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Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
Project Elephant Division

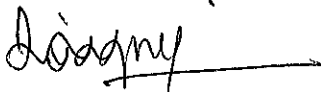
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,
Jor Bagh Road,
New Delhi-110003
Dated 7th August, 2019

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Sub: Proceedings of the Second meeting and field visit of Central Project Elephant Monitoring Committee (CPEMC) held at Sarguja-Jashpur Elephant Reserve, Chhattisgarh on 29th -30th June, 2019-reg.

The undersigned is enclosing herewith the approved proceedings of the second meeting and field visit of Central Project Elephant Monitoring Committee (CPEMC) held at Sarguja-Jashpur Elephant Reserve, Chhattisgarh on 29th -30th June, 2019. This issue with the approval of the Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife), MoEF&CC.

Encls: As above


(Dr. K. Muthamizh Selvan)
Scientist 'D' (Project Elephant)
Email id: km.selvan@gov.in
Telephone No. 011-24695067

Distribution:-

1. All members of the Central Project Elephant Monitoring Committee.
2. Chief Wildlife Warden, Government of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal.

Copy to:-

- PPS to ADGF (WL), MoEF&CC.
- PPS to IGF (PE), MoEF&CC.
- Sr. Consultant (PE), MoEF&CC.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND MEETING AND FIELD VISIT OF CENTRAL PROJECT ELEPHANT MONITORING COMMITTEE (CPEMC) HELD AT SARGUJA-JASHPUR ELEPHANT RESERVE, CHHATTISGARH ON 29TH AND 30TH JUNE, 2019

The second meeting and field visit of the Central Project Elephant Monitoring Committee (CPEMC), under the Chairmanship of Shri M S Negi, Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife) Ministry of EF&CC, was held at Sarguja-Jashpur Elephant Reserve, Chhattisgarh, on 29th and 30th June, 2019.

Day 1 (29th July 2019)

CPEMC members and invitees held a meeting in the meeting hall of the forest office at Ambikapur. Shri. M.S. Negi, ADG (WL), Chairman of CPEMC, welcomed all members of CPEMC and invitees to the meeting and initiated the discussion on the subject by listing out background, objectives and purpose of CPEMC. He requested Shri JACS Rao, APCCF (WL) to explain various aspects of elephant conservation and steps taken by the Chhattisgarh Forest Department to address those issues. Shri Rao informed the committee as to how the elephants from neighbouring States of Jharkhand and Odisha started coming to Chhattisgarh after 1987 and their numbers and duration of stay in the State started increasing gradually and many elephants settled down in forests of Chhattisgarh. New elephants kept coming in and the process continues till date. He explained that in fact elephants are now trying to colonise new areas and moving over to places, where they have not been reported in last 200 years or so. Thereafter he asked Deputy Director of Sarguja-Jashpur Elephant Reserve to explain the situation in his Elephant Reserve.

The Deputy Director informed that human - elephant conflicts are major issue in Sarguja Wildlife Circle. It has intensified further due to the fact that forests of Chhattisgarh are not a continuous and there is a lot of honeycombing with presence of villages in every 3-4kms. Crop raiding and destruction of houses by elephants is a common feature, especially during the season of Mahua (*Madhuca indica*) flowers. Over past few years, there was a steep rise in human and elephant deaths due to conflict, especially in southern part of Chhattisgarh, but no case of intentional poaching and deliberate killing of elephants was recorded. Sometimes elephants inadvertently are caught in traps set for wild boars. Villagers also used light fires for collection of tendu (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) leaves. In most instances, death and injuries of humans is not caused by elephants deliberately, but people are caught accidently in such situations due to their negligence and careless actions. Due to various actions by the Forest Department human mortality rate has come down significantly. These efforts have also been appreciated by local villagers. He listed out various initiatives taken up by the Chhattisgarh Forest Department.

Initiatives made by Chhattisgarh FD

- Chhattisgarh FD has developed a dossier of 70 elephants, with technical guidance by the Wildlife Institute of India, which has helped the department in human – elephant conflict management.
- The State Forest Department has also radio collared 6 elephants. Out of these 3 collars have fallen off accidentally. Shri R K Srivastava, Senior Consultant from the Ministry informed that CWLW has been given full powers by the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 for capturing and radio collaring of elephants under conflicts situation, hence no permission is required from the Central Government for replacement of those collars. This has helped in collation of information on the interstate movement of elephants and sharing of information through Whatsapp group to villagers. This has helped in changing the mind set of local people, who earlier used to blame elephants of belonging to the neighbouring States, who migrated and inflicted damage to their crops and properties.
- Large water bodies have been, within forest areas, so that they do not have to migrate out of forests for water and come in conflict with local people. Forest Department has also trained local people and frontline staff to deal with various conflict situations encountered by them due to activities of elephants.
- Information on elephant movement is also communicated through special program broadcast over radios at specific timings on channel called "*Hamara haathi hamara gonth*".
- The State Forest Department has established "Haathi Mitra Dal", Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and used 'Gajraj' vehicles to control incidents of HEC. Villagers and frontline staff have been provided powerful torches.
- Elephant Rescue and Rehabilitation Centres have been established to restrain rogue elephants.
- Mobile Elephant Repellent Barriers (ERBs) have been experimented and found successful in emergency situations.
- Media sensitisation is also done from time to time.
- The Forest Department stated that implementation of all these steps has helped in reducing human mortality figures to half of earlier deaths, in Surguja Wildlife Circle.

Assistance required by Chhattisgarh FD

- Chhattisgarh Forest Department requested for additional budgetary support to control human-elephant conflicts in the State. ADG (WL) informed that CWLW, Chhattisgarh should submit realistic proposal under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme 'Project Elephant'. Ministry will try to provide financial support to the extent possible. In case of shortfall, State Government can also used CAMPA funds for this purpose.

- The State FD requested the Ministry to approve the Memorandum of Understanding submitted by the State Government for inter - state collaboration to mitigate HEC. ADG(Wildlife) informed that he will examine the matter and take timely action in the matter.
- It was requested to provide contingency power to DFO to handle HEC. CWLW was requested to consider the matter on priority.

Thereafter, the Committee had visited Pingla Elephant Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (ERC) and had interactions with mahouts and other support staff. The Committee also examined location, water and fodder availability for elephants in the facility. There were seven elephants housed in the rescue centre. It is built over an area of 5 acres is fairly large in size and has ample space for the movement of elephants. The rescue centre has very good housing facility for elephants, with shade as well as in open areas. The elephants were shackled and kept under the supervision of mahouts, few of them were brought from Karnataka. However, there was no natural source of water within the facility. Elephants were stall fed there and were taken to Pingla river, located adjacent to the rescue centre, for bathing etc.

CPEMC members felt that ERC should be upgraded with better veterinary facilities and advance training should be imparted to Mahouts and elephant handlers. CZA Recognition for the ERC should be obtained as per Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Supreme Court Directive. Rubber encased shackles should be used to restrain elephants, which do not bite in their skin. FD should raise elephant fodder grass with assistance from neighbouring tribal community. It will not only provide food for elephants but also provide livelihood support to poor tribals. Training of elephants as Kunkies may be started immediately, as elephants are mature enough for that purpose.

Thereafter, the committee visited Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary and met local residents of Archoka village, which has been facing the brunt of elephant depredation. CPEMC deliberated on prospects/nuances of voluntary relocation of village outside the sanctuary; on the main road. Around 32 families reside in Archoka village, which is severely affected by HEC, since last six years, herds of elephants regularly raid crops during paddy season and also damage their houses. The villagers readily agreed for voluntary relocation of their village and requested to be rehabilitated in the new land identified by the Forest Department, on main road. ADG (WL) requested Shri Rao to expedite the process of relocation of the village.

The committee have also visited areas where water reservoirs were created for use of elephants inside the wildlife sanctuary.

Day 2 (30th July 2019)

On second day, the committee visited Mainpat area in Surguja Forest Division. In Mainpat most of the area vulnerable to human elephant conflicts is plateau area and there are limited points from where elephants can climb up to access agricultural fields and habitation in the plateau. Forest Department has made efforts to block these entry points through Elephant Proof Trenches (EPTs), portable solar fences, which are successful to a large extent. Elephant warning systems are also installed on top of many official buildings. Roof tops of buildings are also used as shelter by people at the time of elephant attack. The committee visited the new site of Kandraja village, which has been relocated and rehabilitated by the Forest Department. Villagers informed that newly established site is very good and safe from elephants. However, they are facing the problem of water in the village, although there is a fresh water stream, but it is not very close to the village. They requested that forest department should make a water reservoir to meet their requirement of potable water.

The Committee visited the site in Mainpat area, where the FD has dug Elephant Proof Trenches (EPTs) to restrict movement of elephants. The FD also showed the houses, which were damaged by elephants, prior to the creation of EPTs. The villagers have been relocated from the area to Kandaraja village. However, they continued crop cultivation at old site itself.

Around 44 families were relocated in Kanadraja village, which is situated at an elevated location. The villagers were provided specially designed houses by the State FD. There was an Anganwadi nearby, where children from village are educated. Aaganwadis also works as crisis management centre by villagers, for taking shelter at roof of the building during elephant attack.

The committee had also examined the mobile electric fences at Mainpat Forest Division. It is an innovation by Chhattisgarh FD, which can be erected at short notice and has been found to be very effective by local people. During discussions with villagers there was demand for such fences to surround the village. Some villagers enquired whether such fencing may be used for protection of isolated houses. Someone suggested using diesel generated electricity to scare away elephants. It was explained to them that such use of high voltage electricity is not desirable as it may seriously injure or even kill elephants.

The committee visited Songara village in Surajpur Forest Division and interacted with residents of Songara and 6 more neighbouring villages, who had gathered there to discuss their grievances. Most of these villages are located inside forest areas and there the intensity of human - elephant conflicts was intense in Surajpur Division. The villagers mostly cultivated sugarcane, which was regularly depredated by elephants. These villagers intimated that during the cropping season elephants come and damage their crops. The elephants are attracted by smell of paddy and Mahua. During non-cropping season they often damage their houses to feed on stored grains and mahua.

They demanded electric torches and electric fencing to safeguard their crops. They complained that compensation provided to them was far too less than the loss incurred. Villagers also demanded to fence of forest areas to restrict outward movement of elephants and growing fodder for elephants inside forest areas. The idea of alternate crops was discussed with villagers. They intimated that due to presence of sugar factory in the area, nearby villagers are having good income from sugarcane crop. However, if they get better income from alternate crops they are ready to switch over to these alternate crops. As villagers are receptive to the idea of alternate cropping, Chhattisgarh FD should hand hold villagers to shift to alternate crops such as Chillies, Pepper, Lemon grass etc. Some other solutions that came up during discussions are that Forest Department should create an underground/ pucca granary to check destruction of houses by elephants. The Department should support villagers to adopt Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) in areas affected by HEC. Old used rail lines should be tried for making elephant proof fences as these are more durable.

At the end of the filed visit, the Chairman of the Committee Shri M.S. Negi, ADG (WL), MOEF&CC had thanked Chhattisgarh Forest Department, Villages and Media for the successful conduct of the filed visit. The Field visit cum meeting of the CPEMC was followed by the third Regional Workshop on Human Elephant Conflicts and other related issues at Raipur on 1-2 July, 2019. Few issues that came to the notice of CPEMC members during the workshop are:

1. The inter-State movement of elephants between Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, South Bengal and Madhya Pradesh and straying of elephants from their path of movement, largely for in the search of food in adjoining agricultural fields and villages, is one of the main reasons for this increasing human elephant conflicts in Chhattisgarh. Lack of exchange of information between field staff of the bordering forest divisions of the two States, has aggravated the conflict situation. The field staff and villagers are generally caught unaware of the movement of elephants from the neighbouring States leading to their failure in taking pre-emptive action for smooth and safe movement of elephants without causing any damage to the human life and properties. Therefore there is need for a well established formal communication system at various levels of officers dealing with human elephant conflicts in the two States. Currently there is some communication between the officers, field officers and field staff of bordering divisions/ ranges, but there is no established formal standard operating procedure for such communication.
2. Straying/ dispersal of elephants from their habitat/ natural path of migration, being major cause of the conflict, need to be addressed in a manner where such elephants can be guided to a habitat, which is large enough to accommodate these elephants and has sufficient food base and suitable habitat to keep them within these areas. State Forest Department expressed its intuition to select a landscape between the States of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, which

includes Guru Ghasidas Wildlife Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh and Sanjy Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh.

3. The steps taken by the Chhattisgarh Forest Department to manage the human elephant conflicts need to be strengthened by adopting measures, which can ensure adoption of effective and safe practices for managing the conflicts. Use of Kunki elephants in handling the wild elephants involved in conflicts, could be an effective mean for handling the conflict.

Recommendations of the Committee

As per the observations made by the Committee during its visit to various human elephant conflict areas and during the workshop on Right to Passage held in Raipur on 1 & 2, in July 2019, following recommendations are made:-

- (i) The efforts made by the Chhattisgarh Forest Department, in coordination with other departments of the State, to contain the human elephant conflict and to mitigate the impact of this conflict on the people around, especially rural people is appreciated.
- (ii) The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) should evolved for ensuring smooth, prompt and effective exchange of information between the officers of the bordering States to track the movement of elephants. The major objective of the Standard Operating Procedure will be to ensure delivery of information in advance from the officers of the State from where the elephants are moving to the officers and the public of the States where these elephants are entering. The SOP should have the provision for regular periodical meetings between officers of the two States at different levels from the Chief Wild Life Warden to the Divisional Forest Officers and Range Officers of the bordering divisions/ranges of the two States. These SOPs will be effective in respect of the elephant movement between:
 - (a) States of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh
 - (b) States of Chhattisgarh and Odisha
 - (c) States of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh
 - (d) States of Odisha and Jharkhand
 - (e) States of Jharkand and West Bengal.

(Action to be taken by MoEFCC and the States)

- (iii) The State Government of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in consultation with Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change shall strive for creating a larger elephant landscape involving the Protected Areas like Guru Ghasidas Wildlife Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh and Sanjy

Tiger Reserves in Madhya Pradesh and adjoining forest areas so as to contain the dispersal of elephants in human dominated areas.

- (iv) The Ministry may also explore the possibility of establishing elephant rescue and rehabilitation areas/centres involving larger landscape where the rescued elephants can be kept in their near natural environment.
(Action by MoEFCC)
- (v) The State Governments of the Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal should establish the divisional human-elephant conflict management teams in the divisions having problem with higher instances of human-elephant conflict. Such teams should necessarily include sufficient number of trained Kunki elephants to control the wild elephants, the trained Mahavats & veterinary compounder/assistant.
- (vi) The Mahavat training schools should be established in the States like Tamilnadu, West Bengal, Assam etc so that the traditional expertise of the Mahavats available in these States can be used to create a force of trained Mahavats to handle the Kunki elephants and the wild elephants involved in the conflict.
- (vii) The State Government of Chhattisgarh shall expedite relocation of the villagers of the village Archoka from Timor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary for which villagers have already given their consent.
- (viii) In Songarha and other villages in the Surajpur division, the State Government should handhold the communities in adopting the alternate cropping like lemon grass etc.
- (ix) State Government should provide the underground cemented granaries for storing the agricultural produce/rains away from the houses in the villages in Surajpur region surrounded by the forests. Establishment of such granaries away from the houses will help in avoiding damage to the houses done by the wild elephants in the process of searching for the grains/other produce like mahua.
- (x) The decision of the Government of Chhattisgarh to create Lemru Elephant Reserve is also appreciated.
- (xi) In Mainpet plateau area of the Sarguja Circle, where entering point for the elephants are limited, creation of used rail fencing can also be explored by the State Government.