

Press Release

On overdrive to mobilise grassroots for coexistence with elephant in WGH, Goalpara

Guwahati, Nov 23: As part of its initiative for mitigation of conflict and facilitation of human-elephant coexistence in the vast terrain in West Garo Hills (WGH) of Meghalaya and Goalpara district of Assam, biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak and British Asian Trust have gone on an overdrive to mobilise support of community and other stakeholders to expedite implementation of the mitigation blueprint.

The NGO under the project sponsored by Darwin Initiative organised a two-day training workshop from November 18 on installation and management of solar-powered fence, a proven mitigation tool, for villagers of Borogobal in West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya recently where 37 villagers including 17 females and members of Rapid Response Unit (RRU), village champions and the village head participated.

The Aaranyak resource team led by senior official Anjan Baruah enlightened the participants on the concept of solar fence, its different types and different parts, its utility in mitigation of human-elephant conflict to facilitate coexistence as well as tagging of various equipment and machinery in a solar fence.

On the second day of the workshop, the community members were exposed to a practical session on installation of solar fence under the guidance of the resource team. The women villagers took part actively in the practical session.

Earlier, as a spadework before taking mitigation measures on the ground, Aaranyak formed a Rapid Response Unit (RRU) in Borogobal village. It is the first RRU in the area with 30 participants from different neighbouring villages including Borobakra, Kalitapara, Hatogaon, Mothapara, Belguri etc. of West Garo Hills and a few border villages from Assam. A WhatsApp group was formed within the RRU members to create a network for rapid transmission of information on movements of wild elephants to alert the villagers in advance to reduce the HEC in that area.

Anjan Baruah explained the objective of RRU and discussed about the roles and responsibilities of each member. This initiative was also supported by Darwin Initiative.

Aaranyak team also collaborated for an awareness meeting earlier this month organised by Rongjuli Range Forest Office at Karipara M.E. School campus in Goalpara district.

Around 35 persons from Karipara, Dabpara, Sakla, West Matia, Tektekiapara, Bhatipara, Bapupara, Sarapara villages participated in the awareness meeting focused on the current human-elephant conflict (HEC) status of that greater area to pave the way for coexistence. Procedure for applying for compensation against lives and property lost due to HEC was also discussed in the meeting.

The Forest Range Officer of Rongjuli Md. Khalilur Rahman apprised the participants of the actions taken by Forest Department and discussed about the compensation procedure and support extended in the form of torch lights to select community members.

Anjan Baruah of Aaranyak made a presentation on elephant behaviour, habitat, fodder and movement habits. He explained about different measures undertaken.

The meeting was presided over by Har Kumar Nath, a retired school teacher while Mahesh Choudhury, ex-member of District council spoke on the status of elephant existence and HEC in that area during the interaction session on the Compensation and steps for resolution taken by Forest Department on the present Human-Elephant Conflict situation.

Other members of Aaranyak team associated with these programmes included Nipul Chakma, Subhas Rabha, Ripunjoy Nath and Rupam Gayary along with Nabin Rabha, village champion of Botogobal.

***Press statement issued by Bijay Sankar Bora, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
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