

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

Project Ref No	EIDPO-040
Project Title	The Assam Haathi Project
Country(ies)	India
UK Organisation	North of England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo)
Collaborator(s)	EcoSystems-India
Project Leader	Alexandra Zimmermann
Report date	October 2011
Report No.	HYR 2
Project website	www.assamhaathiproject.org

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April-Sept) against the baseline timetable for the project.

Activity 1.1. Implementation of crop protection methods in 8 new project villages: During this reporting period emphasis was on preparations for new interventions and maintenance of old systems for the forthcoming HEC season (October onwards). Both existing and new project villages (5) were included in this. All the watchtowers are being used regularly. Chilli smoke was used in Sessa TE, Sonitpur to chase away a group of elephants. Two chilli fences (1 km, 1.2 km) in Kalyanpur and Nichinta/Kochpara, Goalpara are ready for use, and will be erected with the first appearance of the elephants. These fences will protect about 300 acres of paddy. Thirty-three spotlights were distributed in 22 villages, of which 9 were given to 3 new project villages, and the remainder in 19 existing project and non-project villages. A 6.1km solar power electric fence was built in the new project village Sourang (Chirang), which also protects a part of the adjoining village Borpathar. It will protect c. 555 acres of crop land and benefit 162 households. The villagers contributed 600 wooden poles, labour, and lodging boarding expenses of the project team. In addition, a maintenance fund was created with each family contributing Rs 200 (3 GBP) as seed money. Since the installation of the fence, elephants have been deterred 7 times. The villagers are extremely happy and say that that the fence has helped to increase their production by around 20%. The cost of the fencing was shared with our partner Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme. The local government authority (BTAD) has also pledged to support our project in future fencing installations, while the local para-military unit has volunteered to provide free labour for any new fencing in the area. The solar power supply to 20 households of the new project village Hatigaon, Goalpara which was energised in December 2010, was augmented with the installation of an additional 35Wp solar panel. This helped to increase the lighting hours to 3-4 hours. The beneficiary households have taken up the responsibility of maintaining the interventions through community contribution, with additional help from our project on a needs basis. Thus a watchtower in Dhankhona was repaired, and the one at Jhawani is awaiting repairs. Regular inspection of existing watchtowers is also being continued. Seventeen spotlights were repaired and replaced in 13 villages. The community replaced 21 old posts for the electric fencing in Rupajuli, sourced from their homesteads. Further, the tea estate provided new wire (1.5 km) as agreed in the MoU towards repairs. About 1 km of old wiring was also repaired. Respective village fence committees in Golapara and new project village Sourang are maintaining their power fences. The Bengkanda fence energizer was replaced after being damaged by lighting. Households of Sourang have agreed to contribute Rs.10/month towards fence repair fund. Similarly, beneficiary families of Hatigaon are collecting Rs. 20/month per family towards corpus for repairs. The home lighting installation in Nichinta (Sagunbahi) needs renovation as the system suffered irreparable damage owing to lighting strikes.

Activity 1.2. Hands-on training and workshops to be held in the project villages: (a) Seven demonstrations/training on chilli deterrents (smoke, dust covers, fencing) were held with participation of 11 villages, including 5 new ones. About 110 farmers and 15 of our field monitors participated. Around 30% of the participants were invited from neighbouring villages. (b) A 1-day training on piggery management in Bamunghopa, Goalpara was conducted with assistance from the local veterinary dept. This was attended by 35 people (20 women), of which 25 were members of 6 SHGs from 4 hamlets. (c) Training on poultry management through *hen can change a man* scheme in Kalyanpur village, with 30 beneficiaries (60% were women) in partnership with *Natures Foster*. Free poultry vaccine was also administered in new project village Kalyanpur, Goalpara. (d) In collaboration with partner MASK, Sonitpur, a 3-day fishery development workshop organised for 29 members from 5 SHGs representing 6 villages. Training was imparted on pond cleaning, water management, disease control, fish variety, and husbandry. (e) 24 farmers from 7 villages in Sonitpur participated in training on cultivation and management of income generation horticulture plants such as betel-nut, ginger, turmeric, potato and lemon. The local Agriculture Dept. provided the resource persons. Awareness about the HEC context was created among the participants during the above events. (f) Capacity building of project staff was undertaken through three events: a 3-day photo-documentation workshop to equip the members with skills to document activities of the project; 2-day training on eco restoration conducted

by Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore to help us plan and develop our reforestation activities; and 2-day retreat for 30 field monitors to apprise them of ecorestoration activities and update on project progress. In addition, regular monthly review meetings were held for field monitors as well field teams.

Activity 2.1. Development of livelihood ideas and business planning: The following efforts were made to develop innovative income generation schemes for acceptance among low income households: **(a)** Launch of poultry-based “*Hen can change a man*” scheme, where 4 birds will given to each a poor family, who will then rear them for next 6 months. After this, the recipient will return the four hens back, and keep the additional birds/chicks that were born during this period. In the pilot phase 20 BPL families in 5 villages of Goalpara and Chirang were selected. **(b)** Promotion of crops such as colocasia, turmeric, ginger and bamboo for existing local markets through SHGs. In project village Sourang, ½ acre of colocasia and ¼ acre of turmeric cultivation by 2 women SHGs initiated. In addition 2 acres of bamboo plantation established by a men’s SHG. **(c)** As a token of gratitude for the electric fencing in Sourang village, the community planted 50 betel nut and 50 timber plants on common land. The returns from these plantations will be used for community welfare. **(d)** Two new all-women SHGs has been formed after several meetings at new project village Thaijoguri, Baksa district. **(e)** Formation of a new SHG in Goalpara comprising 18 field monitors (men) for establishing a micro enterprise based on leaf plate making. Each member is contributing Rs 50/monthly, and preparations to supply 10,000 betel nut bark to a local plate making unit is underway. **(f)** Facilitated a business development workshop for 21 SHGs (incl. 10 women groups) presidents in Sonitpur. NABARD, a premier micro credit institution appraised and encouraged the participants to apply for credit to undertake small business based on local resources. Additionally, accounts keeping, preparation of business plans, record keeping was taught.

Activity 2.2. Training for production of products: **(a)** Two field assistants were trained in making of biodegradable plates (for eating) from betel nut tree bark by DHRITI, a local NGO. They would in turn train the newly formed SHG members in Goalpara. **(b)** A fishery workshop was aimed at training farmers to set up their fish cultivation business. It was heartening to note that two of the participants imparted the knowledge learnt to the farmers in their respective villages. All the participants availed of the free services that included cleaning of fish ponds, procurement of fish seed, etc. In one village, five participants formed a cooperative (*Meen Palan Samiti*), and took a government-owned pond on lease.

Activity 2.3. Marketing and sales: The fish cooperative established in Sonitpur is progressing well, and it has been able to sell its first batch of 12 kg in the local market. The SHG cultivating colocasia in Sourang has found a ready local market, and has already harvested about 250 plants and sold the tubers at Rs 10/piece.

Activity 3.1. Disseminate further copies of ‘living with elephants’ handbook: About 170 copies were distributed in 54 villages in Sonitpur district. Fifty were given out to 14 NGOs working in the Manas Biosphere areas. Further 15 copies were handed out to relevant persons during visits to Sumatra and Kenya.

Activity 3.2. Produce and distribute further educational materials: We have revamped our communication strategy, and have designed three sets of posters for different target groups (farmers, school children, general public) and purposes (demonstration, knowledge, awareness generation). A set of HEC mitigation technique information cards is being designed. Guidelines on piggery management have been documented for distribution among farmers.

Activity 3.3. Workshops and training activities held with teachers and student: Efforts were made to use a different approach to generating awareness and knowledge about elephants, HEC mitigation, project activities, etc. for greater effectiveness: **(a)** A cricket match among four tea estates (suffering from HEC) in Sonitpur was held. An audience of 75 including tea management and labourers was present. **(b)** 50 students and 8 teachers participated in a day long interactive programme to develop a positive attitude towards elephants at Hatisong Middle School, Goalpara. A quiz, film show and story telling were conducted. **(c)** With the goal to create HEC awareness among the youth, an inter-village football tournament named. *Play for Elephants*: a cup tournament took place in Bamunghopa, Goalpara. A total of 15 villages from our project area participated, with 1500 spectators. Project posters, HEC mitigation methods, etc. were displayed and the audience urged to cooperate with our project in the affected villages. **(d)** Two workshops in collaboration with *Natures Foster* at Bongaigaon and Kajolgaon for 30 community Leaders, hailing from Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Baska districts. **(e)** Collective awareness meeting for 5 villages in Sonitpur, attended by 33 persons including village elders. This meeting also served a preliminary scoping study for selection two new project villages. Another consultation was held in new project village Nagapathar, Jorhat.

Activity 4.1. Background research and demarcation of potential replanting areas: Resource persons from Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore imparted eco-restoration protocol training to staff on topics such as establishment of nursery, selection site, selection of native plants, and monitoring. This proved to be beneficial for us to plan for our reforestation activities. Visits were made to tea gardens to discuss the possibility of planting vacant areas within the estates with native trees for creation of refuges for resting elephants.

Activity 4.2. Establish nursery and plant out (both for reforestation and firewood): Preparatory work in two nurseries (Nichinta, Sourang) has begun. The seed collection of local (native) species is underway. Two more nurseries are planned in Sonitpur and Manas, respectively. About 2000 saplings of *gamari* (timber

species) have germinated in Sourang.

Activity 4.3. Trials of alternative stoves, distribution and demonstrations: Ten BPL families in Sonitpur were identified for donation of improved cookstoves for fuelwood savings.

Activity 5.2. Assam-wide HEC survey: Out of 27 districts, the state wide survey has been completed in 20 districts, and the remaining districts are expected to be covered by December-end. The corresponding data entry is also complete.

Student Projects: Two Masters' students (one from Chester Zoo and one from the Netherlands) conducted their fieldwork in with our project, they studied a) the cost-efficacy of intervention methods, and b) the role of salt in the crop-raiding elephants' diets and its potential as a management tool in the form of salt licks.

Exchange visits: The host country project manager, Nandita Hazarika, and field staff toured project sites of the Chester/WCS Darwin Elephant Coexistence project in Sumatra (17-024) in May-June 2011. In September 2011, the four team members interacted with NGOs (*Space for Giants*, *Oi Pejeta Conservancy* in Laikipia and *Elephant Trust*, Amboseli) and individual (Winnie Kiiru, Amboseli). The team also had consultations with Kenya Wildlife Service officers in Amboseli on HEC mitigation.

Publications: Davies, TE, Wilson, S, Hazarika, N, Chakrabarty, J, Das, D, Hodgson, D & Zimmermann, A. (2011) Effectiveness of intervention methods against crop-raiding elephants. *Conservation Letters*.4:346-354

One more paper is in press and three further are in various stages of preparation for peer-reviewed journals,

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months.

Floods from July to September hampered the mitigation activities, chilli plants in Sonitpur suffered heavy losses. June to August also being the season for agricultural operations, community members were unavailable for capacity building programmes. Sudden *bandhs* (strike outs) and road blockades related to local political disturbances posed problems in completion of state wide surveys and selection new project villages in eastern Assam. However, we expect to fulfil our commitments without any major changes in the timetable and budget.

Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? n/a

Discussed with LTS: n/a

Formal change request submitted: n/a

Received confirmation of change acceptance n/a

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year? Yes X No

Estimated carryforward request: £6000

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document. Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with LTS International directly. Please send your completed form by email to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report