

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Thirunelli-Kudrakote corridor occupies a critical space in the larger Brahmagiri-Nilgiri Eastern Ghats landscape located at the tri-junction of the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It is recognized as one of the 28 elephant corridors of South India, that are essential for the movement of the large pachyderms between protected areas. Of the 14,612 elephants, reported from Southern India, the Brahmagiri-Nilgiri Eastern Ghats sub-population is estimated to host over 6500 elephants. This landscape requires constant protection and habitat contiguity in order to prevent the elephants from becoming geographically isolated, which could further aggravate population decline and increase in human-elephant conflict.

Recognising the importance of securing critical corridors such as the Thirunelli-Kudrakote, the Wildlife Trust of India embarked upon the project of securing this corridor in the year 2005-06. The project envisaged the securement of select areas within the corridor in order to facilitate wildlife movement and allow biological connectivity between two existing protected areas of Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary and Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. The project also aimed to reduce human-wildlife conflict in addition to ensuring that villagers in the corridor region are able to relocate to safer location with better infrastructure in order to have a better quality of life.

Being the first project of its kind, the project invested considerable time in developing a robust model of securement including the process of relocation of villagers. The process developed through a series of interactions and the relocation policy was in consultation with the local stakeholders. With this backdrop, the Wildlife Trust of India in collaboration with the Kerala Forest Department and local communities, and with financial support from Elephant Family, World Land Trust and IUCN-Netherlands formally initiated the project with the Private Purchase Model of corridor securement.

The key strategy was to acquire land owned by the villagers either by payment of the agreed value (in the case of non-tribal or non-Below poverty Line (BPL) family) or by providing suitable alternate land and resettlement package (for BPL families or tribals). The project made it clear from the outset that every village or resident who did not wish to relocate would not be compelled to do so and he or she could continue to live in the old site. The project also ensured that regular consultative meetings were held with the resident tribal families for getting their consent and cooperation for the relocation process. Another key aspect of the project design was in assisting the relocated families with alternate livelihoods and ensuring that government benefits reach the families.

The project also ensured that all laws related to relocation of people was consulted and adhered to including the Land Acquisition Act, 1984 and Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2011. Relevant permissions were obtained acquired from the office of the District Commissioner/District Collector of Wayanad district along with a written consent of the villagers who had agreed to relocate.

A total of 25.3 acres of land was purchased from 37 families and they were relocated based on their prior informed consent. The purchased land was handed over to the forest

department to be notified as a part of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. Periodical monitoring has shown that following the post- rehabilitation of villages there has been consistent and regular movement of elephants and other wildlife through the corridor. The rehabilitated people are also being followed to assess the impact of resettlement on their social and economic conditions, especially that of women and children. With swampy grassland that people once cultivated now available to elephants for grazing, and people settled in areas without conflict with elephants and better access to other livelihood options, communications, healthcare, education, and electricity, the initial results from the assessment are encouraging. Thus, the relocation of the villages of Thirulakunnu, Valiya Emmadi, Kottapady and Puliyankolly was a win-win for both elephants and people. The secured corridor land eventually was declared as part of Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in a gazette notification in 2015.

The project came to a formal conclusion with the relocation of all the families to new locations following a mutually agreed agreement between all stakeholders. The post relocation consultations continued in the following years and is being regularly followed up with the relocated families so that the transition into the new lifestyle occurs seamlessly and all the relocated families get access to better livelihoods in the future.