

**REPORT ON CURRENT STATUS OF VILLAGE RESETTLEMENTS ALONG
THE TIRUNELLI-BRAHMAGIRI ELEPHANT CORRIDOR IN SOUTHERN
INDIA**

Important Elephant Range

Asia's largest elephant population (6000+ plus) is found in the Nilgiri-Eastern Ghats Elephant Range (about 12000 square kms.) in southern India. . Increasing human influence has resulted in fragmentation of this prime elephant habitat in a number of locations across the range, and some of the elephant habitats that are relatively large and still viable in the context of conservation are tenuously connected by narrow tracts of land which have been identified as corridors. The Nilgiris-Eastern Ghats elephant range is contiguous with the Kodagu-Wayanad Plateau to the west which has a population of about 4500. One corridor that is important and critical in view of the degree of human influence is the Tirunelli-Brahmagiri corridor that connects the Kodagu-Wayanad plateau with the Brahmagiri-Pushpagiri range (population about 500) in the Western Ghats to the north/north west. (refer Annexures 1 & 2 for maps). Administratively, this corridor falls primarily in the state of Kerala, though the two large elephant habitats that it connects are protected areas that fall mainly in the state of Karnataka.

The Tirunelli-Brahmagiri corridor is itself the result of fragmentation of elephant habitats in the Kodagu-Wayanad Plateau and the Brahmagiri foot-hills. A significant part of the land that now comprises the corridor is still protected forest, but large tracts within it have been brought under agriculture - wet paddy fields or dry spice and coffee plantations - . by migrants in the relatively recent past. The human influence on the landscape is on the increase and with it the prospect of further fragmentation of the forest landscape. The protection / augmentation of the corridor is vital.

Project and its objectives

The Project intends to preserve the Tirunelli-Brahmagiri corridor in order to

- ensure genetic diversity by preventing isolation of elephant populations
- reduce animal-human conflict by moving people away from elephant corridors
- sustain the larger range as one, unbroken entity and prevent its fragmentation
- protect the traditional migration routes used by elephants

Six settlements are situated within this corridor, inhabited by about 60 families engaged mainly in agriculture. Their crops attract wildlife - elephants in particular but also deer and boar - creating many instances of loss of produce and serious wildlife-human conflict situations. The project aims at the complete shift and relocation of the inhabitants of these six settlements over a period of time and the acquisition of about 110 acres of agricultural land from them for eventual transfer to the state Forest Department for reversal to forest land status and integration with the adjoining protected areas for future management in the long-term as a recognized elephant corridor. Annexure 3 gives brief particulars in regard to each of these six settlements.

Given the complexity of the task, the financial implications and the social issues involved, and in order to ensure that the land acquisition and relocation processes are meaningful and proper, the Foundation has sought formal and informal collaborations with like-minded conservation organisations, and the support of the Forest Department, the stake-holders and local agencies.

Progress so far and current efforts

One such collaborator is the Wildlife Trust of India based in New Delhi, which focused on Tirulkunnu settlement (population: about 50) and this initiative has made good progress. ANCF commenced work on this settlement in February 2005, and did considerable groundwork and liaison with the inhabitants, explaining the significance of the work, the allaying of apprehensions on the part of the inhabitants on their livelihood, and the evaluation of viable mutually acceptable options and solutions. Since mid-2006, the work was transferred to the Wildlife Trust of India which offered a significant financial outlay. In this particular instance, the inhabitants are being relocated in alternative farmlands that are being purchased outside the corridor and construction of houses funded.

ANCF has thereafter focused primarily on three other settlements in the corridor where discussions with inhabitants and assessment of the legal and social realities are in progress. ANCF has been particularly active in one settlement – Suldarvayal – where it has made an encouraging start by an outright purchase of about 6 acres of agricultural land (out of about 16 acres) on terms found fair and acceptable by the sellers, who intend to relocate themselves outside the corridor. The financial package offered by ANCF in this instance, and accepted, included purchase of land, compensation for existing houses, settlement of loans to clear mortgages on the land targeted, and compensation for termination of lease on forest land. The viability of our approach and our credibility have been demonstrated, lessons have been learnt, and a reasonable degree of trust generated for ANCF to proceed with further land acquisitions in the area.

Key resettlement principles adopted by ANCF in negotiations

- The resettlement process is entirely voluntary.
- Villagers have the option of getting equivalent area of land or compensation in cash.
- Income potential of the villagers to be protected. For example, if they enjoy two crop harvests in the current land, substitute land should also produce two harvests.
- Substitute land has to be approved by them as being suitable for their needs.
- All costs of resettlement including cost of new land, state levies in registering the ownership documents, brokerage to real estate agents etc. will be compensated.
- Houses and other immovable assets will be compensated
- Assistance will be provided in discussions with banks to release mortgages.

Some Major Issues that affect compensation

Mortgages on land - Having pledged farmland to banks, the inhabitants need to address the issue of bank loans before selling it to ANCF. However, since they do not have capacity to pay the interest or principal of the loan amounts, they expect ANCF to settle the loans

High expectations - Since the farmland is the only major asset for these villagers, they expect to realise the best possible price. This is complicated by the various deals struck in the vicinity for sale of land for tourist resorts, as the area is scenic and beautiful.

Documentation & Leases - Some of the land suffers from incomplete or inadequate ownership records, but would have been under the control of the family concerned for several generations. Similarly, leases from the Government, though granted for limited periods, have rarely been terminated - leases are as good as ownership.

Process at Suldarvayal (Total 16 Acres, Phase I : 6 Acres)

After an initial assessment in 2005, discussions with the inhabitants commenced in May 2006 in earnest. The ANCF team made several visits – once every two to three weeks - and held many rounds of discussions with them. [It took about a dozen meetings to establish ANCF's credentials and bonafides and for the inhabitants to overcome their reluctance to discuss.] Progress thereafter was rapid.

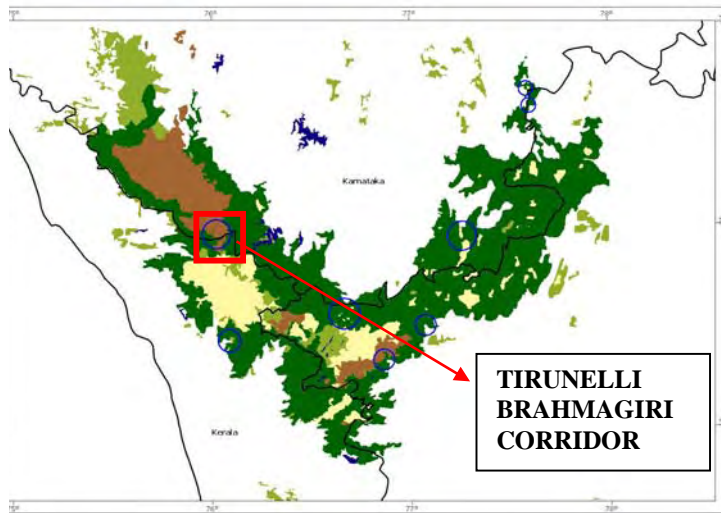
The lands purchased were owned by one joint family, which wanted cash compensation for resettlement, covering land, tiled house, allowances for discomfort and loss of harvest. In addition, to release the mortgage on the land, ANCF entered into discussions with three banks and had to settle bank loans taken by some members of the family. Eventually, in March 2007, after almost nine months of discussions, the 6 acre plot of land was acquired at a total cost of Indian Rupees 1.4 Million (about 25000 Euros). The documentation and legal formalities associated with land transfer were completed in March 2007. Residents were been given a grace period of three months , till June 2007, to vacate. .

The other families in the settlements are perhaps now motivated and in a frame of mind to take similar action.

ANCF's team for this project comprised of [1]Mr.Ravi Subramanian, Finance / Management Consultant, Hon. Senior Adviser; ANCF [2] Mr.K.Sreedharan, Advocate and Resource person and [3] Mr.A.Madhusudan, Project Officer, ANCF.

ANNEXURE 1.

[Map showing the Tirunelli-Brahmagiri Corridor within the Nilgiris Elephant Range (*Note that this corridor is the only green patch of forest connecting large habitats on either side.*)



ANNEXURE 2

Close-up Map of the Tirunelli-Brahmagiri Corridor

(Notice the narrow green patch of forest between agricultural lands. This narrow patch is further threatened by the six villages (numbered 1 to 6) in the middle of this green corridor.)

Brahmagiri Tirunelli Elephant Corridor



ANNEXURE 4 (PROFILE OF THE SIX VILLAGES IN THE CORRIDOR)

Village	Area in acres	Number of Families	Resident Persons	Remarks
1. Poliyankolli	7	12	30	
2. Edayurvayal	27	11		Village dependent on one affluent individual. Initial compensation expectations are high.
3. Pothumoola	35	16		Largest of the settlements
4. Suldarvayal	16	5	<20	6 acres of land purchased in March 2007 by ANCF, from one family.
5. Kotappadi	10		< 5	Uncultivated due to animal incursions
6. Tirulkunnu	17		40 to 50	Undertaken by WTI-ANCF jointly
1 acre = 43200 Square feet)				



View of Suldarvayal from the south, with the Brahmagiri Hills in the background. The settlement adjoins protected forests.

Status Report on the Project to strengthen Elephant Corridors in South India

The settlement, along a valley, is practically surrounded on three sides by protected forests within the identified corridor. Elephants frequently enter the cultivated areas [foreground] to forage on crops, and the inhabitants need to maintain constant vigil. Firecrackers are often used to repel these elephants.





A significant part of the financial package offered by ANCF is compensation for simple housing such as those seen in these images, to enable construction of similar structures elsewhere by the sellers.



A part of the Tirunelli-Brahmagiri elephant corridor, Wayanad, Kerala state. ANCF's intention is to ensure that the people voluntarily agree for relocation outside the corridor, and that the lands now used for agriculture are transferred to the state forest department for restoration of forest cover, integration with adjoining protected areas and long-term management as legally identified elephant corridors.