

PRESS RELEASE

Farmers reap benefits from Lemon fence pilot project in Assam

Guwahati, March 22: Homestead areas around a few non-descript thatch-roofed farm houses in Soraguri Chapori located on the bank of the Brahmaputra at Dikhowmukh area in Sivasagar district in Assam are standing examples of how affordable bio-fences in a human-elephant conflict (HEC) hotspots can restore livelihood and protect lives of farmers and also supplement their income.

As one travels from Sivasagar town in Upper Assam to the historic Ajan Pir Dargah at Dikhowmukh area, those farm houses surrounded by tall and thick lemon fences look discernible from a distance from the road.

As one comes closer to these farm houses, they disappear from the eyesight behind the thick and tall lemon fences that fortify those and one will unfailingly notice hundreds of lemon fruits dangling from these bushes while some ripe-yellow ones lying on the ground.

“These lemon fences not only protect us and our farmstead from wild elephants that often move through our areas deviating from the river course, their usual route, on searches of fodder, but also provide us a substantial income per month. We thank Aaranyak for undertaking the pilot project of lemon fences in your farmland,” said Nitul Das who owns a farmstead in the area.

He informed but for these lemon fences, life had been nightmarish in the area because of frequent raid by wild elephants which used to devour and destroy their vegetable cultivations till three years back. Nitul Das said besides providing a shield against wild elephants, the lemon fences now provide an income of around Rs 8000 per month to his family. Usually he sells 100 lemons at the rate of Rs 800.

Neighbour Rinku Das, an aged farmer, is now happy that because of the protection provided by the lemon fences areas his farmstead, he now can grow varieties of vegetables and earn substantially as wild elephants no longer raid his farm.

“Since the plantation of the lemon fence, though wild elephants come close to the bio fence but goes back without harming my crops. It is now possible for me to cultivate crops inside the fence that are protected”, said another Sombar Hazarika.

“We have provided alternative crops to people living in some of human elephant conflict after two years of field experimentation. Farmers are encouraged to cultivate crops which are less palatable to wild elephants. These tried and tested alternative crops include Homoloma, Wild turmeric, Taro roots, Lemon Grass etc.” said Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, a Senior Scientist of Aaranyak and a senior member of IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group.

According to Aaranyak’s senior field official in the bio-fence pilot project at Soraguri Chapori, Niranjan Bhuyan, several farmers were provided with lemon saplings and trained by Aaranyak as part of its pilot project on how to plant those in three rows around their farmstead. Some of the farmers accepted the projects whole-heartedly and are now reaping benefit besides getting protection from inevitable rains by wild elephants.

Aaranyak has been supporting farmers, women SHGs from indigenous communities and Elephant Conservation Network (ECN) members in alternative crop practices in HEC hotspots of Baksa, Goalpara, Golaghat, Sivasagar and Udalguri districts of Assam with an aim to facilitate human-elephant coexistence.

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