

PRESS RELEASE

Seven rapid response units take on the task of mitigating human-elephant conflict in eastern Assam

Guwahati, July 26: To boost efforts for mitigation of human–elephant conflict (HEC) and facilitate much-needed coexistence through community participation, Aaranyak has formed seven Rapid Response Units (RRUs) at the grassroots level in some of the HEC affected areas of eastern Assam districts of Majuli, Jorhat, Sivasagar and Tinsukia.

Aaranyak, a biodiversity conservation organisation, and the British Asian Trust– have formed these RRUs with community members, in partnership with Assam Forest Department and with support from Darwin Initiative. Aaranyak formed all the RRUs through extensive community consultations held in the first week of July 2023.

The RRUs, comprising of community members, will serve as an early warning mechanism to mitigate HEC and are, therefore, expected to contribute significantly towards facilitation of coexistence in the conflict hotspots. The RRUs will monitor elephant movement and inform community in nearby villages via WhatsApp – serving as a community guarding system.

The first RRU was formed at Ujoni Majuli area in the river island district of Majuli on 5th July, following consultations with several community representatives from HEC-affected villages - Jaborshuk Kathoni, Jaborshuk Bosa, Gazera, Anaishuk, Kangmili, Saurukiya and Haladhibari – in the presence of Aaranyak’s officials. Fifty-eight community members have given consent to be part of the RRU. Debojit Patir, a Zila Parishad Councillor (ZPC), also attended the consultation and played an important role during the RRU formation process.

On 6th July, twenty-four community members joined the second RRU at the community centre of Lebangkola village of Dihing Patkai in Dibrugarh district.

On 7th July, the Aaranyak team formed two RRUs. One in Charagua L.P. School at Chatragua grant in Sivasagar district with 23 members selected from Charaguwa, Charaguwa grant, Samarajan villages. Another at Majumelia village in Sivasagar district with 14 community members from Majumelia, Demowmukh Mising gaon and Gohaingaon villages.

Similarly, two RRUs were formed by Aaranyak on 8th July. Following community consultations, thirty-five community members joined the RRU at Sagunpora L P School, Sagunpora village in Jorhat district. The RRU members are from Sagunpora, Tinigharia, Miligaon and Japongaon villages. Another RRU was formed at Sankardev M.E. School, Bezorechiga in Jorhat district. Thirty-nine community members from Bezoechiga, Kaibartagarh, Chumoni Chapori and Hatishal villages joined the RRU.

Lastly, following an extensive consultation led by senior conservation scientist of Aaranyak, Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, the seventh RRU was formed in Sadiya of Tinsukia district with 22 members from the community.

Aaranyak official Anjan Baruah informed that ‘Village Champions’ selected by Aaranyak, and the voluntary Village Defense Parties’ members, formed by the government, have been involved in these RRUs wherever

possible. Each RRU has an assigned spokesperson to coordinate with various stakeholders as well as the core team of Aaranyak.

Aaranyak's research official, Rubul Tanti sensitised the villagers on the impact of HEC on both elephants and people in HEC affected areas and underlined importance of proactive RRUs in mitigating the conflict to facilitate co-existence. Mridul Konwar from Sibsagar's Charaguwa Grant village mentioned, "By forming the RRU and remaining connected through the RRU WhatsApp group, we can communicate across the village and share about elephant's movements and minimise negative interactions between community and elephants".

Aaranyak's senior official Zakir Islam Bora, along with Niranjan Bhuyan, played a key role in the RRU formation process by organizing consultations with the villagers. The other members of the Aaranyak team involved in the RRU formation process included Pranjit Borah, Junak Baruah, Dibakar Nayak, Ijaj Ahmed, Dhantu Gogoi, Tibrajyoti Gogoi, Lekhon Gogoi, Ananta Dutta, Lakhinath Taid, Chiranjib Kalita, Tanmoy Gogoi, Bijoy Kalita and an intern Vedic Gupta.

The village champions, Manoj Chetia, Bidya Borborah, Sunil Taye, Makhan Kalit were also involved in the entire process. It is worth mentioning that village champions are community members who were trained by Aaranyak's team to facilitate project activities in the project villages.

*Press statement issued by Dr Alolika Sinha, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
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