

Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group:

Intervention in Bhimashankar Wildlife Life Sanctuary:  
Documentation and Analysis

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# 1. Introduction

Forests provide vital services to human and non-human natures, but deforestation rates remain high even as more is demanded of them within the Anthropocene – defined as a geological epoch where human activity is the largest force altering the earth’s climate. At the 24<sup>th</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] Conference of Parties held in Poland in 2018, a special declaration further codified the critical role forests, protected or otherwise, play in abetting anthropogenic climate change (CoP24, 2018). Relatedly, 185 countries have ratified the Paris Agreement, which states that forests are “reservoirs of greenhouse gases and carbon sinks” (UNFCCC, 2015, p.4). Given this intensification of pressures on protected forests, it is vital to understand how existing protected forests and indigenous communities that live in and around these forests are withstanding these pressures. Furthermore, it is important for governments and civil society organisations that have a mandate to protect these forests to do so in consultation with the forest dwelling communities not only to promote environmental justice but also to ensure that protection (in whatever form it is occurring on the ground) is actually effective. This has been one of the main aims of the ‘Conservation and Livelihoods’ team at Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group (KV henceforth), a 40-year-old Indian environmental action and research group.

## 1.1 About Kalpavriksh and intervention objectives

KV is a non-profit organization working on environmental and social issues. The group began in 1979 with a campaign led by students to save Delhi's Ridge Forest. Based in Delhi and Pune, Kalpavriksh works on local, national and global levels, and is registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act (S-17439). KV believes that a country can develop meaningfully only when ecological sustainability and social equity are guaranteed, and a sense of respect for, and oneness with nature and fellow humans is achieved. It has the following 5 interventions:

- Conservation and Livelihoods Programme
- Environment Education Programme
- Urban Environment Programme
- Environment and Development Programme
- Alternative Confluences

To know about their work as please visit their website: [www.kalpavriksh.org](http://www.kalpavriksh.org)<sup>1</sup>

One of the forests that KV has been conducting its ‘conservation and livelihoods’ programme is the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary (BWLS henceforth) in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Among the 18 villages and hamlets that are located inside the sanctuary, KV has focused its intervention on 6 villages: Yelavali, (Garbewadi) Bhorgiri, Bhivegaon, Bhomale (Upper), Bhomale (Lower) and Kharpud. The intervention spans various areas of support ranging from helping the community<sup>2</sup> file for community forest rights<sup>3</sup> under the Forest Rights Act of 2006 (FRA henceforth) to co-creating alternate livelihoods such as growing indigenous rice varieties and harvesting honey. The intervention commenced in 2008 and is on-going as of September 2020, at the time of submitting this report. It began with a certain set of objectives; although over time they have altered in form and function in order to respond to the evolving ground realities. It can be, however, said the intervention has had two main objectives: a) implementing the FRA in the target villages ensuring that communities are allocated titles their rights; b) enhancing the conservation outcomes of BWLS by promoting a community-based conservation approach<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.2 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to record the trajectory of the intervention carried out by KV in the 6 villages with the village communities. The intervention also involved liaising with other necessary stakeholders such as the state administrative officials (the Forest Department, the Tribal Ministry, District collector’s office, Sub-divisional office),

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<sup>1</sup> This description is largely taken from the reports given by KV.

<sup>2</sup> Community here refers to the members of the villages in BWLS where KV has carried out this intervention, depending on the intervention phase it could include 2 villages or 6 villages.

<sup>3</sup> Under the Forest Rights Act (FRA, 2006), communities living in and around forests (as defined by the government) are entitled to claim access and ownership rights to forests (and their produce e.g. NTFP, grazing, water bodies). Broadly, access rights fall under what is known as ‘community forest rights’ and ownership rights fall under ‘community forest resource’ rights. For more details please see: <https://tribal.nic.in/FRA/data/FRARulesBook.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Also referred to a joint protected area management approach in KV’s earlier reports.

civil society organisations (CSOs henceforth) and individual researchers. The author's primary aim is to offer a comprehensive record of the various phases of the 12-year intervention KV has carried out in BWLS. A secondary aim is to conduct a preliminary analysis of this intervention based on the information provided to the author. Lastly, she offers some insights based on this process of recording and analysing the information provided to her, for the benefit of the KV team as they carry forward this intervention.

### 1.3 About BWLS

BWLS was notified by the Government of Maharashtra as a wildlife sanctuary in 1985 under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 (GoI, 1972). It falls within the Western Ghats region which is recognized as a global biodiversity hotspot (Myers, 2000) and is home to *Ratufa indica elphistonii*, sub species of the Indian Giant squirrel that is one of three threatened Indo-Malayan squirrel species. The particular sub-species found here is endemic to Bhimashankar. BWLS is also home to other mammals and birds species. The sanctuary is famous for its 14 sacred groves. These are patches of near virgin forests traditionally protected by the local people for spiritual and cultural reasons. Though large continuous forest tracts are few, the sanctuary shows an amazing matrix of different vegetation patterns such as the Deciduous, Semi-evergreen and Evergreen types of forests. Some of these forests form the catchment and origin of two important rivers of Maharashtra i.e. *Bheema* and *Ghod*, and also the upper catchment of three main tributaries of the river *Ulhas*. They form an important part of the upper catchment of River Krishna, of which the Ghod and the Bheema are tributaries.

The sanctuary is spread across two districts of Maharashtra: Pune and Thane. As per the official records, the area of BWLS is 130.78 sq. km (notified) (Pande & Pathak, 2003, p.326). For more details on the forest type, on its fauna and their threatened status, on its human habitations, on its management history going back to at least 200 years and for a map of the sanctuary, please see Pande (2003, p. 324-340).

## 2. Main sources of information and author's disclaimer on analysis.

Table 1: Sources of information

Sr no.	Name of the source (as received)	Type	Received from	Remarks
1	Proposal for AID Phase 2.draft 2 (as sent to Suchitra 24.03.09)	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Neema P. Broome	
2	Report for RSBP for exploratory phase. Final NP 02.11.2007	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Neema P. Broome	
3	Proposal for activities in 2011 (for funding) 17.05.2011	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Neema P. Broome	
4	Proposal for panchayat training programme to BDO (Doc centre Nov. 2011- Oct 2012)	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Neema P. Broome	
5	Yelavali ecotourism article, second draft 03.03.2014 (based on MB's comments) wtc	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Neema P. Broome	
6	Final Yearly Project phase V report Project321_Misereor e.V._Dec 2017 to Nov 2018	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Pradeep Chavan	
7	Janssens fund report form template	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Pradeep Chavan	
8	Project Report_KNA foundation_April 2016 to January 2017 final(1)	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Pradeep Chavan	
9	Report Final for Ruffords SGP December 2010	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Pradeep Chavan	
10	Entire phase narrative report November 2014-2017	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Pradeep Chavan	
11	19 Images (multiple names)	PDF & JPG files	KV Staff – Pradeep Chavan	These cover different times and aspects of the intervention.
12	Progress Report on Project321_Misereor e.V._Nov 2011- Nov 2014.doc	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Milind Wani	
13	End of Project phase IV report Project321_Misereor e.V._Dec 2014 to Nov 2017	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Milind Wani	
14	Yearly Project phase V report Project321_Misereor e.V._Dec 2017 to Nov 2018	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Milind Wani	
15	Yearly Project phase V report Project321_Misereor e.V._Dec 2018 to Nov 2019	Microsoft Word Document	KV Staff – Milind Wani	

As all of the sources of information have been provided by KV, this document's contents including its analysis are highly informed by them: there has been no attempt to triangulate the data coming from these sources with other data sources as this was not the author's mandate. Outside of these written sources, the author also conducted interviews with following team members of KV who have been involved in BWLS intervention:

1. Neema Pathak Broome (involved since 2007) (interviewed on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)
2. Pradeep Chavan (involved since 2008) (interviewed on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Thus, the author has produced the following based on what KV has documented and on what staff members have shared with the author in the interviews. The report is thus a reflection of the author's understanding of the information offered to her by KV. It must be read and used keeping this caveat in mind.

A final point here is that though Theory of Change (ToC) and impact assessment (IA) language has sometimes been used, e.g. when using words like output, activities, outcomes these terms are not to be taken as per their technical definitions as understood within the ToC and IA literature. More often than not, their meaning is that of their generic meaning as used within the English language.

### 3. Phases of the intervention

The intervention officially began in 2008 and has been described as spanning 5 phases. It has spanned across 12 years having started in the middle of 2008 and is ongoing in September 2020<sup>5</sup>. A 6-month exploratory study, which also included meetings with villagers from certain villages in BWLS (e.g. Mhharbachiwadi and Siddhagad wadi<sup>6</sup>), was conducted in 2007. The duration of each phase (it appears to the author) has largely been determined by the funders and funding agency criteria so e.g. if a donor has been comfortable funding the activities for 3 years at a time, then that has been categorised by KV as one phase. Table 2 illustrates the different phases and associated funders. For the Phase 2, there are two funders whose funding spans have some overlap and between the period between January 2011 to October 2011 seems to have not been funded by any donor

Table 2: Phases of the BWLS Intervention

Phase Name	Years & Duration	Funding Agency	Key KV Staff, other key stakeholders involved	Remarks
Exploratory Study	Jun 2007 – Nov 2007, 6 months	Royal Society for Protection of Birds	Neema Pathak Broome (NPB henceforth), Sharmila Deo (environmental education in schools), Saili Palande (Research and information gathering, Plastic clean-up drive)	
Phase 1	Sep 2008 – Aug 2009, 12 months	AID, Bay Area	NPB? Pradeep?	
Phase 2	Sep 2009 – Dec 2010, 15 months	AID, Bay Area; Ruffords SGP	NPB, Pradeep Chavan (PC henceforth)	AID gave funds for the duration of Sep 2009 – Aug 2010. Ruffords SGP gave funds for a period from Jan 2010- Dec 2010
Phase 3	Nov 2011 – Oct 2014 (3 years)	Misereor E.V.	NPB, PC	KV staff team Milind Wani (MW) writes donor reports
Phase 4	Dec 2014 – Nov 2017 (3 years)	Misereor E.V.	NPB, PC	MW writes donor reports
Phase 5	Dec 2017 – Nov 2020 (3 years)	Misereor E.V.	NPB, PC	MW writes donor reports

Outside of these key phases, funds were also requested and used for other small projects such as a Panchayat training that was conducted in 2012 in partnership with the Block Development Office. Similarly, the Nilekani Foundation gave funds to conduct wild vegetable festivals in the 6 villages, mostly in Phase 5.

### 4. An overview of the intervention

<sup>5</sup> At the time of submitting this report

<sup>6</sup> These, however, are not the target villages that the intervention was eventually carried out in.

The KV intervention in the BWLS villages started with an exploratory phase in 2007. It is expected to continue at least till November 2020 when the current funding phase ends. As per the team's estimate, the intervention will in all probability continue for another 3 to 5 years: at least until the community receives titles to their forest rights and till sustainable livelihood opportunities for most of the villagers are created.

The decision to work BWLS was seen by KV as a way to enhance the conservation outcomes for the sanctuary, which was considered to be under some amount of threat. In 2007, KV noted that the presence of religious centres in BWLS, which attracted a large number of pilgrims, and the park's attraction as a picnic spot for tourists was leading to plastic pollution, pollution of water bodies, continuous disturbance to wildlife, illegal construction of temporary shops catering to tourists and solid waste pollution from the religious centres. In addition, there were other problems that typically afflict protected areas (PAs) in India such as timber smuggling and illegal hunting. All these issues were a source of concern especially as the sanctuary was and is home to a diverse variety of birds, animal and plant species. It is also home to tribal communities belonging primarily to Mahadev-Kolis, Katkaris, and Dhangars tribes - in 1991 about 3000 people from these tribes were living in and around the sanctuary's boundaries<sup>7</sup>. Despite the large number of tourists flowing into the sanctuary, most of the benefits of tourism were being realised by non-locals. Another slightly separate but related area of concern was that since 1985, when the sanctuary was notified, access rights of these tribes to the forest's natural resources (on which they were dependent for their subsistence and livelihood needs) had been restricted. This loss in access and the related fear of eviction from their lands had created a culture of distrust between the Forest Department and the villagers. In sum, considering these factors, the pressure to deserve the sanctuary was high: especially from state level political leaders who had vested interests in the region and saw de-reservation as an opportunity to boost infrastructure investment.

Given this context, KV's intervention was designed to help assess if a participatory community driven approach to conservation and local development could be promoted in BWLS: the emphasis being on mobilising communities to demand their rights as mandated under the then recently passed FRA (2006) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005; known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) from 2009)<sup>8</sup>. KV believed that working with and through the community would be the most sustainable way to further the conservation of BWLS in a way that could also benefit the community and that could restrict the co-optation of benefits (e.g. from the nature-based tourism and religious tourism) by outsiders or local elites. Given this, the central aim of KV's intervention has been to strengthen community governance processes and to create awareness with regards to laws and policies that directly influence the community and its relationship to the forests. Building on this, KV wanted to further promote a greater understanding of BWLS' ecological diversity within the villagers. All of these processes would eventually create the conditions for having a community owned conservation and management strategy in BWLS. It can be thus said that there were and remain two main objectives of KV's intervention: a) facilitating the implementation of the FRA and b) promoting a landscape-based community conservation approach in BWLS.

KV focused on 6 villages located in the Khed Taluka of the Pune district, which is one of the 2 districts in which the BWLS lies:

- a) In 2 of these – Bhorgiri (**one hamlet only?**) and Yelavali – KV started between 2008 and 2010 i.e. Phase 1 and Phase 2. These villages are located within the sanctuary;
- b) The remaining 4 – Bhivegaon, Bhomale (Upper), Bhomale (Lower) and Kharpud - are located around or on the borders of the sanctuary. Active work started with them in Phase 3.

The main reason to choose these villages was that the level of external support or intervention was low. All fall under the same sub-division, which also makes for geographical ease when conducting activities and monitoring progress. Relatedly, as per the team, the forests of these villages are contiguous and it, thus, made sense to work with these villages given that the ultimate aim is to have a community-based landscape approach to conservation for the entire sanctuary.

Over the 12 years of this intervention, its objectives and the methods used to meet these objectives have undergone some change. The focus, as per KV, has always been to reflect on the situation on the ground and then take action in

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<sup>7</sup> **Do we have a more recent official estimate of the population?**

<sup>8</sup> MGNREGA, formerly known as NREGA, was passed in 2005 to provide livelihood security especially to rural households by guaranteeing at least 100 (and now 150 days) per year of wage employment to adult members of the household.

line with those reflections and understandings. As one example of this, over the years KV intensified its work on empowering women and youth groups: this has helped these groups develop a shared sense of purpose and have an active say in local governance decisions. It has also helped women challenge patriarchal structures wherein women have often been excluded from key decisions made at the household and village level. Another example was the focus on creating sustainable livelihood opportunities<sup>9</sup> for the villagers so as to provide a source of income that is also less extractive of the natural resource base: e.g. growing wild vegetables, conserving local seed varieties, sustainably harvesting honey from the local bee species. As a final example here, KV has at times engaged directly with state administration authorities such as the Forest Department (FD henceforth), the Tribal Affairs Ministry (TD henceforth) and the Block Development Officials (BDO henceforth) given the huge stake they have in decisions concerning the FRA and on conservation. KV engaged with them directly by inviting them to local village events, providing capacity building support e.g. trainings on FRA, and in some cases liaised directly with certain office bearers on various matters linked to FRA, MGNREGA and other community development issues. Despite the complicated and challenging nature of this liaising, it has helped reduce the mistrust between these administrative authorities and the local community.

Broadly, over the 12 years KV's intervention has focussed on the following areas:

- a) Empowering and mobilising the community's women and youth;
- b) Facilitating local democratic governance (through formal and informal mechanisms) by building the community's capacities with a specific focus on the FRA;
- c) Implementing the FRA with an emphasis on claiming community-forest and community-forest-resource rights, tracking the progress of this implementation, its documentation, associated outreach and collaboration with other relevant stakeholders (other NGOs and CSOs);
- d) Creating and supporting local sustainable livelihoods: natural farming, harvesting honey, local seed conservation, wild vegetable production and consumption, eco-tourism development;
- e) Undertaking and promoting a landscape community conservation approach by involving all the necessary stakeholders (community, forest and district administration, researchers and other CSOs).

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<sup>9</sup> Or it can also be called - as KV does in some of its reports - integrating conservation and local livelihoods.

# 5. The intervention in detail

## **Note on phases:**

It must be stated that the separation of the intervention into phases has been done largely for the purpose of reporting and recording, and to some extent to take into account funding timelines. The move from one phase to another phase was often unnoticeable on the ground, and the intervention's design and progress was (and is) an outcome of a continuous process of reflection and reflexive action undertaken by KV and the community. Thus, the activities chosen were those that were deemed most suitable in light of the key objectives, while also taking into consideration the conditions and challenges present in each village. This means that although the central objectives of the intervention were and are to support FRA implementation and community conservation, the specific objectives in each phase at times vary. Furthermore, although KV had an initial set of objectives and had (in all probability) some ideas about how to achieve these objectives it appears that the team showed ample flexibility in reforming and refining its approach in consultation with the other CSOs and the community, the latter being urged to take ownership of all the programmes and activities. KV always attempted to collaborate with other governmental (Panchayat, Panchayat Samitee, Tehsildar Office & SDO, FD, TD) and non-governmental stakeholders (Jay Satguru SHG, Chaitnaya, Lok Panchayat, Kisan Sabha) without trying to impose its own ways on the process. Much of this seemed to have been brought about by facilitating several discussions with these stakeholders using a variety of formats and doing so at multiple scales. The flexibility of the funding agencies also allowed for this. Finally, and importantly, as is generally the case with processes of community mobilisation and empowerment, this journey that KV supported the BWLS villagers to embark on was not a straightforward one and in some instances, progress made has been lost as conflicts arose either within the community members<sup>10</sup> or at times between the FD and the community. In some cases, progress has been hindered by external factors such as state or national elections and in the current times by the COVID 19 pandemic.

In the records below for longer phases i.e. those spanning 3 years, a phase summary is also provided that describes the phase in brief.

### *5.1 Exploratory phase (Pre-intervention Phase) (June - November 2007)*

A 6-month exploratory study was carried out by the KV team in 2007 between the months of June and November. The main objective was to understand the threats facing BWLS, which amongst other things is an Important Bird Area in India. In addition to a secondary literature review, KV conducted field visits in a few BWLS villages that involved speaking to different groups e.g. social workers, researchers (individuals and organisations) in the area. Through these interactions and study, KV identified a few areas of support that could potentially have a positive impact on the sanctuary and on the local community. Specifically, the team identified the following areas of intervention:

- Environmental Education in schools (primary and secondary);
- Enhancing the coordination between different groups and individuals working in the area such as researchers, social workers, NGOs, local community organisations such as self-help groups so as to facilitate creating a shared vision for the region;
- Gathering ecological and socio-economic data about the villages and the sanctuary;
- Understanding and assessing the social and ecological impacts of the FRA in BWLS;
- Organising a plastic clean up drive and assessing the possibility of introducing alternate packaging material in the area given the large number of pilgrims that enter the sanctuary;
- Community based eco-tourism management for enhanced local livelihood and ecological security.

In this exploratory phase, as per the records mainly NPB, Saili Palande and Sharmila Deo from the KV staff team were involved. The main aim of the exploratory phase was to assess the role that KV could play in enabling a more participatory conservation practice in BWLS.

### *5.2 Phase 1 (September 2008 – December 2009)*

Based on the findings of the exploratory phase, KV commenced the first phase of its intervention in BWLS. Initially, it limited itself to 2 villages – Yelavali and Bhorgiri, which were chosen as they had thus far received minimal or negligible

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<sup>10</sup> An example of this is the opposition women faced from the men as women started asserting their rights and participating in local governance decisions.

external support from NGOs or governmental agencies. Initially, the plan was to work with Bhorgiri, but conditions there proved challenging: its community was politically active but fractured along mainstream political party lines. This meant that despite many attempts by KV, no noteworthy movement or community engagement was seen and, hence, KV decided to stop its activities there. Instead, the decision was made to work with Yelavali which is a smaller, remote village (comprising at the time 15 households) located within the sanctuary boundaries. In part because of these features, it had been subject to oppression from the FD. Yelavali's villagers showed relatively more interest in the objectives KV wanted to promote, and the community appeared to be cohesive enough to engage with KV's programmes. After commencing activities in Yelavali, KV decided to resume work with Bhorgiri as requests were made by the Bhorgiri women's self-help groups who had witnessed the success of the programmes in Yelavali.

More generally, it was evident from initial field visits and discussions with the villagers in both villages that local governance institutions were weak or non-existent: one of the consequences being that there was limited community interest in any process or activity linked to conservation and development. As a first step, KV started speaking to and getting together the villagers in each village to gauge their interest in programmes related to conservation and local development. Following an initial round of discussions, KV undertook the following activities during this period:

- a) *Community<sup>11</sup> based eco-tourism management* – This initiative received little support from the villagers and from the local forest administration; instead KV's learning was to help facilitate other village level development activities.
- b) *Supporting local youth groups* – In Bhorgiri, as mentioned above, community dynamics were (and remain) challenging. Initially, only some youth and women seemed to show some interest. KV supported the youth to get registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act (1860). In both villages with the youth groups, KV also discussed the existing government development schemes e.g. those under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (known as MGNREGA from 2009). Here it offered support in arranging for the requisite documents (e.g. caste certificates) that would make possible accessing these schemes.
- c) *FRA Implementation* – In Bhorgiri, which is in the wildlife sanctuary, KV found that villagers were afraid of claiming their rights as they felt that such information (i.e. details regarding villagers' customary rights to access forest produce) would be used by the FD to prove that these communities were damaging the forest and, hence, evict them. However, over time and in discussions with KV, the villagers were able to understand the purpose of the FRA. The youth group planned to use the existing mechanism of the *Gram Sabha* (village governance platform) as a way to promote FRA awareness. In Yelavali, things proved easier, and quickly a Forest Rights Committee<sup>12</sup> was formed. In partnership with ECONET (another NGO working in the region) and KV, Yelavali villagers were able to begin the process of filing up the claim forms (individual claim forms).
- d) *Documentation and revival of traditional cultural practices* – KV found that in BWLS villages there seemed to be growing disconnect and distancing of the community from its traditional customs and its local ecology. This was especially true for the tribal youth. KV thus planned to work with the community to document the innate ways of tribal life. KV further encouraged and joined the villagers in celebrating festivals e.g. *Holi* in traditional tribal ways. Additionally, KV worked towards reviving the practice of growing wild vegetables and promoted the same by organising a biodiversity festival in collaboration with Yelavali villagers (September 1, 2009).
- e) *Legal and governance support* - KV helped to increase the awareness of Acts such as FRA, the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) and the Biodiversity Act (2002) amongst the villagers; similarly they tried to increase awareness and create linkages between existing government schemes (such as MGNREGA) and sustainable livelihood opportunities<sup>13</sup> such as biodiversity conservation and rain water harvesting that the villagers could adopt. This required creating channels of communication between government officials (especially FD officials, tribal ministry officials, and district government representatives e.g. the Collector) in the area who are key stakeholders in taking these initiatives to fruition. KV oftentimes filed applications under the Rights to Information Act (2005)<sup>14</sup> to make transparent the information regarding the various Acts and schemes.

As is obvious from the above, the intervention's first phase involved working with a smaller section of the BWLS community (i.e. 2 villages) to understand the different motivations and hindrances that villagers faced when enhancing

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<sup>11</sup> Community here refers to villagers in the villages where the programmes were being run i.e. in Yelavali and in Bhorgiri.

<sup>12</sup> Forest Rights Committee is constituted by the Gram Sabha to assess the claims submitted.

<sup>13</sup> KV uses the term integrated conservation and livelihood opportunities in its reports. Here they are to mean the same i.e. livelihoods that respect the capacity of natural resource base, reducing its degradation and which can at times also help in its revival.

<sup>14</sup> Under the RTI, any citizen of India can request information from a public or state authority with regards to matters that affect her, information must be provided in 30 days.

their livelihood outcomes and when promoting conservation in BWLS at a landscape level. Vital to these objectives was the creation of stronger local democratic governance structures that KV laid much emphasis on.

### 5.3 Phase 2 (September 2009 – October 2010)

In Phase 2, KV continued to build upon its work in the 2 villages and intensified its focus on the following:

- a) Implementation of the FRA (filing claims, claiming the traditional and customary access rights, and developing plans to manage and conserve the natural resource base).
- b) Co-creating plans to link employment and forest conservation by exploring the provisions of existing legislations and schemes (e.g. the FRA, Biodiversity Act and MGNREGA).
- c) Promoting environmental education in the local schools that cater to tribal children to promote an understanding of the socio-ecological history of the region (workshops organised in schools, and also for the panchayats and villagers).
- d) Supporting and strengthening local governance institutions
- e) Supporting the villagers to organise tourism more effectively

To accomplish this, KV engaged in secondary research and worked collaboratively with the villagers; the latter included offering trainings, organising discussions with communities, organising cultural programmes and participating in the celebration of local festivals. All these are similar to the activities carried out in Phase 1. Additionally, KV liaised with necessary government bodies and officials to ensure that all stakeholders that influence conservation and development outcomes were consulted and included. The central goal was to build support for conservation amongst the community and to make conservation work for the community's benefit facilitating community conservation within BWLS<sup>15</sup>.

#### 5.3.1 On the implementation of the FRA:

In Yelavali village significant progress was made towards the implementation of the FRA. After claims were filed with the sub-divisional office<sup>16</sup>, KV facilitated the processes of verification of village boundaries, of assessing the village's natural resource availability, and of creating a use map (using participatory rural appraisal methodology). These being prerequisites for villagers claiming conservation and management rights as guaranteed under the FRA. Villagers were able to come up with a set of rules that would be collectively followed once the rights were granted; neighbouring villages were informed about these developments and the Conservator of Forests (Pune Wildlife Division) was also consulted. KV supported the villagers to take the steps necessary to help create a management and conservation plan<sup>17</sup> for the forest areas in and around Yelavali. Villagers, in light of their interaction and discussion with KV, were interested in conserving a patch of the forest that falls within their traditional boundary: doing this by engaging in a process of creating a management and conservation plan. Such a process, it was hoped, would help villagers themselves identify the strategies needed to implement the forest management plan.

In November 2010, KV conducted an exposure visit for the villagers of Bhorgiri and Yelavali. A group of 30 villagers visited 2 villages in other districts of Maharashtra: Hiware Bazar village in Ahmednagar district and Baripada village in Dhule district. These villages had been successful in claiming their rights under the FRA. Hence, the exposure visit was to promote learning and exchange between the groups that could help the BWLS villagers in securing their own rights. The BWLS villagers appreciated the exchange, and KV believes that one of the outcomes of the exchange was that Yelavali villagers agreed to areas within BWLS being declared as a *critical wildlife habitat*<sup>18</sup>. This declaration was made by the FD on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2010. However, a similar consensus in Bhorgiri could not be reached, largely because of the myriad political factions within the Bhorgiri community.

Yelavali agreed to this change in protection status (i.e. conversion to a 'critical wildlife habitat') with certain demands:

- a) FD accept community forestry claims of the Yelavali village;
- b) FD support the villagers to protect the surrounding forest areas and sacred groves from illegal activities such as hunting and timber smuggling by initiating measures such as joint patrolling (i.e. of FD rangers and villagers);

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<sup>15</sup> In the KV reports of the time, the term used is joint protected area management strategy.

<sup>16</sup> This occurs after a resolution has been passed on the claims by the *gram sabha*

<sup>17</sup> *MIRADI* program was tool was used to facilitate the creation of this plan. An external resource Amelie Wienecke, who was then an undergraduate student of 'Forest and Ecosystem Management' programme supported these efforts

<sup>18</sup> Add a description of what CWH meant as per the norm.

- c) FD help in communicating Yelavali's conservation initiatives and forest management plans to neighbouring villages.

### 5.3.2 On creating sustainable livelihoods for villagers: integrating conservation and local livelihoods

Leveraging the MGNREGA, the villagers in Yelavali, with the support of the FD officials, planted tree species useful to villagers (e.g. fuel wood and fruits) in community lands and common areas. KV also facilitated discussions with *Gram Panchayat* members and youth groups to discuss how the MGNREGA and other relevant schemes could be implemented in these areas – information regarding the employment status of the villagers was also gathered.

Another outcome of the field visits conducted to Hiware Bazar and Baripada was that villagers from BWLS started contributing a day a week towards common village activities e.g. repairing village access roads. KV, in line with its focus on helping revive interest and pride in local tribal heritage, supported the villagers in Yelavali and Bhorgiri to organise another wild vegetable festival in October 2010. This provided an opportunity for the community to come and celebrate their own produce while also learn about its nutritional benefits. Collective efforts between KV and the villagers were also made to study, document and discuss the medicinal value of plants found in the region.

### 5.3.3 On supporting and strengthening local governance institutions

Underpinning many of the developments cited above was KV's focus on getting the community to hold discussions about issues that directly affect their well-being. Such discussions seem to have been conducted both informally e.g. through youth groups and festivals but also using formal democratic governance fora such as the *gram sabha* (village level governance forum) and by facilitating a dialogue between the FD officials and villagers. Opening such channels of communication was vital to reduce the level of mistrust and hostility that existed between the FD and the villagers; amplified since the sanctuary's reservation (notification in 1985) that had curtailed villagers' customary access rights to forest resources.

### 5.4 Phase 3 (November 2011 – October 2014)

The third phase and all the remaining phases of the BWLS intervention have been primarily funded by the German funding agency – Misereor. E.V. During this period KV was able to intensify its engagement with the BWLS community. This also entailed interaction with the new district administration staff, the Tribal Department officials<sup>19</sup>, the FD officials and senior officers of the state government.

NPB and PC of the KV staff team led this phase.

In this phase, there seems to have been an increased consolidation of the programmes KV was engaged in the BWLS villages, centring towards meeting the following three objectives:

*Objective 1: To enhance the capacities of the community and of the local governance bodies so as to support the implementation of the FRA and other relevant laws and policies: to do this by offering training and by actively supporting the on-ground processes that would lead to institutional reform. The main goal being to make governance processes more participatory.*

*Objective 2: To facilitate community conservation and create the on-ground conditions for the same*

*Objective 3: To collaborate with all the different stakeholders - local community (including the gram panchayat), FD, NGOs and other individual supporters/researchers, TD – so as to support the establishment of legal rights and responsibilities towards the forests.*

A key highlight here was the increase in co-ordination (and negotiation) between the administration and the villagers on the matter of forest rights and forest resource rights.

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<sup>19</sup> The Tribal Department is the nodal agency for the implementation of the FRA.

#### 5.4.1. On Objective 1: FRA

Critical to facilitating the implementation of available policies and provisions, especially with regard to the FRA, is for all stakeholders these vary same policies and provisions. For this, KV produced information flyers and policy briefs that were distributed to CSOs such as Shaswat and Adivasi Adhikar Rashtriya Manch (National Forum for Adivasi Rights): it clarified for these organisations the on-ground application of various provisions of the FRA. In some cases, partially as a consequence of greater clarity gained through these briefs, different CSOs helped villages file CFR (community forest resource) in their own intervention areas.

Specifically, villagers from BWLS approached the FD to negotiate for a more formal involvement in the processes of forest governance, social development and conservation. This received impetus in 2011 when the leadership at the State Forest Secretary Level changed (Mr Pravin Pardeshi came to office): Under his leadership Yelavali was included in the eco- village development scheme (EDS)<sup>20</sup>. These developments were facilitated by KV and an agreement was reached for Yelavali to be able to secure tenure and decision-making rights as guaranteed under the FRA. Yelavali would also simultaneously utilise the resources under the EDS to achieve development and conservation objectives. In light of the success witnessed in Yelavali, a Government Order was passed by the Government of Maharashtra (GoM) that laid out the standard practice for how funds received under the JFM schemes are to be utilised by villages in Maharashtra.

In the 3 years of this phase, building on its earlier efforts, KV worked with the BWLS villagers engaging them in discussions and dialogues on the FRA. As a next step, KV also facilitated the interested community members in filing the claims process for Community Forest Resource (CFR) and Community Forest (CF) rights. Leveraging the EDS in Yelavali village, KV supported a small local eco-tourism project wherein the community constructed a small eco-lodge and took the initiative to ban hunting and harmful harvesting practices. This has since been taken over completely by the villagers, being owned and managed by them.

KV continued with its work on making the information (e.g. through policy briefs, door-to-door awareness campaigns, and trainings) on the FRA transparent and widespread to more villagers and to all relevant stakeholders such as CSOs and advocacy groups, extending it to also include government agencies e.g. Revenue Department's Divisional Office, the Tribal Department and the FD: a direct implication of this collaboration and dissemination was an increased level of consensus amongst all the stakeholders. Additionally, by engaging directly with heads of relevant government agencies e.g. the Conservator of Forest (then a Mr Sunil Limaye) it seems that both a bottom up and top down approach was followed. Below are some key events and trainings conducted:

- a) FRA orientation programmes were conducted for officials of the government agencies in relevant administrative blocks (Rajgurunagar sub-division). Another training was also conducted for the SDO Manchar, on their request (Manchar, however, does not lie in the intervention area).
- b) The programme on FRA implementation was extended beyond the two initial villages to more villages so they were total 6 target villages. The 4 new villages added were Kharpud, Bhomale (Upper), Bhomale (Lower) and Bhivegaon. KV was also able to support the establishment of Forest Rights Committee (FRC) in all these 6 villages.
- c) During this period Yelavali and Bhorgiri filed their claims for management and conservation rights i.e. both CFR and CR rights over their traditional lands (claims submitted on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 and 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2014 respectively)<sup>21</sup>. Claims process for other target villages also saw some progress. In Bhivegaon, KV helped send request letters to the SDO office, FD and Revenue Record office, to get the necessary maps and records for Bhivegaon so as to enable the CFR and CF rights claiming process
- d) Similar to the exposure visit conducted in Phase 2, KV organised another field exposure trip for 37 community members from the villages of Kharpud, Bhorgiri, Bhivegaon, Bhomale (Upper & Lower) and Yelavali to villages in Amravati district that had successfully claimed their CFR rights and that were engaged in conserving, regenerating and managing their local forest and grasslands.

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<sup>20</sup> Eco development committees formed have the mandate and power "to protect wildlife and other biodiversity, and also undertake eco-development activities in the villages" (MoEF, n.d.)

<sup>21</sup> What claims are these CFR (check back)

#### 5.4.2. On objective 2 and 3: Collaboration and Conservation

As a consequence of the greater awareness within the community on the FRA, and on conservation more generally, the relationship between the various stakeholder groups especially that between the FD and the community had become less hostile – KV notes that in some cases constructive dialogue was initiated and both parties were able to come together on how to co-manage and conserve the forest and communal lands. To a certain extent, this happened also because the FD officials realised that the rights and claims of the villagers were now protected by law. A greater understanding of the FRA amongst the FD officials also made them realise that the mandate of the FRA is not anti-conservation or anti-FD, and the provisions if implemented well can improve conservation outcomes.

On the other hand, the community, by having a greater understanding of the importance of conservation, became more receptive of the mandate and the tasks entrusted to the FD and simultaneously the FD officials started to treat the communities not as adversaries but as partners in meeting their objectives. KV noted that the villagers were developing a sense of ownership over the community forest resource. Although there were still obstacles, the situation seems to have seen much improvement from when the sanctuary was first notified.

In similar vein, KV notes that in Bhorgiri (which as has been mentioned before is a challenging community) the *gram sabha* participation had increased multiple fold. At the start of the intervention, only 10-12 villagers would attend the *gram sabha* whereas in a *gram sabha* conducted during this phase that KV attended, over 52 villagers – including many women – participated. Women felt empowered to demand both the transparency in and democratisation of decision-making; citing an example of this KV notes that women would question the *Sarpanch (head of the gram panchayat)* or members of the Eco-Development committee on inefficiencies and corruption in the utilisation of village funds.

At this point in time, villagers from both Yelavali and Bhorgiri were implementing the Eco-Development scheme in their villages. In part this was facilitated by KV but only when villagers demanded the same as KV has always focused on villagers taking ownership of their governance and management processes. However, no formal community conservation and management plans were put in place by the villagers as titles to forest resources rights and forest rights had not been granted to them<sup>22</sup>.

#### Phase Summary

In this phase, KV not only expanded its geographical scope of work but was also able to make tangible progress on filing the FRA claims for the villages: e.g. 2 villages actually filed their forest rights and forest resource rights claims. KV also intensified its engagement with forest administration, the block development office and the district administration. Greater participation in local governance fora was also seen and the relationship between the community and administration also seems to have become more functional. Women began to have a greater say on matters of village and forest governance. Eco-Development schemes were being implemented in 2 villages by the end of this phase even as no villages were granted formal titles.

#### 5.5. Phase 4 (November 2014 – October 2017)

This phase, as mentioned earlier, was also funded by Misereor. In order to advance the on-ground implementation of the FRA, KV intensified its engagement with the district administration staff, the Tribal Department officials and the FD officials – also liaising with relevant senior officials at the state government level.

The main KV members involved in this phase of the intervention were NPB and PC.

##### 5.5.1. Understanding the impact of the intervention thus far: A dipstick survey conducted by KV in 6 villages.

At this point in time, the intervention in BWLS had been going on for approximately 7 years. In what seems to be an attempt to understand the impact of its work, KV carried out a small impact assessment exercise. A questionnaire-based survey with the community was conducted to understand how the policy briefs, information brochures, and trainings conducted in Panchayats and villages had influenced or affected them. In each of the 6 villages 2 persons were interviewed, so in essence it was a dipstick to understand the general on-ground situation in the villages. Survey

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<sup>22</sup> In fact, they still, as of September 2020, have not been given.

questions focused on understanding if awareness of their rights and responsibilities with regards to community natural resource governance had indeed affected villagers' attitudes and actions; consequently, had it helped in increasing participation and transparency in local governance processes and in deepening democratisation of conservation and control of the local natural resource base. Based on the responses, as reported by KV, it appears that in all villages greater awareness had translated to increased community participation in governance – e.g. in the form of the Gram Panchayat and Eco-Development committees – including that of women. Respondents had a greater appreciation of democratic decision-making and of local participation in forest and village governance matters. This also helped them fight malpractices such as corruption or opaque decision-making processes. Lastly, although no formal titles to rights had been secured, villagers felt that the process of implementation of the FRA and also of the gram panchayat Act had begun in true spirit.

### 5.5.2. On the implementation of the FRA

Learning from their past experience, KV decided to be more strategic about its capacity building and training programmes for the villagers. One learning was to have a wider reach. With that in view, thematic need-based trainings were organised to include greater numbers of people in the villages and hamlets instead of just focusing on *gram panchayats*, youth groups and village development committees. Another learning was to enhance the focus on collaborating with other NGOs and CSOs and, hence, many training programmes were organised in partnership with these groups.

KV tried to further facilitate the process of claiming rights including following up with various agencies by using the provisions of the Right to Information Act. Even though over a decade had passed since the FRA had come into force, KV found that there was low institutional awareness of the various aspects of the implementation of the FRA at the divisional and sub-divisional level (for Pune district at least, within which BWLS falls).

More concretely, by this time, Yelavali, Bhivegaon and Bhorgiri had successfully submitted their **Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights**<sup>23</sup> claims. These claims were at the District Level Committee (DLC) for final approval. Bhomale (Upper), Bhomale (Lower) and Kharpud villages had also filed their claims, which were at the village Forest Right Committee level. It must be noted that this process of filing posed many hindrances for KV and villagers, primarily arising from institutional lethargy and heavy handedness of government bodies. Such lethargy and heavy handedness has a long historical legacy going back to colonial forest management systems: this is why KV's outreach to villagers focused on making them recognize that access to forest resources, including its conservation and management, was their right and not a privilege that they needed to be at the mercy of the authorities for. This change in community attitudes was hard won for which community members and KV were jointly responsible. One notable example of the outcome such persistence was that after a long follow-up, Kalpavriksh succeeded in its efforts to re-form the Sub Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) of Rajgurunagar to include local Panchayat Samittee members.

### 5.5.3. On empowerment and capacity building of village women & youth

Over the years, KV focused specifically on empowering women, who given the patriarchal ordering of village society suffer from various forms of marginalisation. KV was instrumental in organising *women gram sabhas* (women's local governance assembly) to discuss the village issues and as a next step take necessary action to address them where possible. Furthermore, an awareness of their rights under the FRA and under other relevant laws and policies made women demand that local governance decisions be democratically made and that there be transparency in the utilisation of government funds. During this phase, women organised several protest marches and conducted meetings with administrative officials that resulted in the provision of basic facilities such as electricity, road, water etc. In this endeavour, KV engaged with self-help groups such as Jay Satguru Mahila Bachat Gat (Garbewadi, Bhorgiri) that already had a strong collective of women in the community: such partnerships helped to enhance women's participation in the women assembly meetings that could eventually enable them to co-develop a shared vision for their villages. To this effect, a women's gathering (*Mahila Parishad*) that included women from all of the 6 villages was organised that then gave further impetus to women from Bhomale (Upper), Kharpud and Bhorgiri to organise similar gatherings in their own respective villages. As a consequence of this mobilization and empowerment, women were seen participating in local political processes and became members of committees such as the Joint Forest Management Committee, the Forest Rights Committee, and Eco Development Committee.

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<sup>23</sup> Was it both CFR and CR or only CFR?

Relatedly, with the help of local SHGs, *Gram Panchayats* and Block Development Officer (BDO)- Rajgurunagar and KV, women from Bhorgiri, Bhomale (U) and Kharpud organised wild vegetable festivals. Panchayat Samittee heads, District Panchayat members, Block development officers, FD staff, tourists and some NGO representatives were present for these events. Women planned and executed these events by themselves cooking various dishes from a diverse set of wild vegetables: the events were a medium to get the community and other stakeholders together, to create awareness regarding the nutritional aspects of wild vegetables, for women to assess their own abilities to organize events of such a magnitude and also to earn some revenue.

#### *5.5.4. On facilitating community conservation*

KV had hoped that in this phase it would facilitate the process of the villagers' creating their conservation and development plans, but it proved difficult. Informally, some villages had initiated activities such as restricting timber smuggling, banning hunting and conserving habitats of honeybees. In Bhorgiri, with the help of forest department funds, forest patrolling was initiated and some merging of the conservation and development activities with government schemes occurred. This seems to have been the case in Yelavali as well. However, more broadly across all the villages, any formal drawing up of management plans and its interlinking with existing government development schemes did not occur. The main reason for this was that none of these plans would be valid unless titles for the rights were given to the villagers.

#### *5.5.5. On integrating conservation and livelihoods: Apis Cerana honeybee habitat conservation and sustainable honey harvesting*

Harvesting honey from the forest is a common source of earning livelihood for the BWLS villagers. Honey is typically harvested by a group of traditional honey harvesters within each village, being collected mostly from wild colonies of the *Apis Cerana* honeybee. The bee is an important pollinator for the forest but over the years its habitats have degraded; consequently, the number of bees have declined. As a way to conserve bee habitats and to secure the livelihoods of the traditional honey harvesters, KV initiated a conservation research and action programme focusing on the *Apis Cerana* species. In partnership with the Key Stone Foundation (of Tamil Nadu) and the local honey harvesters, participatory research studies were carried out to understand the causes for bee population decline. Furthermore, harvesters were trained to restore degraded habitats that showed success towards the end of 2016, making a clear case for adoption of more sustainable harvesting practices. In order to increase the viability of honey harvesting as a sustainable livelihood option, local women SHGs were linked to the harvesters and trained on marketing and selling honey and bees wax products. A honey festival was organised in October 2016 and awareness campaigns were also organised in local schools for children and villagers on the importance of bee conservation.

#### *Phase Summary:*

It seems apparent that by the end of this phase there was a visible change in outcomes related to democratic decision making, management of natural resources, claiming of rights and benefits as mandated under the FRA and the MGNREGA. In KV's donor progress reports more details can be found on the specific activities and outputs but here it suffices to say that the initial objectives of the intervention – FRA implementation, community forest conservation and management – were slowly being realised. Also, participation was not limited to a few elites especially as capacity building initiatives targeted a wider audience in this phase. Thus, collective action was promoted and somewhat consequently a noticeable increase in collective efforts was also evidenced. Witnessing the positive outcomes in villages such as Yelavali, members of neighbouring hamlets and villagers were also seen to adopt similar processes. Most notably, the increased voice of women in local decision-making was of special significance. Overarchingly, KV notes an increased political consciousness amongst the members of the target groups.

#### *5.6. Phase 5 (November 2017 – October 2020)*

This phase of the intervention is currently ongoing and, as mentioned earlier, is being funded by Misereor. The phase takes further the aims and activities the KV had settled upon in the earlier phases. The focus has been on furthering the on-ground implementation of the FRA in the 6 target villages: this is premised on strengthening village institutions and on building a successful collaborative network of the many governmental and non-governmental stakeholders

that influence the conservation and development outcomes in BWLS. Additionally, a concerted effort was made in this phase to research, document and conserve local varieties of agricultural produce (seeds, vegetables and continued promotion of the sustainable harvesting of honey from the local bee species *Apis cerana*): efforts that directly impact the community's ability to enhance its own health and livelihood outcomes.

### 5.6.1 On the implementation of the FRA

As of November 2019, all 6 target villages have filed of Community Forest Resource (CFR) and the Community Forest Rights claims, of which 3 are at the sub-divisional level committee stage (Kharpud, Bhomale (Upper) and Bhomale (Lower)) and 3 (Bhorgiri, Yelavali, Bhivegaon) are at the district level committee. KV reports that it has been a cumbersome process to get the members of these committees to hold a meeting to take a decision on the CFR claims, a process further slowed down by state assembly (*Vidhan Sabha*) and national elections that were held in 2019 and by the fact that the (Pune) District Collector's office misplaced the claims of 3 villages (Garbewadi – Bhorgiri, Bhivegaon, Yelavali)<sup>24</sup>. It is hoped that the process of drafting management plans for each of these villages will commence once they are granted their CFR titles: hitherto the formal process of micro-planning and development of conservation and development plans has not begun except in Yelavali (more details below). KV has also worked directly with the sub-divisional office to help them better understand the FRA implementation process. In similar vein, through its on-field team members (Subhash Dolas – Yelavali, Manda Kathe – Garbewadi (Bhorgiri), Parvata Wanghare - Bhivegaon), KV has liaised directly with the sub divisional level committee to assist in the recognition and vesting of CFR entitlements. As a concrete example of this, KV team supported the sub-divisional office of Rajgurunagar (a Mrs Tilekar whose office is responsible for implementing the FRA) on matters related to the FRA.

Outside of these 6 villages, KV has worked with other CSO groups such as Kisan Sabha to assist them on FRA implementation. KV has supported Pabhe village (near Bhomale and not a target village) in submitting their CFR claim to the sub divisional level committee. Thus, in total KV has supported 7 villages in filing for CFR claims.

### 5.6.2. On empowerment and capacity building of village women & youth

KV continued its work on offering capacity building trainings to villagers, including its special emphasis on women and youth groups. Women assemblies (*or Mahila Parishads*) are now a regular feature that often also involve local self-help groups (SHGs) – these assemblies provide women the space to democratically make decisions and discuss the different development issues villagers face; it is also a forum to understand the various laws and policies with regards to the community and its relationship to the forests. The various women's groups have also tried to collaborate amongst themselves: this helps them to share knowledge and find greater strength in numbers. Specifically, in this phase an informal partnership with an organisation *Chaitnaya* that works with women SHGs in the Rajgurunagar Taluka (Pune) was established.

Women are now active participants in local *gram sabhas*: the village level governance platform which is also the formal institution (at the village level) to recognise and vest the community forest rights. In a concrete example of citizen action, women in partnership with the Jay Satguru women's SHG and other SHGs in Bhorgiri filed several complaints that included making in-person visits to senior officials of the FD, Tehsildar (Collector's) office, Block Development Office and the police department to lodge complaints against the fraud in funds utilisation (available under FRA and NREGA) and the sale of liquor. On the latter, women physically dismantled illegal liquor shops in the forest, and registered police complaints. KV has helped organise multiple discussion forums and trainings for women on topics such as the MGNREGA, Eco-Development Scheme, Joint Forest Management Scheme and preservation and conservation of local seeds. Similarly, for the youth groups, KV organised a youth workshop (2018) and an animal rescue training programme (2019).

Although there have been successes, KV also reports there being multiple hindrances in meeting their objectives in this area. One is the opposition of certain factions of village men, of community members that tacitly support the agenda of some FD officials, and of other politically motivated groups. This has meant that women's participation has been often challenged. This was further stressed by the conditions created because of the national general election (*Lok Sabha*) and the local state assembly (*Vidhan Sabha*) elections held in 2019 that aggravated existing political divisions. KV's engagement with the youth is another area of concern. Despite the years of efforts to engage them in

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<sup>24</sup> They were refiled in February 2019 at the sub-divisional office.

matters of forest and local governance, there has not been as much progress as it was hoped. Many of these young people face other issues that impact their morale e.g. lack of access to quality education, lack of access to meaningful employment, addictions and engagement in criminal activities. More broadly, young people find it hard to secure formal opportunities to participate in local governance platforms and to secure acceptance from the village elders.

### *5.6.3. On facilitating community conservation*

Although no process for management plans has been initiated, in 2 villages Yelavali and Bhomale (Upper) KV has helped facilitate the Eco-Development (EVD) and Joint Forest Management (JFM) committee meetings in ways that allow for democratic decision-making on issues of forest conservation and village development. Additionally, the focus has been on increasing the transparency in the utilisation of government funds. KV reports that in 2019 Yelavali was able to create its own micro plan for the Eco Development Scheme even as it took much negotiation with the FD. This process has been led by the KV local team member at the Yelavali village, Subhash Dolas. However, despite the initiative taken by Yelavali, the lack of support from the FD (in activities such as joint patrolling of the forest or in the implementation of the Eco-Development scheme) has made it harder for local people to continue with the conservation plans affecting their morale that has taken years of work to build. Taking a step towards setting up an overarching institution that can promote a local landscape-based approach towards conservation and development, some efforts were made in this phase to record the various individuals and organisations working in BWLS. This was done to facilitate a meeting of all concerned stakeholders on the matter but that has not happened thus far. Additionally, KV initiated discussions with Mr Wankhede (Conservator of Forest Wildlife, Pune) on matters of conservation.

### *5.6.4. On promoting sustainable livelihoods: integrating conservation and local livelihoods*

KV has been able to partner with the Krishnamurthy Sahyadri School (with financial support from the Nilekani Foundation) to promote the preservation of local seeds and natural farming (Subhash Palekar's Natural Farming Technique) (in 2019). An exposure visit to the Sahyadri School was also organised in October 2019 wherein 52 farmers visited the school's local seed cultivation site. Similarly, a seed festival was organised in Bhorgiri village (May 17, 2018) in partnership with the Sahyadri school and the BAIF Development Research foundation in which people and groups from other districts such as Mumbai, Sangamner, Akhole and Nasik also participated.

With the support of Mr Ayush Prasad, sub divisional officer of Rajgurunagar and additional project officer of Integrated Tribal Development Programme of Ghodegaon, the process of forming a Tribal Farmer Producer Company<sup>25</sup> for the tribal areas in and around BWLS was initiated in February 2019. KV and Sahyadri School helped in the setting up the company on the request of Mr Prasad but the company is independent; KV or Sahyadri School have no formal stake in it and no involvement in its functioning.

Continuing its efforts to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for the community, KV (with funding from the Duleep Matthai Trust in this phase) has continued its work on training local honey harvesters on habitat conservation, better honey harvesting practices and hygienic honey extractions. Some support is also being provided to the local women's SHG (Jay Satguru) in selling and marketing the honey. Wild vegetable festivals were held in this phase as well. 6 wild vegetables have been held in this phase so far (i.e. up to November 2019). Funding for wild vegetable festivals in 2019 was given by the Nilekani Foundation. Simultaneously KV developed informational material in the form of flyers on the nutritional and medicinal value of these vegetables and on the process of Zero Budget Natural Farming: the help in information dissemination. As an output of these activities, KV reports that >40 farmers cultivated agricultural plots for local rice varieties as of 2019.

KV has also tried to support the implementation of the MGNREGA scheme in certain villages by helping villagers secure job cards and zero balance bank accounts, but this has not proved easy due to lack of cooperation from the bank officials and local administration. KV's aim has been to get the community youth and the women to proactively work towards the implementation of this act: in Bhomale (U) village, KV had a fruitful meeting with the youth. KV has also worked with Block Development officials, the Tehsildar (collector), Gram Sevaks (village panchayat level workers) and the Sarpanch (head of the village panchayat) to push for its implementation.

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<sup>25</sup> GuptBhima Tribal Farmer Producer Company

It must be also noted, as KV records in its 2019 yearly donor report, that not all events or trainings planned were conducted often due to different reasons (some of which are clearly stated and some not).

#### 5.6.5. Phase Summary

In terms of the FRA, as much progress as possible on filing the claims has been made. The claims for all 6 villages are now in the final stages of approval (or rejection). Similarly, partnerships with external agencies and experts on developing sustainable livelihood opportunities has also received noticeable impetus; with over 40 farmers cultivating local seed varieties. Steps were also taken to advance a local community-based landscape approach to conservation, more in some villages (e.g. Yelavali) than others. However, as per KV, because of delay in getting titles (which has still not occurred and in some cases, claims were filed in 2011) the morale of the community is low. Earlier attitudes of helplessness and frustration are returning. Since March 2020, because of the COVID 19 pandemic, any on-ground activity has proved impossible and in all likelihood any allocation of titles will only happen, if at all, next year.

## 6. Brief note on methods used

Since the goal of the intervention has been to mobilise the community to demand its rights to own, conserve and govern the forests in BWLS, the primary methods used were those that could engage the community through discussions and dialogue. The focus has been using techniques that help KV build strong relationships with the community and that also help the villagers build strong relationships amongst themselves so that they begin to see themselves as a collective. It was then logical to use methods that were co-created in discussion with the community in each village: this also meant that different methods were used for different villages. This was further backed by a continuous process of reflection that informed the next stages of action or programmes. In general, however, KV focused on:

- a) *Establishing a trust-based relationship with the community and creating local leadership* (methods used here): Spending time in the villages, staying with villagers in their houses, organising democratic discussions forums, conducting women assemblies, participating in local village festivals, organising other events such as the wild vegetable festivals that bring the community together to celebrate their own heritage and resources, participation in local governance forums such as *gram sabha* meetings and cultivating local leadership e.g. Subhash Dolas and Manda Kathe.
- b) *Awareness building* (methods used here): KV conducted several trainings and workshops at different levels and of different scales to enhance the awareness level of the community (and in some cases of other stakeholders such as administrative officials and other CSOs) with regards to the various laws, policies, rights and responsibilities mainly on the topics of forest conservation and local development. Exposure visits to other villages in the state and even between the 6 villages was done to facilitate knowledge transfer. Outside of these in-person interactions, flyers and information materials were also created that could be used to increase outreach levels. At the start of the intervention, focused environmental educational workshops were carried out in the local schools and the hope was that it would become a self-sustaining programme owned by the community or the local Tribal Department Office but this could not occur.
- c) *For specialised outputs*: In certain cases, some available specific tools were used:
  1. Strategic Planning for the forest management using MIRADI as a tool.
  2. Impact assessment using impact assessment methodologies, including, transect and quadrat methods.
  3. Developing a detailed inventory of flora and fauna using earlier records and fresh field assessments.
  4. Identifying village extents by using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

## 7. Analysis of the intervention

KV entered the BWLS forests with a belief that giving local communities the autonomy to govern and manage their natural resources is an environmentally just and sustainable way to conserve the sanctuary. The then recently passed Forest Rights Act finally offered a legal framework that could make this possible. The Act recognized the historical injustice done to indigenous tribes (*Adivasis*) and put in place a mechanism that would address the same. This meant that KV's vision of community conservation and forest governance was on paper a possibility. However, as is obvious from the intervention's progress through the years, laws on paper can only lead to systemic change if all stakeholders in the system are prepared and willing to embrace and act upon the changes intended, which is unfortunately still not the case in India. This is evidenced in the BWLS experience.

KV began its work by understanding the ground realities of the villages and of the BWLS region, within which it hoped to implement the FRA. This first objective of FRA implementation was deeply intertwined with their second objective of promoting community-based conservation in BWLS. Soon it was evident from the field visits that communities were poorly informed about their rights and responsibilities and deprived of their customary access to the forests, which was correlated to poverty and to a disengagement with local ecologies. A culture of fear and mistrust marked the community's relationship with the FD and other local governance bodies. Local governance platforms e.g. Panchayati Raj Institutions established to bring in the voices of these marginalized groups were dysfunctional and, instead, perpetuated the discrimination they were meant to tackle. E.g. the KV reports note that in Bhorgiri the *gram sabha* participation at the start of the intervention was only ~10 members comprising mainly men (that then later grew to 52<sup>26</sup>).

It is for this reason that KV's efforts have focused on the giving the community the correct information with regards to relevant laws and policies, which could then be internalized so as to be able to create and demand change; specifically, on the FRA and MGREGA. This was done first by building a trusting relationship with the villagers – which involved spending time with the villagers and assisting them in their myriad struggles – making it clear, however, that KV was not going to provide them any material goods or handouts that they had some times come to expect given their erstwhile experience with NGOs.

Claiming community rights to forests and to forest resources is premised on the village feeling and acting as a collective – this proved challenging since, in KV's view, the FD's actions have often created divisions within the community favoring certain individuals over others. Additionally, the political fragmentation within the community along mainstream party lines also made collective action difficult. It could be for this case that Yelavali, which is a small remote hamlet located within the sanctuary's boundaries, has been able to make relatively more progress on the objectives. Its size and its remoteness may have offered the necessary conditions for collectivization. It was the first village to file its claims and finish the process of micro-planning for its forests in negotiation with the FD. Over the years Yelavali made attempts to ban hunting and restrict timber smuggling, but the lack of support from the FD and other district officials has meant that this progress has to a certain extent been lost. Similar patterns have been noticed in Bhorgiri where women's groups were highly mobilized and empowered - organising protest marches, negotiating and demanding from officials' basic needs e.g. roads, electricity and, creating alternative sources of livelihood – only to later face hostility from men in the village and/or authorities. Some of this is expected: centuries of patriarchy and of top-down fortress conservation approaches mean that any systemic change is slow and hard fought.

From the evidence available, it seems apparent that KV recognized this and persisted in providing the community the requisite information in different forms and multiple times (e.g. through trainings, door-to-door awareness campaigns, through flyers, exposure visits). It supplemented its awareness campaigns by creating opportunities for change (e.g. sustainable livelihoods) and in some cases supporting the community to liaise with the administration directly (e.g. by filing RTIs, accompanying the field staff when meeting concerned officials). Over the course of its 12 years in BWLS, this informed and reflexive persistence has meant that today the villagers, across all the villages (in varying degrees) are empowered enough to:

- a) demand from the FD transparency in forest governance decisions that is their right;
- b) demand that the local development authorities fulfill basic needs such as electricity and roads;

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<sup>26</sup> The report cites these numbers, but Pradeep mentioned ~250?

- c) stand up against malpractices such as corruption in the usage of local development or JFM funds.

Of special emphasis is the noticeable transformation in the position of women, who are now active members in local governance forums and who have often led the demand for positive change and social reform. KV cites in the later reports (2017) that villagers in Kharpu, Bhorgiri and Yelavali have now been able to independently govern and solve local development issues in a democratic manner.

Similarly, KV's efforts in demonstrating the vital link between the conservation of local ecologies and tribal development and subsistence have meant that conservation is an issue the community discusses and debates upon, and in its capacity takes action upon. The project on honeybee habitat conservation or the hunting ban in Yelavali (limited though it was) are evidence of this shift in mindset. These above, in KV's view, are this intervention's most notable successes.

What, however, has been challenging is the rigidity and complacency shown by the forest department and by the administration in general towards embracing the FRA and in devolving power to the community. It is understandable why this is the case: the Forest Department has and continues to derive its power and authority from deciding how forests are used – this allows them at times to overlook and oversee the illegal utilisation of these forests (e.g. in the form of timber smuggling, poaching) either because they benefit from it or because it helps save their resources. As evidence from other parts of the world also shows, fortress conservation – which is model on which FD functions - is rarely effective in forest conservation. Such approaches are premised on separating human and non-human natures and policing forests in a top-down non-participatory manner. This is why legislations such as the FRA (2006) and policies such as Joint Forest Management (of National Forest Policy 1988) were instituted. But the rigidity of the FD to such power-sharing arrangements have rendered these legislations largely ineffective. This is very clear from the BWLS experience: as on date, despite some claims being filed as early as 2011, no titles to forest rights or forest resource rights have been granted to any of the 6 villages. In fact, this delay in title allocation has, in KV's view, made the community skeptical about any real change occurring. Their awareness of their rights and their actions in claiming these rights become futile if the system, as represented here by the FD and district officials, is unwilling to recognize them. Also, until titles are allocated, the forest remains in the control of the FD and any plans for community owned conservation and development cannot be implemented in true measure. This means that KV's efforts to invigorate the community to conserve their forests will yield little tangible results and the community's disillusionment with the process will heighten.

Another challenge is the polarization of the community in certain villages along mainstream party politics – this becomes more severe in years (e.g. 2019) when elections are held. It means that village governance institutions such as *gram panchayats* are corrupted and disrupted by these affiliations. The process of the village becoming and acting like a collective, an essential requisite to meeting the intervention's objectives, is thus hampered.

A third major challenge is the lack of local sustainable livelihood options for villagers in BWLS – more severe with the youth whose aspirations have transformed as rapid urbanization and modernization has occurred since the late 1990s (when India's economy took decisive a neoliberal turn). This leads some (most?) youth to become disconnected from their local ecologies and tribal lifestyles. KV has tried to address this through its environmental education programme, its trainings, its creation of opportunities for sustainable local livelihoods (e.g. natural farming, honey harvesting, seed conservation, setting up the Tribal Farmer Produce Company, eco-tourism) and its promotion of young people in village governance institutions. But this has proved challenging not least because of the significant gap between the aspirations of the tribal youth and the opportunities available in the villages, a feature not uncommon to India's rural contexts.

Despite these challenges, KV's intends to continue its work in BWLS till titles for community forest rights and community forest resource rights are given to the 6 villages. Furthermore, it hopes to co-create the conditions for a local community-based landscape approach to conservation in BWLS so that:

- a) conservation takes into account the socio-ecological realities of BWLS and;
- b) the community is included in true spirit when decisions regarding conservation and management are made and when resources under schemes such as JFM and EDM are utilised.

In addition, KV wants to help create more opportunities and pathways for sustainable livelihoods for the villagers, especially the youth. Towards this endeavour, KV hopes to include BWLS under its Vikalp Sangam<sup>27</sup> initiative.

All of these programmes (and subsequent activities) build upon KV's original objectives and are in line with its overarching goal of promoting greater conscientization within the BWLS villagers (a term that KV uses in its later reports, specifically Phase 5). This would lead to a situation where the process of the identification of problems and of designing and implementing solutions is fully owned by the community. KV has no specific deadline for when this intervention will end but a rough estimate given to the author was 3 to 5 years.

## 8. Concluding remarks and reflections by the author

In this document, the author has tried to capture the different phases of KV's intervention in BWLS. The core objectives of the intervention were and have been, one, FRA implementation and, two, promotion of a landscape community-owned conservation approach. Over the 12 years, KV's engagement with the community has expanded geographically and has encompassed programmes - e.g. of women and youth empowerment – that are more wide-ranging than initially planned for by KV (at least as is evidenced in the reports written during the initial years). But this flexibility has resulted in KV having a deeper and more reflexive engagement with the community.

It appears to the author that KV's efforts in invoking amongst the community a greater awareness with regards to forest rights and in promoting the idea of collective action has thus far had mixed results. This is to be expected because processes of empowerment are long and complex, especially in the context of India where political and socio-economic structures have been undergoing rapid change.

From the evidence above, it does seem that in the 6 villages, the community, and women within that especially, have been able to overcome their long held fear of the FD (and other administration officials) and can now stand up against the various kinds of malpractices (that are tantamount to injustices) they witness and suffer from by virtue of being tribal and forest dependent communities. However, this enthusiasm seems to have been somewhat diffused as the central premise (or promise) on which this mobilization has been based has remained unfulfilled – i.e. of allocation of titles. It is hard to fully know from reading KV reports as to how this may affect the process of participatory governance and community mobilization in the future: will the villagers continue to see merit in these processes as a way to secure the titles? Will they continue to engage in these processes as a way to accomplish self-governance and sustainable resource governance even after titles are allocated? Or will they, disillusioned by their current inability to secure titles and/or to gain meaningful livelihoods (especially for the youth given that they are the ones who must fully believe and own these processes), be fragmented and succumb to the many pressures that the larger economic structures impose on them leading to e.g. urban migration, an adoption of non-tribal modern lifestyles (that are also often unsustainable and individualized) and an alienation from their local ecologies and tribal ways of being?

These questions and issues when juxtaposed against the intensified neoliberal structuring of India's economy (especially under the current government where privatization of natural resources has received greater impetus) seem to become even more pertinent. In my view<sup>28</sup> these are matters that the community and KV will need to deliberate upon as they refine their programmes and activities (under this intervention) in the coming years. The central objective could then become deliberating upon some of the following:

- What is the tribal identity in BWLS in a post 2020 world?
- What does this identity mean for the community's relationship with its natural resources and forests?
- What actions are most strategic in preserving both this identity and relationship especially in the face of increasing authoritarianism and neoliberalisation of government?

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<sup>27</sup> KV's work under Vikalp Sangam or Alternatives Confluence Alternatives consists of multiple projects and activities oriented towards documentation, advocacy, networking and outreach related to initiatives that move away from dominant economic, political and social systems that are unsustainable and inequitable.

<sup>28</sup> As in all probability the KV team would also be reflecting upon

- What actions need to be taken in light of changing ecological conditions in light of anthropogenic climate change - what will be the socio-economic-ecological impacts of that, if any, in the coming decades (e.g. on rural livelihoods with changing weather patterns and increased in the number extreme weather events)?
- How does the youth understand and hope to develop its relationship with its tribal heritage and how does it shape that in light of the information it has on *modern development* – which remains highly pervasive because of the influx of technologies such as internet and smart phones?

These matters, of course, need to be addressed alongside the more immediate concerns of securing titles, creating economic resilience in the face of the pandemic and youth employment

In sum, an important and much-needed process of community conscientization and democratization in BWLS has begun: This would have been difficult, if not unfeasible, without KV's 12-year intensive grounds-up, multi-faceted, reflexive approach. However, in the author's view, the next crucial step (and milestone) would be for KV to reach a point where it and the community agree that this process of community conscientization and democratization no longer requires an organisation such as KV to facilitate it. This remains aspirational but necessary.

## 9. Author's remarks and positionality

It is hoped that this document can be used as tool for dissemination and reflection by the KV staff team. It is an attempt at collating all of the information contained across various reports that KV produced since it began this intervention in BWLS. Information gathered from interviews with the key KV staff has also been included. Such a record, it is hoped, will bolster the institutional memory of this intervention and also spur a discussion on where and how KV might choose to go when considering its future plans and programmes in BWLS: specifically, on this, some comments and questions have been provided in section 8.

Overarchingly, it is hoped, that the document provides evidence in support of undertaking the critical but oftentimes painstakingly slow process of facilitating community ownership and governance of forest resources. This remains a vital struggle for many indigenous communities in India and towards that struggle, the author has found that Kalpavriksh's endeavour in BWLS is both noteworthy and necessary.

### 9.1 Author's positionality

The author was hired by Kalpavriksh to write this report and a professional contract for the same was drawn. Furthermore, the author is keen to continue her association with Kalpavriksh with whom she intends to partner with for her doctoral research that she plans to commence upon in October 2020. This was the reason the author had first interacted with the 'Conservation and Livelihoods' team at Kalpavriksh (in October 2019) and the current contract is an outcome of that interaction and intended association. Aside from this report, the author has completed another assignment for the team on the theme of mapping the status of Protected Areas in Maharashtra. The author is not an employee or member of Kalpavriksh and the association is thus far strictly for these contractual assignments and intended field work for her doctoral research.

It can be said in light of the above that this report is an independent assessment and recording of the material provided to the author with little grounds for the author to give any biased assessment, even as she hopes to continue her association with the team.

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