

SAMRAKSHAN TRUST



The Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary – a new home for Asiatic Lions?

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Supported by
The Rufford Small Grants Programme



Vijaypur Subdivision, District Sheopur
Madhya Pradesh, India



Vision

Samrakshan (derived from the Sanskrit word for conservation) is a registered not-for-profit organization that works on conservation and livelihood issues with communities living close to important biodiversity areas, using participatory approaches and strategies for socially just nature conservation.

Mission

Samrakshan promotes equitable and sustainable livelihoods for remote rural communities subsisting in or around biodiversity-rich areas of India. Samrakshan believes that successful conservation depends upon participation of the community in efforts to protect and regenerate the natural resource base, so that they can share equitably in the gains from such regeneration. Forest-dependant local communities compete with wild flora and fauna in drawing sustenance resources from forests. Samrakshan engages such communities in activities that promote efficient husbandry of locally available natural resources. Samrakshan promotes wise resource use practices, to raise agricultural productivity by improving the water regime, introducing sustainable irrigation and boosting soil productivity. The idea is to limit the adverse impacts on wild habitats that emanate from natural resource dependence of poor communities.

The Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary Project

Samrakshan's first field intervention was with the people living in and around the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in district Sheopur in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Samrakshan has been working since 1999 with the *Sahariya Adivasi* (indigenous) people displaced from Kuno sanctuary due to a **lion reintroduction programme** of the Government of India. Under this programme, a pride of Asiatic Lions is to be re-introduced in the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary from their home in the Gir National Park in Gujarat, to prepare an alternate home for this endangered species.



The Kuno sanctuary

During 1999-2001, Samrakshan focused on assisting the displaced villagers in accessing rehabilitation benefits through information dissemination and intensive liaison with government agencies. From 2002 onwards,

Samrakshan has been working with the villages surrounding the sanctuary to recreate livelihood after displacement, with special focus on soil and water conservation and sustainable agriculture. By mid-2002, almost the entire population of the original villages inside Kuno sanctuary had been shifted to the relocation site by the sanctuary management, and in the face of three consecutive rain failures, the displaced villagers were struggling to survive on the basis of an increasingly precarious farm-based livelihood. The rehabilitation package offered to the displaced people had several gaps, and the state Forest Department appeared unable to plan and implement a holistic and long term plan for sustainable rehabilitation of the community. In this scenario, Samrakshan began working directly with the community on a participatory conservation and development model, with the objective of harmonizing conservation with people's livelihood.

Target Area and People

Samrakshan's field office is located in village Agraa in the Vijaypur subdivision of district Sheopur Kalan, in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The nearest town is Vijaypur (26 km), and the villages we work in are linked to Vijaypur by a fair weather road. Our work in particular targets around 20 villages (comprising nearly 1400 families, or about 7,000 people) that have been relocated from the nearby Kuno wildlife sanctuary and resettled around village Agraa, where the Samrakshan field office is located. Over 90 per cent of the population of this region consists of the Sahariya, a tribe indigenous to the dry semi-arid forests of northwest-central India.

We focus especially on households and villages that have faced the most serious disruption of livelihood, and are highly dependent on common property resources and the surrounding forests.

The Rufford Booster Grant

Samrakshan's main focus under the Rufford Booster Grant for 2005-06 was to provide support to the villages displaced from Kuno wildlife sanctuary, to help them in the complex task of rebuilding lost livelihoods. Specifically, the Booster Grant was meant for providing irrigation facilities to the displaced families, in to reduce agrarian distress and increase productivity of agriculture.



Irrigation well being dug by local people

The Rufford Booster Grant was used in two villages, Paira and Jakhoda, both of which were displaced from the Kuno wildlife sanctuary in 1999-2000. These two were among the villages affected most adversely by relocation from Kuno wildlife sanctuary, in terms of loss of traditional livelihood and difficulties faced in adjusting to their new location. In both these villages, Samrakshan has used the Rufford Booster Grant to secure the agricultural activities of the community through provision of effective irrigation.

Work Progress

Irrigation Development: During 2006, a total of 15 households in villages Paira and Jakhoda, located in the Patar watershed area, were assisted in digging 6 open wells upto the depth of 7 to 15 meters. Meanwhile, assistance was provided to 20 other groups (of 2 to 4 households each) to deepen existing dugwells to make them functional. On an average, 3 families come together to form an irrigation user-group, and share the work of digging or deepening the open dugwells. Financial assistance for well-deepening is being provided mainly to user groups that were originally financed by the Forest Department, but whose work has been stalled for months due to a variety of departmental problems.

The Samrakshan field team has undergone intensive training in groundwater management through a partnership with the Pune based organization ACWADAM. A 2-member team from Samrakshan attended a 17-day training at ACWADAM during December 5 – 22, 2006 on sustainable management of groundwater resources, and it is expected that a detailed groundwater management plan will be prepared for the entire Patar watershed in the next year. This plan, in addition to advising the Samrakshan team on its own work in irrigation development, will be made available to Panchayats and the Forest Department too, for future work on irrigation in the area.



Picture 1: Inauguration of irrigation well after a prayer ceremony

Community Mobilization: Women in these two villages have been mobilised into Self-Help Groups (SHGs). These SHGs are based primarily on thrift and credit activities, but are encouraged to take on a number of credit-plus activities at the village level. The objective of women's mobilization into SHGs was to promote non-

farm Income Generating Activities (IGAs) in the short to medium run, and to promote conservation activities and to empower this relatively voiceless section of the community in the long run.

At the end of April 2006, the 16 SHGs formed till then were federated into two clusters in order to provide a combined platform to SHG members for addressing issues of common concern and eventually, to help the SHGs attain independence from Samrakshan. The members of all SHGs received regular training in various aspects of SHGs, along with special trainings on other relevant issues. Through small savings, the members of these SHGs now are able to cater to their immediate need for small consumption loans. The Samrakshan team then began to work towards taking the SHGs to the next level, where an increasing number of members also begin to take production loans to set up farm or non-farm income generating activities (IGAs). As a part of this strategy, the team is engaged in developing a detailed IGA action plan with the help of external consultants from MART-Rural, a Delhi-based organization.

In the meantime, individual SHG members have already begun using loans from SHGs to initiate small-scale enterprises, with strategic support from the Samrakshan team. The rate of loan recovery continues to be very high, and the stage is gradually being set for launching the larger IGA initiative for the SHG members from the latter part of 2007 onwards.

Impact

In all, a total of 68 families have been able to obtain irrigation facilities for their fields as a result of this activity. For each of these families, agricultural risk has decreased significantly, and they can now be expected to cultivate at least 2 crops in a year, resulting in improved livelihood security. From the conservation point of view, the dependence of these families on the surrounding forests will decrease correspondingly.

The larger gain from this project is in terms of establishment of an improved model of irrigation provision, which is now being replicated by the Forest Department in other villages displaced from the Kuno sanctuary. Samrakshan introduced the practice of using light-weight pumpsets to evacuate water from half-dug wells, thus helping the community to overcome its single most important problem in well-digging. *Learning from this, the Forest Department has now ordered 5 such pumpsets to help spread the work over a larger number of households.* Samrakshan also used the Rufford grant to make payments for well-digging in periods when the Forest Department was unable to make payments due to non-release of funds from the state capital. This enabled the people to continue well-digging work without a break, thus easing a critical bottleneck that had hampered irrigation development work in the past.

Previous Rufford Small Grants were used in the same villages to provide effective crop protection through construction of a loose boulder wall around the perimeter of the agricultural fields. The crops in these villages are now secure from raiding by stray cattle, and this has also made the farmers in this village much more receptive to

the proposed soil and water conservation initiatives which Samrakshan is now initiating. As a result of the construction of the crop protection wall, it is estimated that the crop output in village Paira will be enhanced by at least 100 per cent. Protection of crops is also a critical pre-requisite for introduction of other productivity enhancing inputs in agriculture (which the community was originally not receptive to, due to threat of crop depredation by wild animals and stray cattle).



Picture 2: Meeting of a women's SHG

The activities outlined above and supported by the Rufford Continuation Grant have also served as a valuable entry point activity, using which the Samrakshan team has successfully mobilized the community in these villages to form participatory village and sub-village level institutions of women and men. These institutions are now engaged actively in further livelihood planning for the villages, for enhancing livelihood security through a series of proposed natural resource regeneration activities. The Samrakshan team is now assisting these institutions in accessing government and non-government funds to begin implementing the village-level watershed development plan.

Partnerships

Using the window of opportunities provided by the Rufford Booster Grant, among others, Samrakshan developed many vital partnerships in 2005-06 with donors, support organizations and individual experts working in allied fields. The experiences, resources and expertise garnered from these partners have been of immense use to us in the course of our work. Some of the organizations that Samrakshan is now working in collaboration with are listed below:

Donors: The following organisations supported Samrakshan during 2005-06:

- UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme, New Delhi
- Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Mumbai
- The Government of Japan, Mumbai Consulate

- The Ford Foundation, New Delhi

Technical Support and Training

- ACWADAM, Pune for training in groundwater management
- Samaj Pragati Sahyog, Bagli for watershed development
- MART-Rural, New Delhi for non-farm enterprise development
- Point of View, Mumbai for women's empowerment
- Ibtada, Rajasthan for women's mobilization, micro-credit and enterprise development



Picture 3: SHG members on an exposure visit to Rajasthan

The Implementing Team

Samrakshan's field team now consists of a group of young, well-qualified and committed individuals with multi-disciplinary skills. The team resides at Samrakshan's field centre in village Agra (please see the table below for details of the Natural Resource Management team). A majority of the team members have been drawn from the local community, and trained intensively in their respective fields to combine their inherent knowledge of the area and people with specialized programmatic skills.

S. No.	Designation	Name
1.	Team Leader	Syed Merajuddin
2.	Co-ordinator – NRM	Shailendra Pathak
3.	Co-ordinator – Agriculture	Rajesh Patidar
4.	Assistant	Dayakishan Kushwah

From the Samrakshan Head Office in New Delhi, Arpan Sharma (Chief Functionary) and Asmita Kabra (Trustee) continued to provide strategic support to the field team in project formulation, fundraising, reporting, documentation and overall administration.