

# M A N Y A M

A NEWSLETTER ON THE EASTERN GHATS



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## THE FORESTS OF DAMS AND PLANTATIONS

The Eastern Ghats have long been confronted with a host of challenges that have caused rapid landscape changes which negatively affected the ecosystems and the communities in the landscape. These challenges are mainly the result of various development related projects which have involved attempts at securing the natural resources of the hills, forests and rivers for industrial development in the plains.

In this issue, we present to you articles illustrating the challenges confronting the landscape in the larger context of development, and the greater long term consequences that these can have on the forests and communities of the region.

Syed Subhani, Secretary of ASHA, an NGO working on communities and forest management in Chinturu village of Andhra Pradesh shares the results of a survey he carried out on the current process of reset-

tlement and rehabilitation for the families affected and displaced by the Polavaram dam project, coming up in the Papikonda National Park in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh.

Bidyut Mohanty, Secretary of SPREAD, based in Koraput, Odisha, talks about the potential negative affects of the large scale commercial Eucalyptus plantations coming up in the Eastern Ghats of Odisha's Koraput region, on the sensitive forests of the region as well as on the tribal communities involved in its cultivation for supply to paper mills.

Finally, we share a news with you written by Alex Cole from BirdLife International, about the recent declaration of Papikonda National Park as an Important Bird Area (IBA), following a two week intensive bird survey carried out in Papikonda and other parts of the northern Eastern Ghats by ATREE and BNHS.

-Vikram Aditya



Top: A dam site in the Eastern Ghats. Above: A view of the Godavari from Papikonda NP (Images by Vikram Aditya)

**DISPLACED BUT NOT REHABILITATED | SYED SUBHANI**

The Polavaram dam project (Indira Sagar Multipurpose Project) is a major multipurpose irrigation project currently under construction across the Godavari river in the northern Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, and is projected to be India's largest irrigation project when completed. The project is set to displace an estimated 2,37,000 people according to the 2001 census in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, almost entirely in the hills and valleys of the Eastern Ghats.

By now, a decade later, the population in the project affected villages has grown considerably. According to surveys carried out till date, the tribal population constitutes 53.17% to 61.11% of the affected population. The Koya and Konda Reddy tribes inhabiting the region constitute a conservative estimate of 53% of the population, roughly around 1, 25,610 individuals. The Dalit SC community constitutes 12.5% of the population. As per the Constitution, if more than 50,000 tribals are to be displaced by a project, a Constitutional Amendment is necessary to get approval for the project. More than 1,00,000 ST (tribals) will be displaced in the case of Polavaram and yet, no efforts have been made in Parliament to make necessary changes in the Law till date.

With support from Keystone Foundation, we conducted a survey on the process of compensation and transparency in land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement under the 2013 Act in the Project submergence area of Chintur mandal, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. We found that several villages were missing in the Land Acquisition village list as per G.O.Ms. No: 111 Irrigation & CAD (LA.IV.R.R.I), 27th June, 2005. The (original) bifurcation list stated 149 submergence villages, but the Polavaram SDC (LA) Unit-II, Bhadrachalam listed only 82 villages for resettlement. The rest 67 villages had not been included for R&R, even though they will be displaced. This is only in four of the 11 mandals undergoing submergence.

The survey also showed that 35 buildings and 418 thatched houses have not been provided any compensation package, 40,534 *palmyrah*, tamarind and mango trees have not been compensated for, whereas Project Affected Families (PAF) were told that cash award includes all trees present on the land. In

fact, no PAF is informed about the calculations (the specific amounts given for land and the trees on it, the extent of land considered etc.) They are offered a cheque with only the total amount. We also found that most people were not aware of the provisions of the Act and lacked minimum knowledge on LA (2012), PESA and others.

There are major gaps in the family wise distribution of rehabilitation and resettlement for Polavaram; and several challenges facing the project affected families. 'Land for land' in command area of the project needs to be provided to all PAF as part of the R&R package. There has to be verification on bifurcation of *pattas* during award of the package. There is also a need to make people aware of the package. The affected communities must also be organized for obtaining total compensation package without any gaps in implementation of the Act. For this, there is a need to strengthen FRC committees in every village of submergence and settling the claims of individuals and the community. Training to village level youth committees on land literacy is also needed. The settlements of land records needs to be done transparently and equitably.

-Syed Subhani is founder and secretary of ASHA, an organization based in Chintur, East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

(Image copyrights: author)



*A group session with local youth*

*"We found that most (Polavaram) Project Affected Families were not aware of the provisions of the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act."*

## EUCALYPTUS: FUTURE IMPACTS ON THE EASTERN GHATS | MOHANTY, SAHU AND BEHERA

The increasing eucalyptus plantations in Koraput district in the northern Eastern Ghats may have long term negative effects for both the local people as well as the environment. Whether it is eucalyptus or any other species, the introduction of an alien species disrupts the ecological balance of an ecosystem. Eucalyptus may have been in the country for over 200 years but it was limited to reforestation efforts and as avenue trees, and has not been grown on such a large commercial scale as is being planned now.

While the larger ecological effects like those on the populations of birds and animals are easier to quantify, the more long lasting effect is likely to occur at the soil microbial level. The introduction of eucalyptus is likely to cause destruction of these subterranean ecosystems by introducing pathogenic microbes and reducing soil nutrition. Another devastating effect of planting eucalyptus, which has often been overlooked is the possibility of forest fires, which have already devastated large parts of the Eastern Ghats. Forests fires in North India in recent times owe their origin to the numerous pines introduced to the sensitive ecosystem in the Himalayan ranges. Eucalyptus has been blamed for forest fires in far flung California. The dry leaves, peeling barks and exudate (resin) are all inflammable. With growing incidents of hot summer days and extreme climate, the effects of large scale plantation as a fire hazard need to be examined. There are also attempts to eradicate eucalyptus from Western Ghats as the damage is becoming obvious, and so the repetition of an action in the Eastern Ghats that is trying to be corrected in the Western Ghats is baffling.

Farmers in the region have been growing eucalyptus for the paper mills and construction industries in Koraput. The environmental impact of constructing paper mills in such a sensitive ecosystem has itself not been given due consideration. Once the land is degraded and the demand for eucalyptus falls, the farmers would have lost the basis for any future agroforestry entrepreneurship. More importantly, small farmers with limited resources who depend on the ecosystem for natural resources would suffer most due to these industries. Other more environmentally friendly and less polluting industries can be considered as a means of employment in place of paper mills. We are certain the number of people employed by paper mills are far lesser than the number of people affected by the paper mill, reiterating our argument that benefit to a few is no reason to damage the commons.

An argument favoring eucalyptus states that other cash crops like rice and sugarcane consume a lot of water and add to greenhouse gas emissions and since these are not being abolished, eucalyptus should stay too. However, transforming a broad leaf forest to a conifer forest instead of acting as a carbon sink, acts as a net source of carbon emissions. By destroying native forest trees that are best adapted to local the environment and contribute positively towards reduction of greenhouse gases and by replacing them with eucalyptus, we are creating a counterproductive situation. The statement that a large part of Odisha's Eastern Ghats would face ground water shortage adds to our argument against eucalyptus cultivation.



*A eucalyptus plantation in Eastern Ghats barely standing after the Hudhud cyclone in 2014*

PHOTO: OVEE THORAT

The pros and cons of eucalyptus cultivation need to be clearly communicated to farmers, especially the long term risks associated with it. This is important as making information available to the farmers would help them make better use of the resources. Most people living in these areas would be affected whether they cultivate eucalyptus or not. Thus, it is our duty to provide the farmers and locals information about the damage that eucalyptus has caused in other parts of the world.

With the growing need to preserve native flora and fauna for a sustainable agriculture in the face of impending climate change, it is all the more necessary that native species be planted in higher numbers than introduced species. Native tree species while being more adaptive also provide food and shelter to the wildlife, which will decrease the incidents of human-animal conflict as the wild animals will find greater means of sustenance within the boundaries of their existence. Introduction of non-native and ecologically incompatible species like eucalyptus can only aggravate these ecological and social issues.

- Dr. Ranjit K. Sahu is a Research Associate at UVA, Virginia, USA. Bidyut Mohanty is the Secretary of SPREAD, Koraput, Odisha. Ravi Shankar Behera has experience in agricultural management and works as an independent consultant in New Delhi.

## NEW VITAL BIRD HABITAT IDENTIFIED IN INDIA (EASTERN GHATS)

| ALEX DALE FOR BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

To date, more than 12,000 Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) have been identified by BirdLife – making it the largest list of globally-important biodiverse sites in the world. And as we continue to perform vital research in remote, rugged areas, the number of identified IBAs will only continue to grow. The latest to be recognised is Papikonda National Park, a 1,012 sq km region of deep forested valleys and steep hills nestled in the Eastern Ghats, a mountain range that stretches across India's eastern coast.

The IBA was identified during a Conservation Leadership Programme-funded study of mammals in the Eastern Ghats. The area's tropical forests are a biodiversity hotspot, hosting many endangered plants and animals, but unfortunately it was unsafe for many years to conduct research in the area due to political conflicts. However, this threat has recently decreased and the area is once again accessible for research.

The primary purpose of the study, which was undertaken by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), was to assess the effects that landscape change and habitat degradation are having on the mammals that live in the region. However, during the course of the project, ATREE also conducted a week-long intensive bird study alongside the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, BirdLife in India). Numerous globally-threatened

birds were spotted during this exercise, including Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea* (VU), Yellow-throated bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* (VU), Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* (EN) and Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (NT). Also, the Critically Endangered Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewetti* was spotted near the park's northern border. From this, the researchers were able to provide a site assessment of the national park and declare it an IBA. However, this fledgling IBA is already in danger, with the most ominous threats including the expansion of nearby commercial plantations, forest fires, hunting, mining and the ongoing construction of Indira Sagar Multipurpose Dam across the Godvari River, which runs close to the park's eastern border.

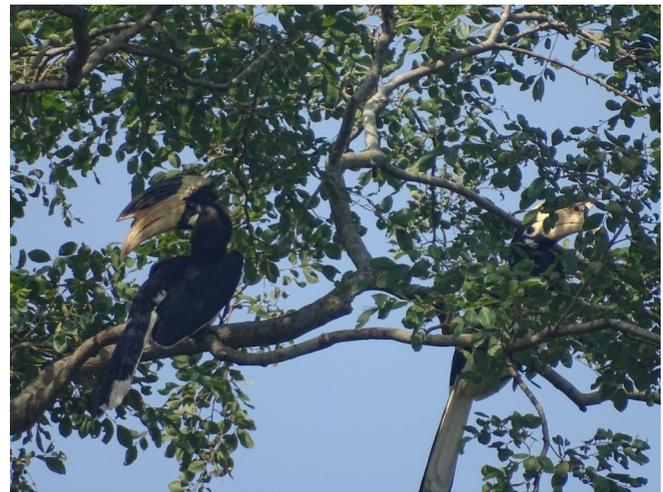


PHOTO: VIKRAM ADITYA

Malabar Pied Hornbills seen in northern Eastern Ghats

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