another to understand the web of life. During the period, programmes were held in twenty-one schools and around 650 students took part in the various activities.
 - c) Celebrating World Environment Day – It had been decided well in advance to celebrate World Environment Day (June 5) inviting a large number of people including leaders from the community to the event. For a good part of May, team members were actively engaged in planning the event. The invitation list and invites were drawn up with the help of the Team Leader. It was decided that the programme would be held in the Baghmara Campus of the organization. The invitees were Class IV students from Rewak, their teachers, their parents/guardians and two *nokmas* (village heads). The total number of participants including the personnel from Samrakshan was 51. In addition to a film show, the wildlife team also presented a slide show on the biodiversity of the Garo Hills. The programme was a success and the team was highly encouraged by the response of the participants. A report of the event was prepared in English (Annex VI) and widely shared. The same has been translated into Garo for sharing at the local level.
 - d) Planning for teachers meeting – The team feels that inviting school teachers for a meeting would be useful as the attitude of the teachers towards the environment awareness programme has a bearing on

how children respond to the team's efforts. Several teachers have responded positively to the efforts of the team and also believe that the activities help them address the Environment Awareness part of the school curriculum. The idea is still developing and will also require bringing on-board the District Inspector of Education. A meeting with the Inspector is planned for in the month of July.

- e) Engaging with educational institutions in Baghmara – Though planned for there has been little progress on extending environmental awareness activities to educational institutions in Baghmara. To begin with team members have gone and met with the Vice-Principal of the Captain Williamson Memorial College, Baghmara, however this was only a preliminary discussion and needs to be further followed up.
 - f) Developing a revised environment awareness strategy – Though plans had been drawn up to get a resource person to help draw up a strategy, the unavailability of such a person has meant that there have been no developments on this front. Even as the search for such a person continues, the team proposes to carry on with the present set of activities and improvise in-house till such time that the situation can be remedied.
- 3) Livelihood support – The livelihood support team is made up of six persons and has been mainly involved in the setting up of and strengthening Self Help Groups (SHG), however over the past year the district administration has solicited support from the team to conduct trainings for the Area Employment Councils (AEC) in Rongara block set up under the aegis of the Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- a) The Self Help Programme – The team has helped communities form 33 SHG spread across seven villages most of which are at this juncture primarily involved in micro credit activities (Annex III). Nearly all the groups except the ones recently formed have opened bank accounts. The District Rural Development Agency together with representatives from SBI, Baghmara branch graded 17 of the SHG and eight of them have received bank loans. A bulk of the sum loaned to members of the SHG has been for income generation activities. During the period:
 - i) Four SHG undertook to develop fisheries with an aim to increase incomes, and another SHG was able to avail financial assistance from the District Fisheries Department, the first instalment of Rs. 22,500/- was released to the members.
 - ii) One SHG linked up with the District Horticulture Department to set up a vermicompost unit with government funds.

Atleast a couple of SHG have come forward with a request to the organization for support to protect *waris* (lake/deep spots in river or stream), within their village that are known fish breeding spots. The SHG propose to protect these *waris* drawing up norms for access and use.

- b) Social audit in Rongara block – In addition to the training undertaken for the AEC in Rongara Block on the provisions and implementation of the rural employment guarantee scheme, the livelihood team was also undertook a social audit of the programme. The exercise was undertaken from May 10 to 25, 2007 and 33 AEC and 105 Village Employment Council (VEC) were covered. Questionnaires were prepared for the exercise and a presentation of the findings made to the district authorities on May 29 (Annex IV and Annex V).
- c) Initiation of project with the Livelihoods Improvement Project for the Himalayas (LIPH) – The organization entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS)¹ on March 29, 2007 to carry out a collaborative livelihood improvement effort in the Rongara Community Development Block. The aim of the LIPH is to help the vulnerable in the rugged highland of the Himalayas improve their livelihoods and develop broader alternatives for income generating activities. The partnership will help enhance:
 - i) The organization's reach to all villages in Rongara Block
 - ii) Extend SHG coverage to all villages in the Block
 - iii) Develop a platform to effectively deliver support to the community to improve farm and non-farm livelihood opportunities
 - iv) Strengthen the organization's link to and ability to influence line departments

¹ MRDS is the implementing agency of the LIPH in the state of Meghalaya

- v) Sensitise the LIPH to conservation concerns
 - d) Exposure visits and training programmes – During the period several exposure visits and training programmes were held for community representatives as well as members of the livelihood team.
 - i) Exposure visit to West Garo Hills - During April 2007, an exposure visit for members of the SHG from one of the villages (Rewak). Exposure visits are undertaken with a view to enable the people to learn by seeing with their own eyes how their brethren have come together to achieve their overall socio-economic development. Around 50 SHGs' members participated in the visit. (Annex VII)
 - ii) Training on Participatory Rural Appraisal - Team members attended a training programme on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) during April 2007. MRDS organized the training in Shillong and five members from the team participated.
 - iii) Training on Promotion and Nurturing of SHG- MRDS also organized a fortnight long training on SHG concepts and basic accountancy in June. Mahila Sakti Kendra (MASK), which has been working on SHG for the past seven years in Assam, provided the training (Annex VIII).
 - e) Association with State Coordinator for SHG – The Government of Meghalaya has initiated an exercise to collect and compile information on the number and status of SHG across the state. Team members attended a workshop called for by the State Coordinator for SHG which was held in Shillong, a follow-up workshop on the subject was also called for by the District Administration at Baghmara. Subsequent to this the team has undertaken a survey to collect all the requisite information which is to be shared with the office of the State Coordinator for SHG.
- 4) Other activities – In addition to the above there were a number of other activities that team members were involved in.
- a) Nimesh Ved attended the India Portfolio Review Workshop (PRW) of IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture Development) at Mussorie (Uttarakhand) from May 9 to 12, 2007. The objective of the workshop was to assess the experience of IFAD-assisted projects in the implementation process and identify specific issues regarding project management, financial management, exit strategy and sustainability, and convergence for follow-up and attention.
 - b) Visitors to the Meghalaya Field Office
 - i) Pankaj Sekhsaria from Kalpavriksh visited the Meghalaya field office in April and spent 12 days with the team. The purpose of his visit was to discuss strategies to project the Garo Hills and the work of Samrakshan Trust in Garo Hills to a much larger audience. This could take the form of articles in newspapers and magazines as also photo-features in the same media. Team members also benefited from his sharing of the rich biodiversity of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the threats to these from human action.
 - ii) Mr. K M Momin, Deputy Director, Tourism, Meghalaya State along with the Tourist Officers of the three districts that comprise Garo Hills visited the field office in April to discuss potential tourism sites in the villages where Samrakshan Trust is working and also visited one of the villages.
 - iii) Ritupon Gogoi from Indo-Global Social Service Society visited the field office to assess progress and achievements of the project supported by them.
 - c) Media Coverage during the period – Reports that cover the effort on livelihoods were uploaded onto the website hosted by the State Government on Self Help Groups www.megselfhelp.gov.in, the report on the World Environment Day celebrations were hosted by the Zoo Outreach Organization on their website www.zoosprint.org
 - d) Core Team Meeting – The Team Leader participated in the core team meeting that was held at the Head Office in Delhi from May 13 to 15, 2007.

Annex I - Table showing species spotted and recorded during the period

Sl.No	Species	Number	Date and Time	Place	GPS Location
	Mammals				
i.	Malayan Giant Squirrel	Two (2)	June 27, 1030 hours	Gongrot Chisoh Stream	25.16387 N 90.44377 E
ii.	Elephant	Herd Two (2)	June 22, 2000 hours June 22, 2030 hours	BRF BRF	
iii.	Jackal	Three (3)	June 12, 1500 hours	Border Road – Gasuapara	
iv.	Hoolock Gibbon	Seven (7)	June 11, 1000 hours	BRF	25.20698 N 90.65854 E
v.	Large Indian Civet	One (1)	June 1, 1500 hours	Dambuk Aga	25.21694 N 90.69374 E
vi.	Capped Langur	Troop	May 25, 1600 hours May 23, 1300 hours	Dambuk Jongkol nr. cashew orchard Dambuk Atong – Rongop Stream	
vii.	Stump Tailed Macaque	Troop	May 17, 1500 hours	Dambuk Atong nr. Gongrot Boundary	
viii.	Otter	Two (2)	May 17, 1200 hours	Dambuk Aga - Gaobari Stream	
ix.	Orange Bellied Squirrel	One (1)	May 16, 0900 hours	Dambuk Atong nr. abandoned habitation	
x.	Rhesus Macaque	Troop	May 5, 1100 hours	Dambuk Aga (on way Bolbokgre)	
	Birds				
xi.	Yellow Bittern	One (1)	June 28, 0800 hours	Gasuapara	
xii.	Indian Pond Heron	One (1) One (1)	June 24, 1700 hours June 12, 1400 hours	Baghmara – Dabit Gasuapara	
xiii.	White Throated Kingfisher	One (1)	June 24, 1700 hours	Baghmara - Dabit	
xiv.	Blue Bearded Bee Eater	One (1)	June 21, 0700 hours	Halwa Atong Mondoli – cashew orchard	
xv.	Cinnamon Bittern	One (1)	June 17, 0500 hours	Baghmara – Dabit	
xvi.	Open Billed Stork	Two (2) Three (3)	June 12, 800 hours April 21, 1000 hours	Paikan (State border) Karukhol	25.28140 N 90.64823 E
xvii.	Rufous Woodpecker	Three (3)	June 15, 1600 hours	Rewak	25.29693 N 90.66213 E
xviii.	Coppersmith Barbet	One (1)	June 6, 0600 hours	Baghmara- Asimchiring	
xix.	Kaleej Pheasant	Three (3) Three (3)	June 2, 1630 hours May 17, 1530 hours	BRF Dambuk Atong – community forest land	
xx.	Golden Fronted Leafbird	One (1)	May 30, 1530 hours	Chimitap	
xxi.	Scarlet Minivet	Flock	May 30, 0800 hours	Chimitap	
xxii.	White Rumped Shama	One (1)	May 20, 1200 hours	Dambuk Atong	
xxiii.	Oriental Pied Hornbill	Three (3)	May 15, 1600 hours	Dambuk Atong nr. abandoned habitation	
xxiv.	Lesser Racket Tailed Drongo	One (1)	May 12, 0930 hours	BRF	
xxv.	Common Green Magpie	One (1)	May 11, 0900 hours	Dambuk Aga – Gaobari Stream	
xxvi.	Junglefowl Chick	One (1)	April 24, 1100 hours	BNP	
xxvii.	Bronzed Wing Jacana	One (1)	NA	Bulawe - Riverside	
	Reptiles				
xviii.	Monitor Lizard	One (1) Two (2)	June 12, 1500 hours May 11, 1300 hours	Border Road – Gasuapara Halwa Ambeng Stream	

Annex II – Table showing details of film shows conducted during the period

Sl.No	Name of Film	Date of show	Village	Hamlet	Viewers
i.	Monsoon Forests	May 4	Rongrepal	Saman Gittim	32
		May 2	Rewak	Rongjak	53
		May 1	Rewak	Malengma	27
		April 26	Panda	Wagekona	16
ii.	Unknown Seas	May 2	Rewak	Songmong	25
		May 1	Rewak	Malengma	27
iii.	Tigers' Domain	April 27	Panda	Wagekona	21
		April 25	Alokpang	Bulawe	23
		April 3	Panda	Chikasin	14
iv.	Sahyadris	April 20	Panda	Wagekona	15
v.	Elephant – A God in Distress	April 4	Panda	Bolsigre	17

Annex III – Table showing status of Self Help Groups (as on May 31, 2007)

Sl.No	Name of group	No. of meetings	Saving	Internal lending				Fine	Cash in hand	Cash at bank	Income Generated
				No. of loan	Amt. disbursed	Amt. repaid	Interest earned				
i.	Pring Prang Ask women SHG	138	5935	23	17350	9653	288	1044	1902	11025	5924
ii.	Dokua Mix SHG	108	2605	27	15100	9269	447	330	1564	4257	2130
iii.	Simsang Women SHG	124	6495	31	23470	3020	268	2961	264	11445	9465
iv.	Balsrigittim Women SHG	112	6181	48	21550	18376	980	1252	2307	13293	7500
v.	Balsrigittim Male SHG	125	3530	17	8700	5265	325	640	1095	5352	3305
vi.	Rongcholgittim Male SHG	96	4350	47	16500	13159	355	1800	1134	8753	4385
vii.	Dosigipil Women SHG	116	2004	21	7400	4500	1285	1787	5075	15308	6619
viii.	Chit mang Songgital Male SHG	117	3002	23	12000	2654	1854	972	3239	5633	7690
ix.	Dosingkal Mix SHG	110	1454	16	1900	1635	135	40	744	2200	2550
x.	Meen Wari Mix SHG	52	660	10	1200	1105	105	605	667	2755	3270
xi.	Gongrot Matchirampat Male SHG	22	298	4	1100	745	45	89	479	0	705
xii.	Dabajol Male SHG	79	1674	11	1400	660	115	438	178	2122	1194
xiii.	Areng Abri Women SHG	87	2628	47	8800	7650	1235	1781	74	6208	3292
xiv.	Totengkal Women SHG	47	383	14	1360	790	90	229	301	500	855
xv.	Chikasin Women SHG	86	3815	21	6240	6408	728	723	1279	4007	3115
xvi.	Chibasal Mix SHG	86	4095	18	4900	4875	705	175	840	3304	1065
xvii.	Chasong Tangkamchi Women	53	1985	16	2100	1185	35	1332	955	3002	3145

xxviii.	Pakram Achik Women	39	2425	3	600	440	40	70	141	2752	2431
xix.	Ripokdokatchi Mix SHG	10	470	0	0	0	0	65	1288	0	690
Sl.No	Name of group	No of meetings	Saving	Internal lending				Fine	Cash in hand	Cash at bank	Income Generated
				No. of loan	Amt. disbursed	Amt. repaid	Interest earned				
xx.	Rongbilbang Male SHG	39	2300	14	2700	1620	120	346	821	3802	2846
xxi.	Jakusan Women SHG	39	1995	7	700	410	10	225	265	3001	3562
xxii.	Doma Mix SHG	15	1105	9	1500	400	100	35	35	0	0
xxiii.	Jarabong Male SHG	38	1565	11	3100	2465	180	605	580	3210	1950
xxiv.	Balading Women SHG	33	1175	3	650	365	65	155	520	1400	420
xxv.	Bongai Male SHG	22	870	6	1000	724	24	345	206	1100	612
xxvi.	Aruak Mix SHG	23	1500	1	600	400		360	225	1800	875
xxvii.	Purun Sikram Male SHG	17	755	9	1450	245	45	380	1855	0	1980
xxviii.	Chibasal Male SHG	20	1640	5	3300	175	75	410	255	4000	1275
xxix.	Mongnal Mix SHG	17	670	2	300	105	5	100	1150	0	575
xxx.	Balsrigittim Women SHG	17	785	7	3400	1970	70	335	2105	0	2420
xxxi.	Atampang Women SHG	4	120	0	0	0	0	0	120	0	0
xxxii.	Rongjakgittim Women SHG	6	128	10	3600	564	64	55	421	2443	477
xxxiii.	Abongnoga Mix SHG	6	250	0	0	0	0	80	550		160
Total		1,903	68,847	481	173,970	100,832	9,793	19,764	32,634	122,672	8,682

Annex IV – Table showing findings from Social Audit of MREGS in Rongara Block

Sr. No	Basic Criteria	AECs	Percentage
1	Maintaining information walls	0	0%
2	Employing contractors	0	0%
3	Maintaining Muster Roll at worksite	33	100%
4	Operating joint bank accounts	33	100%
5	Having 30% women members	30	90.9%
6	Having women as office bearers	16	48.5%
7	Project received as per prioritization made by VECs	26	78.8%

Annex V – Table showing findings from Social Audit of MREGS in Rongara Block

Sr.No	Basic Criteria	VECs	Percentage
1	No of VECs having HH who have not applied for job card	28	26.6%
2	No of VECs having HH who have not received job card	61	58.1%
3	No of VECs having formed VMC	29	27.6%
4	No of VECs having not formed VMC	76	72.4%