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MINUTES OF THE 6TH MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF PROJECT ELEPHANT

The 6th meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant was held on February 15, 1999 in Paryavaran Bhavan, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Environment & Forests. The list of participants who attended the meeting is attached. The meeting commenced with a welcome by Additional Inspector General of Forests (WL), especially the incoming new members of the Steering Committee. MEF welcomed all the members and mentioned that the meeting is being held after two years during which the population of elephants would have changed and it is necessary to take stock of the progress made under the Project. He then asked the members to make some general observations before taking up discussion on the agenda items.

Dr. R. Sukumar observed that after six years of Project Elephant, it is necessary to take stock of the achievements under the Project Elephant. In particular, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of some of the measures being implemented such as minimising elephant-human conflicts through setting up of barriers and whether this has resulted in a reduction of conflicts.

Prof. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury stated that the project had so far failed to achieve the objectives of ensuring long term survival of elephants in identified areas because not even one elephant reserve has so far been notified by the states. He further observed that even though Government of India had agreed to pay 100% compensation for loss of human life, the State Governments are not revising their rates for payment of such compensation. Some states are also not paying compensation for damage caused to crops by wild elephants.

The Chief Wildlife Warden, Assam mentioned that the human-elephant conflict is intense in Assam and 20 of the 23 districts are affected. Although they are trying to raise the rates of compensation from Rs.5, 000 to Rs.20, 000 per case, the State Government has not yet approved this and they are also not able to pay any

compensation for crop damage. He stated that one way of controlling depredation would be through capture of elephants, in addition to the other measures of erecting barriers and paying compensation to the affected persons. He wanted that permission for capture of elephants should be given for a period of 3-5 years and not on an annual basis. Moreover, the stipulation of 7 feet and above should be removed, as it is difficult to train elephants which are beyond that size.

Sh. S.C. Dey complimented MEF for creating the post of Project Director, which could be done after nearly 4 years of the project being launched. He also observed that a lot of work had been done in preparing and presenting the draft National Elephant Conservation Action Plan (NECAP). He agreed that for long-term management of wild elephant population, capture is essential. He wanted that more attention should be given to the reporting of poaching figures by States, as the figures received from Chief Wildlife Wardens are very much lower than those reported by the NGOs.

MEF then desired that discussion on the agenda should be taken up as most of the points being raised would again come up while considering the agenda items.

Item 1: Confirmation Of Minutes

The minutes of the 5th meeting of the Project Elephant Steering Committee were confirmed.

Item 2: Action Taken On Minutes Of The Last Meeting

- Prof. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury felt that the Steering Committee should meet more than once a year. However, after discussion, it was agreed that regional meetings of the members and concerned officials may be held, in addition to one annual meeting of the full Steering Committee.
- On the issue of inventory of domestic elephants, it was recommended that the Chief Wildlife Wardens should ensure that all elephants in captivity are registered, as required under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

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- Regarding protection of corridors, it was decided that the first step would be for the States to notify all the identified elephant reserves, as this work had not been done in any State even after six years of the project being implemented. It was also decided to constitute a small group comprising Dr. R. Sukumar, Prof. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury, Director, Wildlife Institute of India, Sh. Ashok Kumar and the Project Director to work out a long term plan for protection of identified corridors, which are crucial for elephant movement. The Plan should suggest how effective protection of corridors could be ensured through various strategies such as erection of barriers, entering into co-operative agreement with land owners, through active participation of local communities, acquisition of land etc. It was noted that as resources are limited, acquisition of land would only be done to a very limited extent and where absolutely essential. The use of the Environment Protection Act, 1986 could also be considered to prevent damaging development projects from coming up in such areas. It was noted that the Wildlife Act is proposed to be amended to provide additional categories of protected areas, such as "conservation reserve" and "community reserve", which would also help in extending legal protection to such corridors.

At this juncture, MEF had to leave the meeting because of some other pressing engagement and, therefore, he requested Secretary (E&F) to Chair the rest of the meeting.

- As regards the training of Mahouts, the Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala mentioned that they had been organising regular training programmes and details about them would be sent to the Ministry for circulation to other states. Dr. Cheeran further offered to organise training programme for trainers, which could be availed of by other states to start similar training programmes for Mahouts. Secretary (E&F) mentioned that the Ministry would be able to offer limited support for conducting such training courses for which the Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala should send a proposal.

- Dr. Cheeran assured that the guidelines on post-mortem, which Dr. Krishnamurthy was preparing, would be submitted shortly. It was also suggested that metal detectors should be used in the post-mortem examination to identify whether or not firearms were used for poaching elephants.
- It was noted that elephant census, which was due in 1997 had not been completed by most states and only Kerala, Karnataka and Assam had submitted their reports. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamil Nadu mentioned that they had also completed the census operations and that their report would be submitted shortly. The states of Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh were asked to take up the census operations and complete them during the year. It was agreed that census should be done on a regional basis so that there is effective co-ordination between the different states to avoid the problem of double counting etc.
- The problem of shortage of staff in the Project Elephant Cell within the Ministry was noted and it was recommended that some solution should be found to overcome the problem.
- On the issue of minimising human-elephant conflict, it was observed that effectiveness of barriers should be the criteria for funding support from the Ministry. Ministry should fund only those projects, which have an element of participation by the local communities so that the problem of maintenance of barriers could be overcome. It was also agreed that the creation of elephant proof trenches should not be a priority, as power fencing is considered more effective. Dr. R. Sukumar suggested that the erection of some permanent barriers should also be considered, as these are largely maintenance free.

Item 3: National Elephant Conservation Action Plan (NECAP)

The draft National Elephant Conservation Action Plan (NECAP) was introduced and discussed by the Steering Committee. It was noted that all missing information

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should be obtained from the States and specific activities to be undertaken within each of the elephant reserves should be identified. For this purpose, it was decided to set up a core group comprising Dr. R. Sukumar, Prof. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury, Director, Wildlife Institute of India and the Project Director to discuss and finalise the NECAP within a period of 4-5 months. The NECAP could then be finalised by the Ministry, without having to go back to the Steering Committee.

Item 4: Poaching and Illegal Trade

Sh. Ashok Kumar, Vice-President of the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) who was a Special Invitee to the meeting briefed the members about the meeting about the outcome of the recent CITES Standing Committee meeting at Geneva. The CITES Standing Committee had approved the limited sale of ivory by two Southern African Countries, namely, Zimbabwe and Namibia to Japan and India should consider the likely impacts of that decision on the Asian elephant, particularly within the country. After considerable discussion on the subject, it was decided that there is a need to develop a good system of intelligence network to identify and apprehend middlemen and traders involved in poaching of elephants and illegal trade in ivory. For this purpose, there has to be an effective co-ordination between the states, enforcement agencies and NGOs. There should also be faithful reporting of all poaching figures to the Ministry so that the trends could be monitored realistically.

It was also decided to make a concerted effort to identify traders and other persons involved in illegal trade of ivory in a few selected places within the country and take concrete action against them within the next 3-4 months. Addl. IGF (WL), Sh. Ashok Kumar and the Project Director should draw up a Plan of Action for this purpose. Help of other enforcement agencies should also be enlisted through the Special Co-ordination Committee, which has been set up within the Ministry. Funding should also be targeted to such identified areas, where a detailed strategy to deal with the problem of poaching and illegal trade is to be operationalised.

Item 5: Management of Isolated Populations and Capture of Wild Elephants

As already recorded in the summary of the general discussion, capture of wild elephants is essential for long term population management. However, this would have to be done with all safeguards and by following the guidelines established for this purpose as well as the provisions of law. Besides, the NECAP would also deal with this subject in greater detail and provide the necessary guidance.

Item 6: Extension of Project Elephant to Tripura

The request of the Government of Tripura was not recommended by the Steering Committee on the grounds that such populations of wild elephants would have to be tackled under other on-going wildlife schemes, as decided by the Steering Committee on earlier occasions.

Item 7: Issue of Ownership Certificates for Ivory

It was decided that to begin with all raw stocks of ivory with dealers should be taken over entirely and the articles and carved items would be inventorised and frozen. The Additional Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife) together with Sh. Ashok Kumar and the Chief Wildlife Wardens of Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Rajasthan would work out the guidelines for establishing limits for retention of articles for bonafide personal use. This should be done within a period of 2 weeks so that the Delhi High Court could be informed of the proposed course of action.

Item 8: Items Proposed by Dr. J.V. Cheeran

The three items proposed by Dr. Cheeran relating to Policy on Captive Elephants, Study of Health and Nutrition and Establishment of a Training Centre were discussed in detail. It was noted that a decision on the training aspect had already been taken by the Steering Committee under Item 2 above. As regards the policy on captive elephants, it was agreed that in addition to the recommendations, which would form part of the NECAP, Dr. R. Sukumar would co-ordinate the development of a long-term

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policy over the next one-year or so. Dr. Cheeran also stressed the need for funding some projects on the health and nutrition aspects of captive elephants, which would help in the better management of not only captive elephants but also the wild populations.

Other Items

The Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamil Nadu raised the issue of the proposed railway line in the State, which would run from Chamrajnagar to Satyamangalam and effectively bisect the elephant population of Nilgiris and the Eastern Ghats. The Steering Committee expressed its concern over this and recommended that the project should be opposed and the matter taken up with the Railway Ministry.

The meeting ended with thanks to the Chair.

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE VI MEETING OF
THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF PROJECT ELEPHANT

| <u>No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Designation & Orgn.</u> |
|------------|---------------------------|---|
| | Shri Jivtesh Singh Maini | JS & FA - MOEF |
| | Shri J.R.B.Alfred | Zoological Survey of India Calcutta |
| | Shri S.K.Mukherjee | Director Wildlife Institute of India Dehradun |
| | Dr.G.Raveendran | Dy. Director General Ministry of Tourism |
| | Shri C.R.V.Rao | Dy. Director General Ministry of Tourism |
| | Shri S.K.Patnaik | Chief Wildlife Warden Orissa |
| | Shri T.Rama Krishna | Chief Wildlife Warden Andhra Pradesh |
| | Shri V.K.Sinha | Chief Conservator of Forests (WL) & Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala |
| | Shri R.P.S.Katwal | Chief Wildlife Warden Tamil Nadu |
| | Shri S. Doley | Chief Wildlife Warden Assam |
| | Shri Shivanna | Chief Wildlife Warden Karnataka |
| | Shri S.N.Kalita | Chief Wildlife Warden Arunachal Pradesh |
| | Shri K.K.Sema | Chief Wildlife Warden Nagaland |
| | Shri Arin Ghosh | Chief Wildlife Warden West Bengal |
| | Shri R.L.Singh | Chief Wildlife Warden Uttar Pradesh |
| | Shri S.C.Dey | Secretary General Global Tiger Forum |
| | Shri Cheeran, JV | Professor & Head College of Veterinary & Animal Mannutty |
| | Shri R.Sukumar | Indian Institute of Science Bangalore |
| | Shri D.R.Lahiri Choudhury | Asian Elephante Specialist Group IUCN/SSC |
| | Dr.D.S.Srivastava | Secretary Nature Conservation Society Ranchi |
| | Shri Ashok Kumar | Vice President Wildlife Protection Society of India |
| | Shri J.C.Daniel | Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai |