

Rajasthan People and Protected Areas Workshop

(Godwar region)

5th March 2024

The Rajasthan People and Protected Areas Workshop: Godwar Region was organized by Kalpavriksh in collaboration with Lokhit Pashu Palak Sansthan (LPPS) and through support of the University of Kassel, Germany on the 5th of March 2024, at Lokhit Pashu Palak Sansthan, Butibag. The workshop was organized to address the pressing issues arising from the declaration and establishment of the proposed Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve. It also aimed to bring together members of villages affected by the proposal, local organisations and NGOs as well as individuals engaged in slow, responsible travel in Godwar to discuss the challenges related to community rights and conservation, ensuring that both local livelihoods and ecological objectives are considered in the management of the protected area.



Image 1: Session on proposed Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve being led by Meenal Tatpati (Kalpavriksh)



In 2019, the state government initiated efforts to convert the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary into a National Park and eventually a tiger reserve. During this time, local community members urged Kalpavriksh to conduct a field investigation to assess and document procedural violations in the expansion of the Protected Area (PA). Following the COVID-induced lockdown, the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change issued a draft notification for establishing an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around the sanctuary. By 2020, the push for creating a tiger reserve intensified. Kalpavriksh continues to support investigations and documentation of alleged violations concerning the settlement of rights and the forest department's acquisition of community land. In August 2023, the proposal for the Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve received in-principle approval from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. This development poses a potential threat to local communities, as the establishment of the tiger reserve may lead to their displacement adversely affecting their livelihood.

This workshop was organised to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges faced by local communities, particularly in the context of the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA). This workshop aimed to create a shared platform where local communities, conservationists, and legal experts—could come together to engage in discussions on a wide array of issues and complexities related to the management of the protected area. The workshop created a platform which facilitated a rich exchange of ideas, offering insights into how community rights could be safeguarded while also addressing conservation objectives, ultimately seeking solutions that are sustainable for both the people and the ecosystem.

Community Discussions on Conservation Governance and Legal Frameworks

The focus was on bringing together local community members and local organisations from five protected areas of the Godwar region: Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), Jawai Bandh Conservation Reserve, Todgarh Raoli WLS, Phulwari ki Naal WLS, and Mt. Abu WLS. These protected areas are all part of the buffer zone of the proposed Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve. The workshop aimed to address pressing concerns about non-democratic conservation governance, particularly regarding the proposed establishment of the Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve in the region.

The workshop opened with Mr. Hanwant Singh Rathore, (Director of LPPS) setting the context for the meeting, followed by Ms. Meenal Tatpati (Member, Kalpavriksh), a lawyer and researcher,



who provided an overview of the proposed tiger reserve, detailing what is currently known about the proposal of tiger reserve. Ms. Tatpati discussed experiences of top-down conservation efforts and how they have often overlooked the voices and needs of local communities, potentially leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and disruption of cultural practices that have coexisted with the forest for generations. Ms. Tatpati also highlighted the experiences from travel around the five protected areas to understand the issues of consent and information sharing regarding the proposed tiger reserve, where it was clear that several villages across the landscape were unaware of the possibility of their surroundings being declared a tiger reserve.



Image 2: Prior to the meeting, the team travelled to villages which are part of the proposed tiger reserve to understand if people were aware of the proposed tiger reserve.

This helped underscore the rights violations that communities face when such conservation initiatives are pushed forward without proper consultation or adherence to legal frameworks. Ms. Ishika Patodi (Member, Kalpavriksh) provided insights into the existing legal frameworks that govern conservation in India, including the WLPA, FRA and other pertinent regulations specifically in the context of the process of declaration and creation of Tiger Reserves. It highlighted the institutional framework established for relocation, the challenges encountered during its implementation, and the procedural violations often observed in the declaration of Tiger Reserves. These sessions helped local communities to:



- Gain a deeper insight into the area and villages to be affected by the proposed tiger reserve
- Legal requirements, including full prior information that they need to ask local authorities about the tiger reserve
- Legal requirements that are to be ensured by the government before undertaking relocation of the villages.

The aim was to empower the community members and individuals with knowledge of their rights and the legal avenues available to challenge or negotiate the proposed changes.

Major challenges and concerns of the communities:

Post tea, the workshop provided a space for villagers and stakeholders to discuss and share their experiences, express their concerns, and strategize on how to ensure that their rights and interests are considered in conservation efforts. The following issues were highlighted in this session.

➤ **Lack of awareness of the law**

One of the key issues and challenges faced by local communities in the context of the proposed Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve is their limited awareness of the laws and policies that directly impact their livelihoods. Many forest-dwelling and forest-dependent communities are unfamiliar with the FRA and WLPA, and other relevant legal frameworks. These laws are designed to protect their rights, including their access to traditional lands, forest resources, and their right to live in and around Protected Areas. However, due to a lack of information and outreach efforts by the authorities, these communities are often unaware of their legal entitlements.

This lack of awareness places them at a significant disadvantage, particularly when decisions are made at higher levels, such as the declaration of a tiger reserve. Without this knowledge, communities may find themselves excluded from discussions that directly affect their futures, resulting in displacement, loss of livelihoods, and the erosion of their cultural and traditional ties to the land.

➤ **Issues of access faced by the community**

Women from the Raika pastoralist community around Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary raised the pastoralist community's concerns that they are facing severe challenges as their access to forest





and common lands has been restricted due to the area's constant changing legal status, including its declaration as a Tiger Reserve. With grazing permits withdrawn and entry to the forest now limited, the Raikas are losing the vital resources that have sustained their traditional livestock-rearing practices for generations. This not only threatens their economic livelihood but also disrupts their cultural and social ties to the land.

The community members also emphasized that as their pastoral way of life breaks down, so do the inter-community relationships that were built around shared grazing routes and seasonal movements. These restrictions are leading to the erosion of communal bonds, leaving the Raikas increasingly isolated. Without proper legal recognition of their rights or inclusive consultations, their traditional livelihood and social fabric are at risk of disintegration due to conservation policies that overlook their historical reliance on the forest.

➤ **Economic hardship**

The **Raika community** relies heavily on their traditional pastoral lifestyle for income, primarily through livestock rearing, which depends on access to forest grazing lands. With the in principle approval establishment of the Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve, grazing has been severely impacted, cutting off their main source of livelihood. Many Raikas lack alternative income sources, and they are facing difficulty in transitioning to other forms of work such as agriculture or labor, particularly due to limited skills, land ownership, resources etc. This shift can lead to severe financial instability, pushing families into poverty as they struggle to find sustainable ways to support themselves.

➤ **Cultural Erosion**

The pastoralist community's way of life is not just an economic activity but a core part of their cultural identity. Their knowledge of livestock management, grazing routes, and seasonal migration patterns has been passed down through generations. As they lose access to the forest and commons, these practices are gradually disappearing. The restrictions also prevent younger generations from learning and continuing these traditions, leading to the gradual erosion of their cultural heritage. Moreover, their deep spiritual connection to the land and its resources may be lost, as modern pressures force them to abandon their ancestral ways.

➤ **Potential impact of increased tourism on local communities**





With the in-principle approval of the Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve, the MoEFCC Minister Bhupender Yadav mentioned that this step is a significant advancement for wildlife conservation, promising a brighter future for tigers and biodiversity in Rajasthan, and is expected to boost employment through ecotourism. However, while resort and hotel owners are optimistic about increased revenue, the reserve's establishment could severely impact local communities. The local communities are fearful of the displacement that may occur as conservation measures tighten, threatening traditional livelihoods such as pastoralism and small-scale farming, which could lead to economic hardship. Further, the influx of tourists and the establishment of new regulations might disrupt traditional ways of life and erode cultural practices deeply connected to the land. Additionally, increased tourism could put additional stress on local resources, causing environmental degradation and competition for essential resources like water. Local communities may also face marginalization, being excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives and rights. This could lead to social fragmentation, weakening traditional social structures and relationships.

Finally, the sessions highlighted a recurring pattern in Protected Area governance in India, particularly the impact on forest-dwelling and forest-dependent communities, as seen in the proposed establishment of the Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve. Participants noted the state's resistance to democratizing conservation, evident in the poor implementation of the FRA in Protected Areas, including Kumbhalgarh. The discussions also provided an overview of the various laws and policies related to conservation, emphasizing the statutory protections for communities that are mandated by law but often overlooked.

The way forward:

The final session provided an opportunity to revisit earlier discussions and collaboratively develop strategies moving forward.

- **Documentation and evidence gathering:**

In community-led efforts, documentation and evidence gathering are vital for preserving local cultures, traditions, and biodiversity relationships, providing tangible proof of communities' deep-rooted environmental connections. These practices help safeguard cultural heritage and challenge exclusionary conservation policies by compiling data, testimonies, and visual records that underscore sustainable practices honed over generations. The participants emphasized that by systematically documenting traditional



knowledge and ecological insights, often overlooked in mainstream approaches, communities can build a compelling case to advocate for their rights and influence decision-making processes.



Image 3: Hanwant Singh (LPPS) leading the session on possible ways forward

- **Amplifying local conservation efforts through social media:**

The participants recognize that social media can be a powerful tool for local communities in the protected areas, enabling them to share their conservation efforts, raise awareness, and garner broader support. It can rapidly disseminate information, fostering connections with others facing similar challenges. Through real-time documentation, communities can share evidence of their struggles, bringing global attention to their cause. This visibility can strengthen their advocacy, help build alliances, and amplify their voice in the fight to protect their land, forests, and environment. By leveraging social media, the communities can attract attention, galvanise action, and build alliances to enhance their environmental protection and conservation efforts.

- **Advocating for community rights through political channels:**



Participants emphasized the critical need for vigorous political advocacy both during election periods and with elected representatives, including MLAs and MPs at the state and national levels. Engaging with the legislators is crucial for addressing the issues faced by communities on the ground. By bringing these concerns to the forefront in state and union legislatures the development of policies that genuinely reflect and respect community rights and needs can be influenced. This approach ensures that conservation and development policies are equitable and inclusive, incorporating the experiences and voices of local populations. Active political engagement is essential for shaping policies that take into account the rights of communities and address their challenges effectively.

Deliberation on Slow Tourism as an Alternative Model

The need to explore alternative models for regional development, particularly through the lens of slow tourism was also discussed. Slow tourism advocates for a more sustainable, community-centric approach that contrasts with the potentially disruptive ‘tiger reserve model’. By inviting experts and practitioners in slow tourism, the meeting aimed at deliberating on how this model can be implemented in the Kumbhalgarh region.

The participants highlighted that Community engagement is crucial for the success of slow tourism in areas like Kumbhalgarh. It involves early and inclusive participation, ensuring that local residents are actively involved in the planning and decision-making processes. By providing training and resources, communities can gain the skills needed to benefit economically from tourism. Further, respecting and incorporating local cultural practices into tourism activities can also help preserve traditions and foster positive relationships.

The discussions then centered on how slow tourism can provide economic benefits to the local communities without the adverse effects associated with large-scale conservation projects like a tiger reserve. This approach emphasized the preservation of local culture, environment, and traditions while promoting responsible travel. Participants also explored successful examples of slow tourism from other regions and discussed potential challenges. It was suggested that the equitable distribution of economic benefits through community-owned enterprises or revenue-sharing models is essential to ensure broad support. Apart from this they also discussed the importance of community partnerships by actively involving local communities in the planning and decision-making processes. This can ensure that the needs and perspectives of the local communities are integrated, fostering ownership and support.





To conclude, the workshop provided vital insights into developing a conservation model that balances ecological goals with community needs. By exploring slow tourism as a sustainable alternative and emphasizing community engagement, these discussions have paved the way for a more inclusive and democratic approach to managing the Kumbhalgarh region. The outcomes reflect a commitment to preserving local traditions while promoting responsible tourism, ensuring that conservation efforts benefit both the environment and the people who depend on it.

Positive feedback and actions post the workshop:

Participants in the workshop were thankful to LPPS and Kalpavriksh for organizing the workshop and providing vital information about the proposed tiger reserve and also the space for discussions regarding ways forward. The workshop provided a vital space for villagers from protected areas of the entire region of Godwar to come together to prepare the next steps to be taken towards collective mobilisations for the tiger reserve.





उदयपुर जिला 06-09-2024

फुलवारी अभयारण्य को कुंभलगढ़ टाइगर रिजर्व में शामिल करने का विरोध, धरावण में हुई बैठक

भारत न्यूज | फुलवारी

फुलवारी पंचायत समिति क्षेत्र के ग्राम पंचायत धरावण के पंचायत भवन में गुरुवार को फुलवारी की नाल अभयारण्य टाइगर रिजर्व रोको समिति की ओर से जागरूकता बैठक हुई। बैठक में बताया कि टाइगर रिजर्व बन गया तो इस क्षेत्र में रहने वाले आदिवासी समुदाय को विस्थापित होना पड़ेगा। इसलिए लोकतांत्रिक तरीके से विरोध में सहभागिता जरूरी है। सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता धनराज ने कुंभलगढ़ टाइगर रिजर्व में फुलवारी अभयारण्य को सम्मिलित किया जा रहा है। भारत सरकार ने सर्वेक्षण कार्य शुरू कर दिया है। इस क्षेत्र में निवासरत लोगों को जानकारी मिलने पर



लोगों में जागरूकता बैठक की जा रही है, जिसमें पेसा कानून के तहत आदिवासी क्षेत्र में केंद्र सरकार बिना ग्राम सभा की सहमति से काम नहीं कर सकती। भारत सरकार द्वारा पेसा कानून का उल्लंघन किया जा रहा है, जिसको लेकर राष्ट्रीय, प्रधानमंत्री, मुख्यमंत्री के नाम सरपंच व जनप्रतिनिधि को हस्ताक्षर युक्त ज्ञापन देकर क्षेत्र को इसमें शामिल नहीं करने की मांग की जा रही है।

आगामी समय में क्षेत्र का सर्वे समाज मिलकर संगठित स्तर धरना-प्रदर्शन करेगा। बैठक को जगदीश गरुडिया, अर्जुनलाल, लक्ष्मणलाल गरुडिया, ओम प्रकाश भोगी, नारायण लाल गरुडिया ने संबोधित किया। सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता धर्मचंद खी ने आह्वान किया कि राजनीतिक विचारधारा से ऊपर उठकर इस मुद्दे को आगे बढ़ाने में तन मन धन से सहयोग करें।

Image 4: A newspaper headline announcing opposition to the proposed Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve by villages from Phulwari Ki Naal WLS.

In the months after the meeting, protest marches and meetings have been organised within Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Phulwari Ki Naal Sanctuary against the proposed tiger reserve by the local tribal and pastoralist groups. Representations have also been sent to several key local and national authorities against the proposed tiger reserve. Discussions have also been held on the way forward to introduce a slow tourism model in the region.