

Rajasthan, despite large area falling in arid zone and climate mostly hostile, is rich in bio-diversity and cultural heritage. The richness of bio-diversity is largely due to the involvement of local community either on account of religious or cultural beliefs. In many villages area around some water body is recognized as "ORAN -a sacrosanct area" and is protected by the local community. No tree felling is allowed in such area. Likewise 'Bishnoi' community is known for saving "Black Bucks" and "Khejari trees" even at the cost of their lives. The State has, therefore, got the opportunity to enhance the forest area by bringing the community land under afforestation on one hand and to develop wildlife habitats by involving the local community in the management process on the other. Keeping this in view following initiatives have been taken for the enhancement of forest areas and development of rich wildlife habitats in the State :-

1. Biosphere Reserve in Daang / Hadauti Area-

Ranthambhore is internationally recognized for the tiger reserve. During the last few years the tiger population has grown significantly and the management is experiencing the problem of territorial fights among male tiger as main habitat area is (limited to Ranthambhore Sanctuary- only a part of the Tiger reserve) is not sufficient for growing

populations of male tigers. Though the over all core area notified for the tiger reserve is large, the favored area is small as the area under two other sanctuaries forming part of tiger reserve namely – Kailadevi Sanctuary are not favoured habitats natural/human barriers namely barren Banas River bed between Ranthambhore and Kailadevi and Sawai Madhopur Khandar Road between Ranthambhore and SMS are the inhibiting factors in the movement of tigers. Besides these two sanctuaries there are other sanctuaries namely, Van Vihar Dholpur, Ramgarh Vishdhar Bundi and Jawahar Sagar, Bhansoregarh and Darra in Hadauti region in the neighboring areas. These can be developed as safe habitats and act as satellite reserve for tigers moving out of Ranthambhore if corridors are developed by removing physical barriers i.e. underpasses are provided for passage under the Highways. Thus the entire area extending from Dholpur to Jhalawar which is very rich in bio-diversity can be developed as a Biosphere Reserve with tiger being focus of attraction.

The Deptt has prepared a project for developing this area as a Biosphere reserve. The comprehensive project involves investment of ₹ 276 crores over a period of 3 years. This can be implemented if the adequate financial support is made available from GoI.

Sariska Tiger Reserve Integrated Development-

Sariska is the other important tiger reserve in the State. In 2005 no tiger was left in the area. The efforts to reintroduce tiger in the reserve have been successful. Also there is very high potential of eco tourism at Sariska because of the fact that following places of religious and cultural importance are either located inside the sanctuary or in the area adjoining the sanctuary:-

Religious Places

1. Pandu Pole
2. Bharti Hari
3. Neel Kanth Mahadev
4. Parashar ji
5. Jahaz
6. Tal Vriksha
7. Garthi Mamod
8. Virat Nagar

Heritage Property

1. Thanaghazi
2. Kushalgarh
3. Bala Kila
4. Alwar Forte
5. Ajabgarh
6. Bhangarh
7. Tehla
8. Baldevgarh

The rich biodiversity of this compact tiger reserve can be helpful in the socio-economic development of the neighboring areas and the people living in these areas will get emotionally attached with the reserve if proper eco-tourism facilities are developed by creating supporting infrastructure for making the above mentioned places as part of tourist itinerary.

For this, it is essential that road network and tourism estates are developed around Sariska so that in addition to visiting Sariska tiger reserve tourists can also be motivated to stay for more days and also enjoy the cultural and religious heritage around the area.

This development will also help in relocation of population residing inside the sanctuary area as some of them will move in the tourism estates as they will get better livelihood opportunities.

A proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Tourism for this purpose. It has not been sanctioned so far. However, it has been learnt that the focus of the ministry is only on restoration of heritage sites within the sanctuary area and not on comprehensive project. Since only the integrated development of the area will also provide opportunity to the people residing in the national capital region to come out on week ends and spend time to enjoy Nature, the project should be executed under NCR program Urban Governance department have been advised to take up the proposal under.

3- Aravali National Park - Proposal

Another area which has very high potential for being developed as tiger reserve is Kumbhalgarh. Total area of Kumbhalgarh and Raoli Tatgarh Sanctuaries is

1071.60 Sq. Km area. Out of this 508.60 sq.km. has very little human population residing inside the forest and 2 roads pass through the area. By providing adequate protection to the forest area and constructing safe animal passages through the two roads by constructing small height raised road structures to create underpasses, the area can be converted as a very rich National Park.

Process of constructing boundary walls for protection of the forest area has already been started. Action to notify the area as national park is also in advance stage. The process of developing it as a tiger reserve can, however, be completed expeditiously if the project is given central assistance.

4. Development of Conservation Reserve -

Following areas have been identified as Conservation Reserve :-

1. Sakambhari
2. Shahbad
3. Gogelao
4. Guda Bishnoi
5. Hamir Garh
6. Bid Jhunjhunu
7. Bid Fatehpur
8. Jod Bid Gadwala
9. Bisalpur
10. Sunda Mata

Out of these, notification for Jod Bid Gadwala, Bisalpur, and Sunda Mata have already been notified and the notification for the remaining is in process. This will lead to involvement of local community in the management of the wildlife habitats and biodiversity conservation.

5. Development of Mega Shelter Belt for mitigation and adaptation of Climate Change

The climate change is cause of concern internationally. Rajasthan is highly sensitive and vulnerable to the climate change. A detailed review of the scientific research so far in this field have been done where in it has transpired that Mega Shelter Belt in the desert area will work as wind breaker for the perennial South-West to North-East wind (which is cause of sand dune spread) and the threat of expansion of desert with the rise in temperature due to climate change can be effectively controlled.

Since the area is difficult and manpower with the Forest Deptt is limited this work should be got carried out by Eco-Task Force. Keeping in view the fact that work in some areas is already being carried out by Eco-Task Force and the result has been encouraging.

GoI has modified the policy and now Eco-Task Force is to be funded by the State Government. Rajasthan has vast area and limited manpower. The State may not be able to invest enough funds on raising and maintenance of the Eco-Task Force required for development Mega Shelter Belt. Therefore, it is desirable that the problem of expansion of Thar Desert is effectively addressed with the assistance from GoI and atleast one Eco-Task Force Battalion specifically for the Mega Shelter Belts is raised and deployed. The Territorial Army have shown their willingness and have also prepared a modified plan. It is only the issue of expenditure of raising and maintaining the battalion which have to be addressed. If ministry of defence does not bear this expenditure, it should be borne by MoEF and project should be taken up under Green India Mission.

6. Enhancement of Forest Area in the State

Rajasthan has only 9.56% of the geographical area as forest area. Due to difficult climate conditions large part of this area is either degraded or has low forest density. Forest Deptt is using its resources to restore the existing forest areas. Efforts are also being made to develop existing area and some community lands with

the financial support from international agency (JICA) and involving local community.

The Deptt has envisaged to expand the forest cover on wasteland, community lands and roadsides in extensive manner. The resources available with the State Government and under the schemes like MNREGA are not sufficient for the massive task. The State Government was hopeful that significant funds may be received under Green India Mission to pursue this cause. But the meager allocation under Green India Mission so far is disappointing. Significant support of GoI under Green India Mission is essentially required. Deptt is preparing projects for posing before GoI for support.

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