

# Kalpavriksh: Intervention in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra, India (2008-2020)

**Central Objectives:** 1) Facilitating the implementation of the FRA; 2) Promoting a landscape-based community conservation approach in BWLS.

**Funders:** Royal Society for Protection of Birds (2007), AID – Bay Area (2008-10), Ruffords SGP (2010), Misereor E.V. (2011-2020)

**Key Staff Involved:** Neema P. Broome, Pradeep Chavan

## Phase 1

1 Year; Sep 2008- Aug 2009

**Geo. Scope:** 2 villages (Yelavali, Bhorgiri)

### Key Outputs:

1. Awareness programmes conducted
2. FRC\* formed in Yelavali
3. Biodiversity Festival in Yelavali
4. Where necessary, Right To Information applications filed to increase transparency of development schemes

## Phase 2

15 months; Sep 2008- Aug 2009

**Geo. Scope:** Same as Phase 1

### Key Outputs:

1. Claims filed by Yelavali in SDO\*\*
2. Process of verification of village boundaries initiated & KV supports the creation of a conservation & management plan
3. FRA exposure visit for 30 villagers
4. Trees planted in villages under MGNREGA
5. Joint efforts (KV+ Community) to study medicinal value of local plants
6. Wild vegetable festival organised

Yelavali agrees to its surrounding areas being declared as critical wildlife habitats (announcement made by FD\*\*\* on 30/12/2010) but makes demands in relation to promoting community resource rights.

## Phase 3

3 years; Nov 2011- Oct 2014

**Geo. Scope:** 6 villages [added Kharpud, Bhomale (Upper), Bhomale (Lower), Bhivegaon]

### Key Outputs:

1. Outreach material (e.g. flyers) created on FRA
2. Yelavali & Bhorgiri included in the Eco-Village Development Scheme (eco-tourist lodge operationalised in Yelavali)
3. FRA trainings conducted for govt. officers
4. CFR and CF\*\*\*\* claims filed by Bhorgiri and Yelavali
5. Exposure visit conducted for 37 villagers

Increased women's participation in *gram sabhas* of villages (e.g. Bhorgiri).

## Phase 4

3 Years; Dec 2017- Nov 2017

**Geo. Scope:** Same as Phase 3

### Key Outputs:

1. Dipstick to understand impact of KV's intervention
2. Targeted trainings on FRA conducted
3. Bhivegaon files CFR and CR claims, Bhomale (Upper & Lower), Kharpud claims at village FRC
4. Sub Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) of Rajgurunagar reformed to include local Panchayat Samittee members
5. Wild vegetable festivals organised by women
6. Sustainable honey harvesting programme initiated- honey festival organised.

Multiple women assemblies organised, and noticeable increase in women's participation in local matters. Women become members committees e.g. JFM, FRC, and EVD.

## Phase 5

3 Years; Dec 2017-Nov 2020

**Geo. Scope:** Same as Phase 4

### Key Outputs:

1. Bhomale (Upper & Lower), Kharpud have filed for CFR and CF rights. These are at the Sub-divisional level and the other 3 villages' claims are at district level
2. Women dismantle liquor shops and file police complaints against illegal liquor sale in the forest
3. Youth workshop and animal rescue training session conducted
4. Yelavali and Bhomale (U) develop democratically active EVD and JFM committees
5. Yelvali creates micro plan under EVD in negotiation with FD
6. Natural Farming training for villagers
7. Conservation of local seeds promoted and cultivation of same done by ~40 farmers as of 2019, relatedly seed festival also organised
8. Tribal Farming Produce Company Set Up (supported by SDO - Rajgurunagar)
9. Wild vegetable festivals organised (~6 festivals)
10. Information brochures made to increase awareness on a variety of relevant subject (e.g. Natural Farming)

Women assemblies now a regular feature in villages as is the participation of women in *gram sabhas*.

\*Forest Rights Committee

\*\*sub divisional office

\*\*\* Forest Department

\*\*\*\*Community Forest Resource (CFR) Rights & Community Forest (CF)Rights

# Methods

- Co-developed by KV and community contextualized to each village
- Aimed at establishing a trust-based relationship with the community and creating local leadership
  - Spending time in villages; staying with villagers in their home; organising events; celebrating local festivals; reviving traditional tribal practices; participating in local governance forums.
- Aimed at building community awareness
  - Thematic trainings for different groups of stakeholders; door-to-door information dissemination; exposure visits; create outreach material (flyers); environmental education workshops in schools.
- Some specialized methods were used where necessary (e.g. strategic planning for forest management using MIRADI)

# Key Insights & Successes

- A prerequisite for claiming forest rights is village level collectivization, a process that takes time and that progresses non-linearly with gains being lost for myriad reasons that can be hard to factor in when starting the process.
  - There is now a noticeable increase collective thought and action in all the 6 villages, especially on matters of forest governance and local development
- Dissemination of information with regards to rights and responsibilities must occur in different formats and at different scales to all relevant stakeholders
  - As the dipstick also indicated, villagers are now more aware of their rights under the FRA and some villages feel empowered to challenge the FD's top-down approaches to conservation
- External support and hand-holding is often necessary, especially when collectivization and awareness levels are low
  - Despite opposition from certain factions, KV has been able to develop a trust-based relationship with the community. It has worked also to create local leadership (e.g. Subash D., Manda K.) that KV has nurtured and trained through the years
- Empowerment of certain groups and of the community (as a whole) to participate in local governance decisions must be accompanied with an enhancement of livelihoods.
  - Alternative sustainable livelihood and subsistence options have been developed e.g. harvesting honey sustainably and marketing & selling honey by women's SHGs, local seeds conservation, growing wild vegetable and the Tribal Farm Produce company that was set up through the local SDO's support.
  - Enhanced women's participation in local governance by raising awareness: mobilization through the organisation and promotion of women assemblies.
- A strong and tangible link between conservation and local development can shift the community's mindset towards conservation, which it often resists when top-down conservation approaches are implemented.

# Challenges faced

- Systemic lethargy and corruption, especially in the FD, that hampers the process of devolution of power to the village communities.
- Factionist tendency in the communities: divided typically along mainstream political party lines, along socio-economic class and because of patriarchy.
- 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 1990s.
- Macro climate of economic neoliberalisation and of privatization of natural resources in the country, which is antithetical to the idea of community owned resource governance and conservation.