

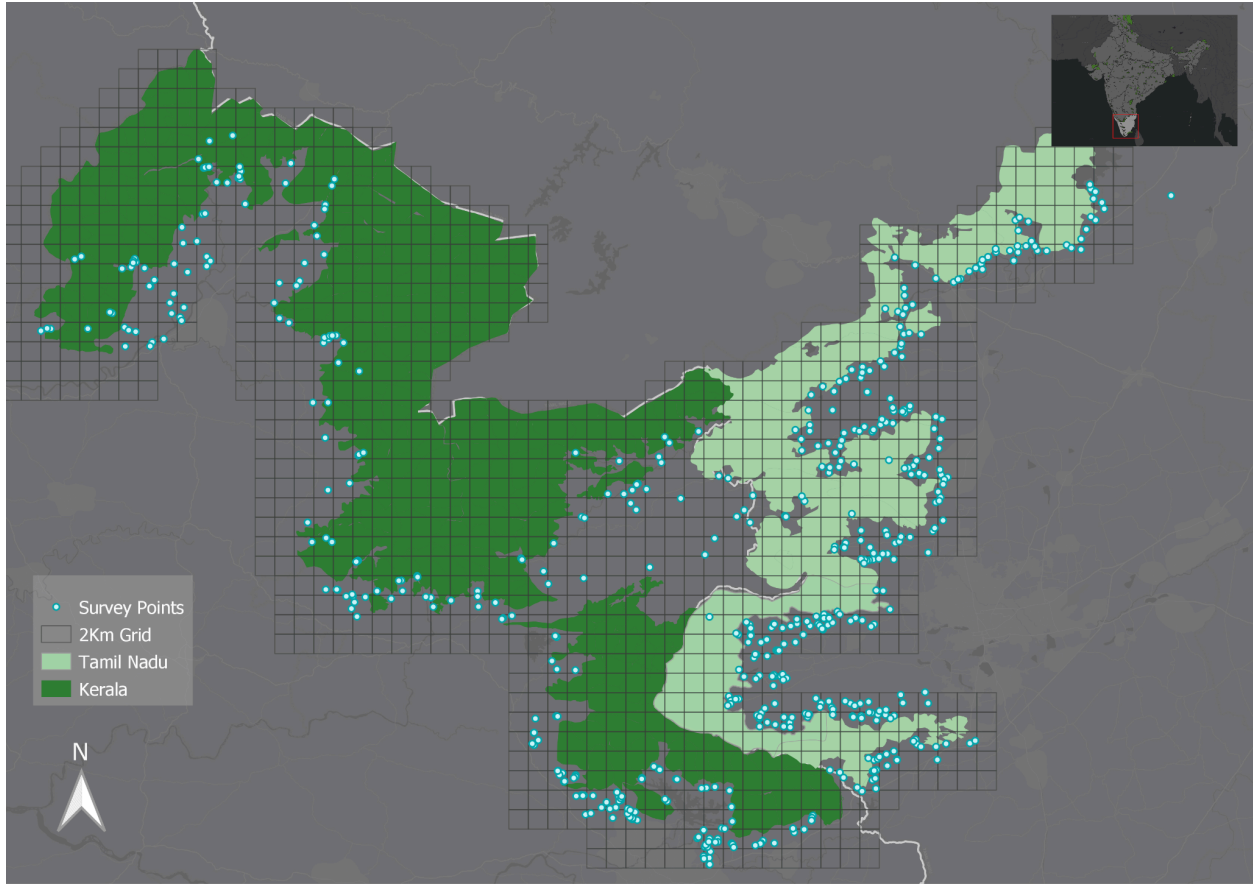
**Title of Application:**

Understanding the Intricacies of Human-Elephant Conflict Management in the Southern Western Ghats.

**Name of leader:** Aishwarya Anilkumar

**Field work conducted:**

- Completed 500 household interviews across five forest divisions (Palakkad, Mannarkkad, Nilambur North, Nilambur South, and Coimbatore) in two states, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, India.
- Surveys were conducted across approximately 10,000 sq. km along forest boundaries using a systematic grid.
- Met and interviewed key community-level social nodes, including:
  - Vana Samrakshana Samithi (VSS)
  - Panchayat members
  - Rapid Response Teams (RRT)
  - Local forest watchers
  - Independent Farmers' Associations
  - Village elders and residents
  - Thozhilurappu (MGNREGA) groups
  - Vanakuzhu thalaivis and thalaivans
  - Environmental activists
  - Local politicians
  - Farmers
- These interactions helped identify decision-making roles in elephant conflict situations.
- Documented people's perceptions and experiences with elephants, particularly in relation to farmland use, crop damage, and frequency of sightings.
- Conducted interviews to identify information flow patterns and understand how communities communicate elephant presence and coordinate responses.
- Developed and implemented choice cards to assess community willingness to participate in various conflict management activities. These cards varied in timing, responsibilities, and the level of support expected from authorities or the community.
- Maintained detailed spatial data (with GPS locations) for all interviews for further mapping and analysis.



Map 1: Study area and distribution of survey locations across Kerala and Tamil Nadu, India

### **Preliminary Observations (Not final results)**

- Communities show substantial variation in the frequency of elephant visits to farmlands. In some areas, elephant presence follows predictable seasonal movement patterns, whereas in others, elephants are reported year-round.
- Early patterns suggest that certain social actors—such as Vana Samrakshana Samithi (VSS) leaders, forest watchers, and Vanakuzhu members—play an important role in disseminating information related to elephant movement and conflict events.
- Initial review of choice card responses indicates that willingness to participate in conflict mitigation initiatives varies with occupation, geographic region, and the intensity of experienced conflict.
- Emerging differences between Tamil Nadu and Kerala are evident in terms of language use, traditional ecological knowledge, familiarity with elephant behavior, and levels of trust in forest departments.
- Perceptions of elephants and the nature of conflict differ between the two states, including variation in cultural attitudes and expressions of respect toward the species.

- Cropping patterns and crop types vary widely across locations and are influenced by multiple interacting factors, including land use, environmental conditions, and local livelihoods.
- Many respondents report that direct experiences with human–elephant conflict have largely emerged within the past two decades, with perceived intensity increasing over time. In several locations, communities are adapting to conflict in areas where such interactions were not reported in earlier generations.
- Land-use patterns and rainfall regimes are perceived to have changed substantially over the past decade, potentially influencing agricultural practices and elephant movement.
- Translation and transcription of interviews are ongoing and will inform subsequent thematic qualitative analyses.

**Plans ahead:**

- Complete translation, transcription, cleaning, and coding of all 500 interviews.
- Conduct preliminary social network analysis (SNA) to identify key influence nodes involved in information dissemination and conflict response.
- Map spatiotemporal patterns in perceptions and experiences of human–elephant conflict.
- Complete analysis of choice card data to model determinants of community willingness to participate in mitigation initiatives.
- Prepare visual maps and figures for the next project report.
- Initiate discussions with forest department teams regarding potential community-based mitigation planning informed by initial insights.