

# People in Conservation

## Community Conserved Areas in India



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## CCAs for Forest Conservation

The Gond tribal community in Mendha (Lekha) village of Gadchiroli District, Maharashtra, initiated protection and *de facto* control over 1800 hectares of forest over two decades ago. In the process, the villagers have prevented a paper mill from destroying bamboo stocks, stopped forest fires, and promoted the sustainable extraction of NTFPs. Some hunting continues, but the forest harbours significant wildlife populations, including the endangered central Indian giant squirrel. This initiative has inspired several neighbouring villages that are also now preserving their forests.

Jardhargaon village in Uttaranchal has regenerated and protected 600-700 hectares of forest, revived hundreds of varieties of agricultural crops, and created synergistic links between agricultural and wild biodiversity.

In the same state, traditional efforts by Van Panchayats, like Makku, are protecting vast areas of high altitude pasturelands and forests, and helping to revive populations of leopards, bears and other species. Villagers in Shankar Ghola, in Assam, are protecting forests that contain the highly threatened Golden Langur.

Community forestry initiatives in several thousand villages of Orissa have regenerated or protected tens of thousands of hectares of forests, including Dangejheri's forest, managed entirely by women. Elephants are reported to be now using some of these forests.

Large areas have been conserved as forest and wildlife reserves in Nagaland by various tribes, with over 100 villages (such as Khonoma, Luzuphuhu, Chizami and Sendenyu) managing hundreds of sq.km of forest, including the Khonoma Tragopan and Wildlife Sanctuary. These efforts often involve the integration of customary and official law, sometimes even the granting of full legal ownership over a CCA. In Tokpa Kabui village, Churachandpur District, of the adjacent state of Manipur, 600 hectares of regenerated village forest have been preserved in the Loktak Lake catchment by the Ronmei tribe. These unofficial protected areas provide critical refuge for many endangered birds, including Blyth's tragopan, Grey sibia, Beautiful sibia, Grey peacock pheasant, Rufous-necked hornbill and White-naped yuhina. Villagers also report sighting other rare species in their CCAs, including the Spotted linsang, Tiger, Leopard, Wild dog, Stump-tailed macaque and Asiatic black bear.

With help from the NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), many villages in Alwar district have restored the water regime, regenerated forests and, in one case (Bhaonta-Kolyala), declared a "public wildlife sanctuary". Grassroots mobilization has also helped to save large scale ecosystems that may contain CCAs. Several large hydroelectric projects, such as those in Bhopalpatnam- Ichhampalli (Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh), Bodhghat (Chhattisgarh), and Rathong Chu (Sikkim), which would have submerged valuable forest ecosystems and wildlife habitats, have been stalled by mass tribal movements. Some of these have preserved areas equal to or larger than many official protected areas.

<sup>1</sup>For reasons of convenience the term 'community' is used in this paper to include indigenous peoples, nomadic communities and other local communities

Top right  
*Leaders of the village of Sendenyu, Nagaland, outside their people's sanctuary*

Bottom right  
*Forests conserved by the village of Chizami, Nagaland*

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*The all-women forest protection committee of Dangejheri, Orissa*

Cover  
*Blackbuck feel quite safe as they are zealously protected at Buguda, a village in Orissa.*

**Community conserved areas (CCAs) are forests, wetlands, coastal and marine areas, grasslands, or other ecosystems and wildlife populations managed and conserved by local communities<sup>1</sup> for a variety of reasons.**

**Like many countries around the world, India has a rich history and diversity of CCAs. There are thousands of examples nationwide. These range from sacred groves and landscapes protected for centuries, to more recent initiatives at regenerating and protecting forests: conservation of bird nesting or wintering sites, protection of sea turtle nesting beaches, safeguarding ecosystems against 'developmental' threats, and others. These areas provide immense ecological, social, and economic benefits, including the conservation of threatened species and ecosystems, corridors for wildlife, as well as water and livelihood security for communities.**

**Although many CCAs are much older than state-sanctioned protected areas, they do not receive adequate support (legal, political, financial or technical), recognition or documentation from government and civil society. On the contrary, they face serious threats.**

**Lessons from CCAs can provide important insights for resolving conflicts and improving the management of official protected areas.**

**A number of legal provisions in India could provide backing to CCAs, with appropriate changes. India also needs to implement provisions regarding CCAs that are now incorporated under the international Convention on Biological Diversity.**



## What are CCAs?

Nature conservation is often understood to happen only within the limited boundaries of protected areas, managed by government agencies. These are conceived as islands of conservation where any form of human intervention is considered harmful for conservation. In contrast to this model, yet complementing its very cause, are thousands of 'unofficial' protected areas across the globe, managed and sustained by ordinary people. In fact, indigenous, mobile, and local communities have played a critical role in conserving a variety of natural environments and species for millennia, for various economic, cultural, spiritual and aesthetic purposes.

There are many of these Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) around the world today. CCAs can be defined as *natural and modified ecosystems (with minimal to substantial human influence) – providing significant biodiversity, ecological services and cultural values– voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and other local communities through customary laws or other effective means.*

Hundreds of such examples have been documented, but many more are yet to be unearthed. These efforts range from the continued traditional protection of sacred sites, to a revived interest and engagement of communities in protecting their natural resources, to community attempts at saving natural habitats from the penetration of destructive commercial and industrial forces (see side panels on page 2,4,6,8 and 10). Historical practices of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources embodied in many CCAs are much older than government-managed protected areas, yet they are often neglected and seldom recognised within official conservation systems. Consequently, many face enormous threats to their existence.

## What are the key characteristics of CCAs?

Though they are enormously diverse, all CCAs exhibit at least the following features:

- ▶ Local communities depend on these ecosystems for livelihood, economic, cultural, religious, and/or ethical reasons.
- ▶ Communities are major players in the management, decision-making and implementation process.
- ▶ Community efforts lead to the conservation of habitats, species, ecological services, and associated cultural values, although explicit management objectives are frequently for other reasons. These include livelihood or water security, spiritual sustenance, etc.

Community initiatives are site specific in their approach and varied in their origin. Methods of use, regulation and management of natural resources differ significantly from site to site. Evolution of these methods depends on the nature of the community, the type of resource, and other local political and economic factors.

In their origin, CCAs can be classified into three categories (with many CCAs displaying a mix of origins):

- a. Local community initiated, when faced with resource scarcity, ecological hardships like landslides and drought, or external threats like dams and mining, or as a continuation of traditional practices, or due to an ethical desire to protect nature, or concern for a particular species.
- b. Civil society initiated, to help communities overcome resource scarcity crises, to fight social injustice, or to enhance biodiversity conservation.
- c. State-sponsored, as part of government schemes, or to save ecosystems from threats.



## CCAs for Wetland and Coastal/ Marine Habitat Conservation

Uttar Pradesh is a locus of traditional wetlands conservation. In Amakhera village of Aligarh district lies a wetland used traditionally for irrigation and fishing. The wetland hosts a large number of migratory birds, which villagers are careful not to disturb. Patna Lake in Etah District is home to up to 100,000 water birds in a favourable season. The lake, declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1991, has been protected for centuries as a sacred pond. Sareli village in Kheri District supports a nesting population of over 1000 Openbill storks, considered harbingers of a good monsoon. As they feed on snails, villagers consider them useful in controlling disease-spreading Helminths.

Communities in hundreds of villages across India have protected heronries. At Kokkare Bellur, Karnataka, villagers offer protection against hunting and untoward treatment, sometimes even foregoing their tamarind yield so that nesting birds are not disturbed. The birds are considered a sign of good fortune and also provide them with guano (bird excreta) for their agricultural fields. A NGO, Mysore Amateur Naturalists, is helping the village youth to carry on the tradition. In Tamil Nadu, a classic example is the 700 hectare Chittarangudi tank, built in 1800. Chittarangudi attracts, storks, ibises, herons, egrets, cormorants and other migratory birds. Villagers do not allow any hunting or stealing of bird eggs. They go to the extent of not bursting crackers during Diwali, and avoiding commercial fishing. Local communities are protecting similar tanks throughout coastal and wetland regions of India. (See side panel on page 6 - CCAs for Individual Species Protection for more examples). Fisherfolk in Mangalajodi and other villages at the Chilika Lagoon, Orissa, are protecting hundreds of thousands of waterfowl (once extensively hunted). Some have also assisted authorities in stopping destructive aquaculture projects, thus helping to protect this unique ecosystem. Today, villagers are promoting alternative sources of income through tourism and sustainable fishing. A number of coastal communities are protecting critical coastal wildlife habitats such as mangroves (in Orissa), and turtle nesting beaches (in Orissa, Goa, Kerala)(See side panel on page 6).

Such local conservation initiatives are complemented by heroic collective struggles by fisher communities across India to save coastal and marine ecosystems from destructive development activities, such as a demand for a ban on commercial trawling, and fighting for implementation of the Coastal Regulation Zone notification.

Top right  
Kheechan village harbours thousands of Demoiselle cranes every year

Bottom right  
Several endangered birds such as the Great Indian bustard have thrived in traditionally managed pastures

Page 5  
Villagers go about their daily chores as storks nest and roost on the tree-tops, in Kokkare Bellur, Karnataka

## Why are CCAs important?

### For conservation, CCAs:

- Protect critical ecosystems and biodiversity hotspots.
- Form sanctuaries for threatened plant and animal species.
- Provide corridors and linkages for plant and animal movement between official protected areas.
- Maintain essential environmental benefits and services, especially water flows and quality.
- Facilitate synergistic links between agricultural biodiversity and wildlife.
- Promote sophisticated ecological knowledge systems, often combining traditional and new knowledge.
- Embody indigenous and local communities' resistance to 'destructive' development.
- Offer insights on the integration of customary and statutory laws in conservation systems.
- Provide useful examples for resolving conflicts between protected areas management and local people.

### For communities, CCAs:

- Enhance long-term livelihood security and opportunities.
- Provide economic benefits from the sustainable harvest and sale of aquatic resources and non-timber forest products, and from activities such as eco-tourism.
- Spread awareness and empower villagers to gain control over land, water and forests; as well as over developmental and other political processes affecting their lives.
- Help build local capacity and access information that communities can use to influence processes affecting their lives.



- ▶ Enhance community cohesiveness, which in turn helps communities establish more locally appropriate development processes in such areas as education, health and finance.
- ▶ Promote greater social and economic equity within communities, especially when individuals from underprivileged sections are involved in or lead the initiative.

### **What factors are needed to sustain CCAs?**

#### **Security of Tenure**

For a community to effectively conserve its natural resources, it must have a sense of responsibility or custodianship towards them. This develops through economic or cultural interaction and association with these resources. The most successful community conservation initiatives are often those where the communities enjoy full legal ownership or control over an area, such as in Nagaland and parts of Uttaranchal, or strong *de facto* control over resources, as is the case with many forest CCAs in Orissa and Maharashtra.

#### **A Favourable Social Context**

Conservation is a part of livelihood insurance, but it is also deeply rooted in other social dynamics. On the one hand, community conservation initiatives may actually lead to social reforms (such as greater equity or empowerment). Conversely, social reform efforts could promote the conservation of natural resources. It is essential to understand that conservation cannot be isolated from other social, economic and political processes of the community.

#### **An Informed, Transparent, and Impartial Decision-Making Process**

A transparent and impartial process of decision-making with the involvement of as many members of the community as possible, are essential features of successful, sustained community initiatives. Abuse of

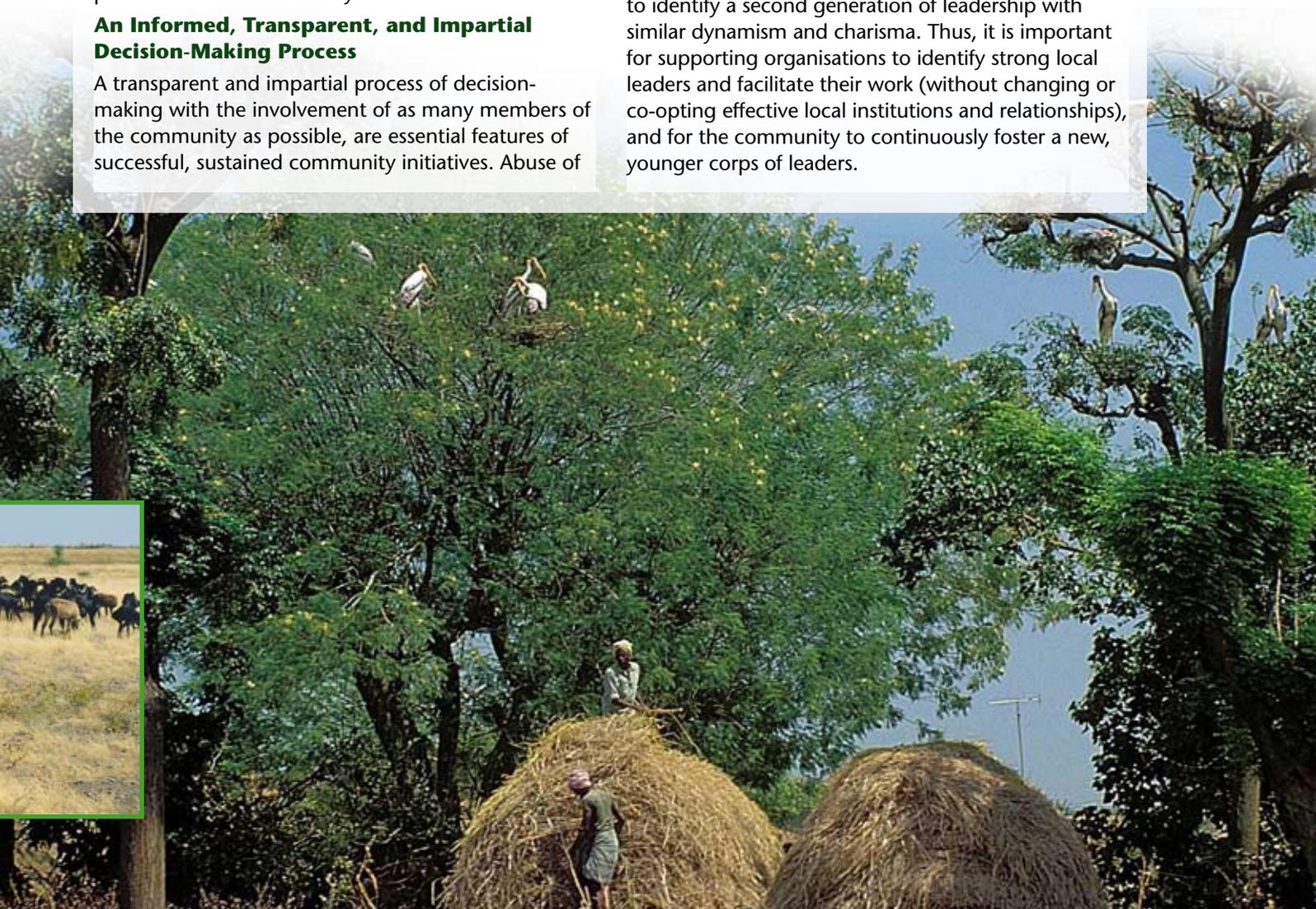
collective funds, or other forms of social and power inequities, often threaten or undermine conservation efforts. Successful community initiatives share an open, just system of decision-making and accounting, where records are regularly disclosed at village council meetings. Through such open processes, CCA initiatives have resolved troubling issues as encroachments, forest fires, poaching and timber smuggling.

#### **Effective Collaboration with Outsiders**

In many CCAs, villagers have demanded that resources be managed jointly with government officials or NGOs. Here, communities realise the difficulty of 'going it alone', especially in the face of political and commercial pressures. Communities expect that partners in joint management should play an active but equal role, that of a facilitator rather than a dominating ruler or policeperson. External partners are also expected to contribute significantly at community discussion forums, by raising awareness and introducing information and perspectives from the outside world.

#### **Strong Local Leadership Capacity**

In most successful community initiatives, local leaders have played a crucial role, often driving conservation efforts. Such leaders are typically inclined towards the larger social good. They may not be traditional or political leaders, but those who touch the soul of the community and motivate them toward change, often at tremendous personal cost. When such leaders move on, many communities find it difficult to identify a second generation of leadership with similar dynamism and charisma. Thus, it is important for supporting organisations to identify strong local leaders and facilitate their work (without changing or co-opting effective local institutions and relationships), and for the community to continuously foster a new, younger corps of leaders.



## CCAs for Individual Species Protection

Protection of sea turtle eggs, hatchlings and nesting sites by fisherfolk communities is taking place at Kolavipaalam, Kerala, Galjibag and Morjim in Goa, and Rushikulya in Orissa. At Rushikulya, fisherfolk used to collect the eggs for consumption or sale. Local youths learned of the threatened status of the Olive ridley turtles, and stopped the collection of eggs. They registered themselves as the Rushikulya Sea Turtle Protection Committee, and constructed an interpretation centre. Their conservation ethos has spread to neighbouring villages such as Gokharkuda, and some villagers are now earning an income from tourism. In 2006, over 100,000 turtles are reported to have nested at Rushikulya.

Youth clubs from the villages around Loktak Lake (Manipur) have formed the Sangai Protection Forum to conserve the greatly endangered Brow-antlered deer, which is endemic to this wetland. They take part in the management of the Keibul Lamjao National Park, which forms the core of the lake.

The Buddhist Morpa community the Sangti Valley of Arunachal Pradesh has traditionally co-existed with the Blacknecked crane (greatly endangered in India), whose insect-feeding habits have led the community to view them as a harbinger of better rice yields.

Villagers in Kheechan, Rajasthan, provide refuge to a wintering population of 10,000 Demoiselle cranes. They ungrudgingly spend huge amounts annually to feed them grains.

The Bishnois, a community in Rajasthan famous for its self-sacrificing defence of wildlife and trees, continue strong traditions of conservation. In neighbouring Punjab, lands belonging to the Bishnois have been declared the Abohar Sanctuary in recognition of their wildlife value. At all the Bishnoi sites, Blackbuck and Chinkara are abundant.

There are a few other sites where Blackbuck can be seen grazing freely with domestic livestock. At Buguda village in Ganjam District, Orissa, inhabitants have been protecting Blackbucks for centuries. Fifty years ago the efforts were intensified by a few village elders who formulated strict penalties when they realized that incidents of hunting by outsiders were on the rise. Today many agricultural fields lie uncultivated, due to water scarcity and crop damage by Blackbuck. Yet the resolve to protect the species is strong. Buguda was recently awarded the Chief Minister's award for wildlife conservation.

Andhra Pradesh is rich in nesting sites for water birds. In Veerapuram village, Painted storks, pelicans and White ibises have been nesting since time immemorial, at times exceeding 5,000 in number. Villagers perceive their arrival as a good omen and protect them. Pedullupalle village of Cuddapah District protects Painted storks, White ibises, and cormorants, which have been nesting here for over a century. Nellapattu and Vedurapattu, in Nellore district, have been visited by Openbilled storks, White ibises, and cranes since ancient times. Some of these species feed at the neighbouring Pulicat Lake and nest on the tamarind trees at Vedurapattu. Villagers have zealously looked after them, with women even taking care of injured and fallen chicks and sending them to the neighbouring Tirupati National Park. Due to its ecological importance, Nellapattu was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1997.

## What challenges do CCAs face?

### External Challenges (factors outside of the conserving community):

- Educational systems do not emphasise or even acknowledge local value systems, alienating youth from local cultures and ecosystems.
- Intrusions by dominant religions often have serious impacts on local value systems and traditional conservation practices (especially among indigenous/tribal communities).
- Locally specific traditional institutions managing CCAs are often undermined by centralised political systems. Even well intentioned government initiatives to support conservation can involve the cooption of local functions and powers, or the establishment of new, alien bodies, rather than bolstering existing institutions. Thus, government efforts at devolution often only mean the transfer of power from distant political strongholds to local political strongholds.
- Global economic policies and market forces make it difficult for communities to establish and maintain local and decentralized economic systems and markets, affecting their financial sustainability.
- CCAs that contain commercially valuable resources (e.g., timber, fauna, minerals) are often encroached upon or threatened by commercial users, land grabbers, resource traffickers or individual community members.
- Direct threats are felt where conserved or sacred lands are part of the land leased out or earmarked for development activities, such as hydroelectric dams or mining, without consulting local populations.
- CCAs are not recognised within legal frameworks or by the political system. This hampers community efforts and renders traditional powers ineffective at resisting external pressures.



Right  
Gram sabha of Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra, discussing forest conservation issues  
Page 7  
Community conserved forests of Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra

Furthermore, community conservation efforts inside official protected areas are not recognized and have often degenerated.

- ▶ Conservationists' and governments' attitudes toward some ecological issues – for instance, that all shifting cultivation practices are harmful to forests – may differ substantially from those of local communities, and therefore impede local management practices and autonomy.

### **Internal Challenges (factors within the conserving community):**

- ▶ Communities are often highly stratified, with many decisions made by the dominating sections of society (men, large landowners, "upper" castes) without considering their impacts on the less privileged (women, landless, "lower" castes). CCA efforts controlled by such powerful sections may appear successful in the short run. In the long run however they may not sustain themselves under conditions of growing dissatisfaction of marginalized groups, such as women, scheduled castes and ethnic minorities.
- ▶ Market forces have deeply penetrated local economies, increasing local material aspirations and individualism, and weakening traditional value systems.
- ▶ Community conservation may not always address the issue of overall biodiversity conservation, as species that are not in use by the community (because they are either unknown or deemed undesirable) may not be given sufficient attention.
- ▶ There are many communities where hunting is still deeply entrenched, both spiritually and culturally. In some CCAs, over-hunting remains an unresolved problem.
- ▶ Many communities do not have adequate management skills and, therefore, rely heavily on outsiders for administrative, accounting, marketing and other functions.

- ▶ Many communities are not adequately prepared for the sudden empowerment resulting from external efforts to devolve power. Any devolution process thus needs to go hand-in-hand with capacity building.

The above-mentioned factors are constraints to be dealt with while extending support to CCAs. But they are *not* intractable situations that would make effective community conservation impossible, and should *not* be used as an excuse to not provide CCAs the recognition and support they deserve.

### **How are CCAs being supported in India?**

Though CCAs have been in existence from time immemorial, their recognition by the modern conservation movement is very recent. Some factors that have contributed to their official acknowledgement, include:

1. A more vocal demand for recognition by the conserving communities themselves, and by grassroots organisations working with them; such as Vasundhara and Regional Centre for Development Cooperation (RCDC) in Orissa, Kashtakari Sangathana and Vrikshmitra in Maharashtra, and Seva and Viksat in Gujarat.
2. Efforts by NGOs and individuals to promote and facilitate local community action for conservation; such as Nature Conservation Foundation, World Wide Fund for Nature - India, Wildlife Trust of India, Samrakshan, Ashoka Trust for Research on Ecology and Environment, Foundation for Ecological Security, Kalpavriksh and others, and researchers from institutions such as Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Nature Conservation, and Wildlife Institute of India.
3. Documentation and popularisation of CCAs at national and international forums by organisations such as Kalpavriksh and the Centre for Science and Environment.



## Sacred Sites as CCAs

Sacred groves and landscapes are found throughout India, serving to protect rare and endemic species, as well as critical biodiversity assemblages. Such sites also help meet the religious, cultural, political, economic, health and psychological needs of communities. Local livelihood needs are sometimes met through restricted harvesting of biomass. Sacred forests (*orans*) in the desert regions of Rajasthan, are typically managed by the *gram sabhas* (village assemblies). Some are open to limited grazing by livestock. *Orans* are important components in the recharge of aquifers in the desert, where every single drop of water is precious. In most Orans, particularly in western Rajasthan, the dominant tree, *Prosopis cineraria* or *Khejari*, is worshipped for its immense value, as the tree enriches soil nitrogen, and during drought and famine, its bark is mixed with flour for consumption.

The Khasi Hills of Meghalaya are characterised by pockets of rich biodiversity that have been protected by the Khasi tribe and form the basis of nature worship practices in the area, manifested in the trees, forests, groves and rivers. The Khasi people believe that those who disturb the forest will die, and that sacred animals such as the tiger bring about prosperity, happiness and well-being. In fact, the people of Thaianing believe that the destruction of their forest by their forefathers has caused 'good luck' (i.e. the tiger) to leave, leading directly to suffering due to a scarcity of medicinal plants, wood, water and fertile soils. Sacred groves are often quite limited in size, but there are at least 40 of them in Meghalaya (out of total recorded 79) that range from 50 to 400 hectares, including the best known Mawphlang sacred grove at 75 hectares.

There are several thousand sacred groves in Maharashtra, some still managed well, others under grave threat. These include, the famous Bhimashankar and Ahupe *deorais* in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary; Durgubai Cha Kila and others between Bhimashankar and Kalsubai Harishchandragad wildlife sanctuaries and so on. Ajeevali village in Pune district manages a protected site for both spiritual and commercial significance. About 16 hectares in size, the grove is dedicated to the Tiger Goddess *Waghjai* and valued for its abundance of Fishtail palm trees, which are used to produce *maadi*, a popular local liquor. Revenue from the sale of *maadi* is used for village welfare activities. The palms are not harmed in the extraction process and the community restricts removal of all other forest products from the grove.

Studies have shown that many groves in Meghalaya, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh, among other states, harbour rich floral and faunal biodiversity. In fact, the biological spectrum of groves in Kerala closely resembles the typical spectrum of tropical forest biodiversity. For example, one grove occupying only 1.4 sq.km was found to contain 722 species of angiosperm, compared with 960 species occurring in 90 sq.km of the Silent Valley forest.

4. Extension of legal and other assistance to CCAs by the above-mentioned NGOs.
5. Lobbying for greater governmental and legal support for such initiatives by many of the above-mentioned organisations and others. As a result, the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act 2002 incorporated two new types of protected areas: *Community Reserves* and *Conservation Reserves* (see below).

## What laws and policies are relevant to CCAs?

Some legal and policy provisions that could support CCAs, either as they are or with suitable amendments, are:

### Indian Forest Act (1927)

Provides for the declaration of Village Forests that can be handed over to local communities for use and management while ownership remains with the government. This provision has not been used much and there appears to be a general reluctance by state governments to implement it.

### The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act of 1972

Incorporates two new categories of PAs (in addition to national parks and sanctuaries, which are not compatible with CCAs) for which community participation in conservation is envisaged: Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves. However, these categories remain quite restrictive. Community reserves (CRs) are applicable only to community and private lands, whereas most CCAs in India are on government-owned lands (the state having taken over most common property lands since colonial times). Moreover, the Act specifies a uniform institutional structure for managing CRs, which may stifle the diverse range of institutional and



Top right  
Mating Olive ridley turtles off the coast of Rushikulya, Orissa

Bottom Right  
Youth of Rushikulya and Gokharkuda, Orissa, who have formed sea turtle protection groups

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Dense forests conserved in the Durgubai cha Killa sacred grove, Maharashtra

customary structures/rules that communities have created. India's Ministry of Environment and Forests is in the process of drafting guidelines for effective implementation of these categories.

### **Environment Protection Act 1986**

Under this Act sites can be declared ecologically sensitive areas (ESAs), helping to restrict environmentally destructive activities. However, this provision has not been used by local communities, presumably out of ignorance of such a legal provision.

### **National Forest Policy of 1988 and JFM Guidelines**

Specifies that meeting the livelihood needs of local people should be placed above national industrial and commercial interests. It also emphasises the need for participatory conservation mechanisms (including participation by women) to meet this objective. This policy was translated into action in 1990 through the Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme. Official figures indicate that millions of hectares of forest are being regenerated as part of this programme. However, JFM has also been criticised for being top-down rather than promoting existing community efforts and devolution of authority. In 2000, a Government of India circular recommended that self-initiated community efforts be brought under the JFM scheme and that relevant community institutions be called JFM committees. This blanket recommendation ignores the diversity of local conditions and traditional institutions. However, some CCAs have used the JFM programme to obtain recognition and funds for their initiative.

### **Panchayati Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996**

Emphasises a more decentralised system of governance to rural bodies, like *panchayats* (village

councils) and *gram sabhas* (village assemblies) in predominantly tribal ('scheduled') areas. PESA confers the ownership and decision-making rights over non-timber forest products (NTFP) to local institutions. The Act also mandates consultation with local communities regarding many developmental and other issues. Unfortunately, government forests and protected areas have been excluded from the jurisdiction of the Act, and most states have been reluctant to push for its implementation.

### **Biological Diversity Act in 2002**

Formulated as a response to the Convention on Biological Diversity, this Act emphasises the participation of local communities in the conservation and use of biodiversity. It provides for the declaration of Biodiversity Heritage Sites, which could in theory be used by communities involved in biodiversity conservation. However, to date there is no clear definition or guideline for this category.

### **The Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016)**

Emphasises the role of people in conservation. The Plan incorporates time-bound targets to achieve involvement of local people in protected area management, and encouragement of CCAs. However, no efforts have so far been made towards implementation of these goals.

### **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan draft, 2004**

Sets out detailed strategies for conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of biodiversity, linking to the Biological Diversity Act and the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was produced through a countrywide participatory process, and advocates a major role for CCAs. Unfortunately, though finalised in 2004, as of mid-2006 it remains unaccepted by the government.



## CCAs in the International Context

Recognition of the role of communities in conservation has been rather recent at both international and national levels. However, participatory conservation has also rapidly occupied a central focus, largely due to two key international events held in 2003 and 2004.

*The Fifth World Parks Congress*, organised by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in September 2003 in Durban, South Africa, was the biggest ever gathering of conservationists (with over 4000 participants). Among its major outputs were the "Durban Accord and Action Plan", the "Message to the Convention on Biological Diversity", and over 30 recommendations on specific topics (including the roles of tourism, governance, spiritual values, gender, poverty, CCAs, and mobile/indigenous people in protected areas). All of these outputs strongly stressed the central role of communities in conservation, by respecting their customary and territorial rights, and vesting them with decision-making authority. The biggest breakthrough was the recognition of CCAs as a valid model for conservation. ([www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003/index.htm](http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003/index.htm))

*The Seventh Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2004, had governments all over the world committing to move towards participatory conservation with the recognition of community rights. One of the main outputs was a detailed and ambitious Programme of Work (POW) on Protected Areas, which incorporated, for the first time, provisions on 'Governance, Participation, Equity and Benefit Sharing'. The POW requires all countries to recognise various governance forms for protected areas, including CCAs. Since the CBD is a legally binding instrument for signatories, the POW is of great significance in making countries identify, recognise and support CCAs. ([www.biodiv.org/meetings/cop-07/default.asp](http://www.biodiv.org/meetings/cop-07/default.asp))

An international network under the IUCN called the *Theme on Indigenous and Local Communities, Equity and Protected Areas (TILCEPA)* played a key role in both of the above. TILCEPA is a working group of two commissions of the IUCN: the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and The Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP). It has strongly advocated for the recognition of communities' role in conservation by facilitating the participation of communities in international events; introduced the concept and practice of CCAs to the international community, including inserting relevant text into the CBD POW; and produced materials in various languages for spreading awareness. ([www.tilcepa.org](http://www.tilcepa.org)).

Examples in side panels on pages 2,4,6,8 and 10 are from the *Directory of Community Conserved Areas in India*, under preparation by Kalpavriksh.

Right

Rules governing the people's wildlife sanctuary in Bhaonta-Kolyala, Rajasthan

Page 11 inset

Crop diversity conserved and utilized by farmers of the Beej Bachao Andolan, Uttaranchal

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Youth of Jardhagaon, Uttaranchal, in front of their community conserved forest

Back cover background

Community conserved wetlands of Mangalajodi, Orissa, are packed with waterfowl in winter

Back cover Inset

Volunteers of the Mangalajodi village bird conservation group, with Wild Orissa members

## What more is needed to promote CCAs in India?

### Political and Policy Imperatives

- Full political support for CCAs and their governing institutions (with appropriate changes to enhance internal equity), at the local, state and national levels.
- Official recognition and inventory of existing CCAs.
- Clear guidelines, developed in consultation with communities, for external agencies who wish to support or help establish CCAs.
- Clear mechanisms for resolving conflicts between CCAs and other parties (i.e., private corporations, non-sanctioned users, government) devised in consultation with the local communities.
- Enhanced mechanisms for increasing local participation in official (government) conservation initiatives.
- Participatory planning processes at the national and state levels that acknowledge the efforts of communities to protect species and ecosystems, and strongly consider what communities do and don't want for their area, through local consultations and transparent public hearings.

### Legal Reforms

- Amendments in, or further elaboration of, the laws listed above, to make them more supportive to CCAs. This includes amendment of the Community Reserves provision of the Wild Life Act to encompass community conserved government lands as also to empower a diversity of community institutions.
- Clarification of tenure and access rights for communities relating to CCAs and their resources.
- Further acceptance of customary law, and its integration with statutory law, relating to CCAs.
- Reconciling of CCAs with official protected areas and other government land designations.



## Technical and Economic Assistance (as requested by the relevant communities)

- ▶ Increased support by government agencies and NGOs for creation and maintenance of CCAs.
- ▶ Training in basic accounting, marketing, management and leadership skills.
- ▶ Training in appropriate resource/wildlife management and monitoring techniques.
- ▶ Direct financial assistance and credit for establishment and maintenance of CCAs.
- ▶ Facilitation of regional cooperation and the building of coalitions/federations among CCAs.
- ▶ Promotion of sustainable economic and livelihood options (e.g., processing and marketing of NTFP and aquatic produce, and community-based ecotourism).
- ▶ Training and capacity building in relevant laws/policies

## Social Programs

- ▶ Awareness and training programmes for communities, on the importance of biodiversity conservation in the national and global context, gender and social equity, local governance issues, and rights with respect to resources and protected areas.
- ▶ Support for youth (leadership) programmes, and other local conservation groups and initiatives.
- ▶ Promotion, cataloguing and reinforcement of local knowledge and management systems.
- ▶ Identification and facilitating the involvement of marginalized groups, both within and outside of CCA communities.
- ▶ Social recognition and awards to exemplary CCA initiatives.

## Relevant Publications and Outputs

Balasinorwala, T., Kothari, A., and Goyal, M. (compilers). *Participatory Conservation: Paradigm Shifts in International Policy*. IUCN/TILCEPA/Kalpavriksh, Pune, 2004.

Borrini-Feyerabend, G., De Sherbinin, A., Diaw, C., Oviedo, G., and Pansky, D. (eds.), *Policy Matters, 12, special issue on Community Empowerment for Conservation*. CEESP- WCPA issue, 2003.

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Kothari, A., Pathak N., and Vania F. *Where Communities Care: Community Based Wildlife and Ecosystem Management in South Asia*. Kalpavriksh, Pune and IIED, London, 2000.

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*Communities Also Conserve! (July-September 2005)*

*Where Blackbucks Roam, Turtles Breed and Birds Fear no More (January-March 2006)*

*Birds and People: A Traditional Association (April-June 2006)*

Pathak, N., Kothari, A., and Balasinorwala, T. *The Naga Transformation: Conservation by Communities in Nagaland, India*. (Brochure). Kalpavriksh, Pune, 2006.

Shresth, S., and Devidas, S., *Forest Revival and Water Harvesting: Community Based Conservation in Bhaonta-Kolyala, Rajasthan, India*. Kalpavriksh, Pune and IIED, London, 2001.

TILCEPA. *Communities and Protected Areas: Papers presented at the Vth World Parks Congress*. A two-CD compilation of over 140 papers related to the theme on Communities and Equity, Durban, 2003.

TILCEPA *Briefing Notes and Information Papers*: A set of short briefing notes for distribution at international events (available at [http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/Wkg\\_grp/TILCEPA](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/Wkg_grp/TILCEPA)).

*Community Conserved Areas: a Bold Frontier for Conservation*

*Mobile Peoples and Conservation*

*Governance of Natural Resources*

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2006

Funded by  
**Bombay Natural History Society**  
Photographs by  
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