

Namdapha

Conflict over tiger numbers –

Official census figure (latest) – 61 tigers

Aparajita Dutta, Nature Conservation Foundation –

1997 survey of 363 sq km of the Park - no tiger photos through camera trapping and 7 scats

1997-2000: A Dutta covered atleast 1000 km of the Park – pugmarks observed only thrice.

She quotes a Forest Guard's estimation of tiger numbers (1999) – 1 tiger

(New census figures for Namdapha due in January 2006 – need to check this)

What do these conflicting figures reveal?

(a) Methodology of official census figures is suspect. What is methodology employed in Namdapha?

(b) Inflation of census figures by Park Management to justify its own existence, therefore, continue huge fund allocation to Tiger Reserve

(c) Scale of poaching, if prevalent, cannot be estimated accurately (Dutta estimates 15 tigers poached between 1994-2003)

Atleast 90% of the Park is unexplored / very little assessment of wildlife and biodiversity species

Because of the terrain, patrolling is possible only in fringe areas.

Miniscule guard to land area ratio

For the 1985 sq. km, the official number of guards is 22. Out of these, only 11 posts have been filled

Pressures

The Lisu exert tremendous hunting pressure because of the inadequacy of agricultural land, given the terrain and the absence of other livelihood alternatives.

Their inferior socio-economic condition is compounded by the fact that they have not been given legal ST status, and thus do not come under the ambit of several schemes which might have ameliorated their situation.

There are 65 families with a total population of 317 residents inside the precincts of the Park and four villages on the eastern periphery outside the Park, bordering Myanmar (Gandhigram, Sidikhu, Hazulu and Vijaynagar (Dawodi) pop.est.2300)

Atleast 20-30 sq km of the Park is being used for settlements or cultivation.

There is a defunct 157 km road from their settlements to Miao and this is a major cause of disgruntlement with the Forest department. (NCF's observations are that this road must be restored even though it passes through the Park, as this may lead to more effective patrolling and protection. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the absence of a road affects hunting practices in any way as the Lisu are very familiar with the terrain inside Namdapha. This would also mean better access to markets for the Lisu.)

Peoples' Problems with Park

Demarcated without consultation with local population

Upset with being perceived as 'encroachers'

Inaccessibility has meant no development and a National Park in the area would mean even lesser development

Lisu area on eastern periphery of Park surrounded by Myanmar and mountains on three sides and the National Park on the other – tremendous pressure on land already parceled out for Nepali settlements in the area in 1965 (current pop.est. 2100). Notifying the area as a Park has therefore been perceived as a wastage of available land.

Area from Deban to their settlements perceived as their "own" territory

Given the unique nature of Namdapha – in terms of geography, the ambiguous political status of the Lisus, the unavailability of agricultural land and land for relocation in Arunachal Pradesh given the different system of land usage & ownership, the weak socio-economic condition of the Lisus and therefore their dependence on forest & hunting, on the one hand, and the dense knowledge of Namdapha's terrain among the Lisu on the other, a collaborative model of conservation seems feasible and necessary, if combined with livelihood and developmental necessities. This could also contribute to resolving the Forest Department's problems with manpower and inaccessibility.

How can conservation be expected to work when even the most basic developmental facilities – education, healthcare and livelihood - have not been made available for resident and periphery families? An awareness of the importance of conservation can be inculcated only when other socio-economic parameters have been safeguarded. In this context, Nature Conservation Foundation's interventions become highly significant. As an independent agency too, it becomes a bridge between the Lisu and the Forest Department

Nature Conservation Foundation's interventions –

Trying to address the problem of hunting, agricultural land availability, livelihood alternatives, monitoring of wildlife & habitat / setting in place basic facilities – primary education, a healthcare system

In the long run, NCF proposes an eco-tourism and collaborative protection model based on

- (i) reciprocity between Lisu and FD, consensus-driven
- (ii) delineation of rights, privileges and benefits for local people
- (iii) benchmarking of indicators to monitor health of habitat and effectiveness of Lisu protection force
- (iv) collaboration between State, community and research groups with a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities