

SAMRAKSHAN TRUST
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MEGHALAYA FIELD OFFICE



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PART 1

BACKGROUND

The state of Meghalaya, lies between 25⁰ North and 26⁰ 10' North latitude and 89⁰45' East and 92⁰45' East longitude and covers an area of 22,429 km². Meghalaya is home to a unique array of vegetation, ranging from tropical and sub-tropical to temperate or near temperate. The forests are particularly well endowed with orchids and numerous species of medicinal plants. Meghalaya has one of the largest and densest Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) populations in India - a population that is poorly protected, and that is causing increasing damage to life and property. Other large animals of significance include Wild buffalo (*Bubalis bubalis*), Gaur (*Bos gaurus*), Serow (*Nemorhaedus sumatraensis*), Goral (*Nemorhaedus goral*), Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Hoolock gibbon (*Hylobates hoolock*) and a number of small cats.

Within Meghalaya, the Garo Hills situated in the western part of the state, neighbouring Bangladesh, are particularly rich in natural values and therefore merit greater conservation attention. Of particular significance for wildlife is a 300 sq. km. tract called the Balpakram Baghmara Community Conservation Landscape (BBCCL). On the northern periphery of the BBCCL is located the Balpakram National Park (220 sq.km.), the largest protected area in Meghalaya. In conjunction with this park and its surrounding areas, the BBCCL, forms a large tract of contiguous habitat (nearly 600 sq.km) that is relatively intact and supports approximately 500-600 elephants. The BBCCL is possibly the largest tract of habitat in Meghalaya that has the best long-term possibility of conservation of wildlife in general and mega fauna such as elephants in particular. Land use changes have been relatively benign and no major infrastructure projects that could fracture the habitat are envisaged in the near future.

The principal threat to elephants (and other wildlife) in the BBCCL arises from large scale conversion of land use to such forms that are not compatible with the survival of elephants. This includes monoculture cash crops such as cashew, areca nut, rubber, coffee and tea; horticulture crops such as pineapple, citrus and temperate fruits and spices such as ginger, and cardamom. Such conversion permanently banishes forests and drastically reduces habitat available to elephants to meet their ecological requirements.

Since 2004, Samrakshan Trust has been working in *Aking*¹ within the BBCCL to reduce such habitat fragmentation. The focus of Samrakshan's initiative is on limiting such conversion to effect a "win-win" situation where farmers benefit from better agricultural yields without having to drastically alter land use. Learning from various experiences in north east India that have had similar objectives under comparable circumstances, we are attempting to assist farmers to intensively cultivate small plots of land with a judicious combination of food and commercial crops. The emphasis is on ensuring livelihood security and generating moderate surpluses for farmers. Such a model, as has been demonstrated at other sites in north east India, will ensure that at least a part of the community land is left in a state that can be used by elephants and other wildlife. Drawing from experiences of Integrated Conservation Development Projects across the world, Samrakshan's approach has been to foster strong local people's institutions that can serve as platforms for judicious land use activities that safeguard the interests of wildlife while ensuring that survival needs of people are adequately met. In pursuance of this methodology, Samrakshan team members are involved with the fostering and capacity building of people's groups (called Self Help Groups or SHGs) in the target villages. Once these groups are sufficiently mature, they are assisted to undertake a variety of activities for consolidating and intensifying agriculture for improving the yield from land. SHGs fostered by Samrakshan have been able to access government funds for specific ecologically friendly livelihood enhancing activities. Apart from such elephant friendly livelihood enhancing activities, Samrakshan's strategy in the BBCCL also incorporates community based monitoring of elephants and enhancing conservation consciousness among people.

¹ An *Aking*, roughly translated, is a tract of land that belongs to a particular clan. Each *Aking* is under the jurisdiction of a *Nokma* or headman who is the final arbiter about the nature of land use in the *Aking*. *Aking*s can vary in size from 3-4 sq.km to 20-30 sq.km and the land use in an *Aking* typically presents a mosaic of features like habitation (mostly wood and bamboo structures), jhum (shifting cultivation), wet terrace cultivation, orchards and homestead gardens, open forests and dense forests. The proportion of each category of land use varies from one *Aking* to another. The habitations are often spread over the *Aking* in clusters that form distinct hamlets. Hence in an *Aking* it is not uncommon to find 2-3 hamlets, each comprising of a few homesteads

PEOPLE AND ELEPHANTS: ENHANCING LIVELIHOOD SECURITY

2.1 BUILDING PEOPLE'S INSTITUTIONS

The experience of social development interventions from large parts of India shows that institution building efforts that follow the "SHG model" are far more efficacious in terms of the ability of such institutions to engage with development activities compared to other types of institutions. Progressively this model is being adopted across countries to anchor social development projects. Briefly, the SHG model involves mobilizing people into self help groups (SHGs), each consisting of 10-20 members bound together by affinity². Each SHG is put through a rigorous capacity building process spread over a 12 month period during which each group is provided training inputs commensurate to the absorption capacity of its members. These capacity building sessions typically include issues pertaining to effective functioning of groups, maintaining accounts and other records, leadership, conflict resolution, conducting group meetings, business planning and fund management. In addition the groups are also put through training sessions on enhancing incomes through small business activities and improving the yields of their agricultural holdings as well as orchards.

The group members necessarily make small savings each week and thus build a corpus fund for their group. This corpus is also enhanced by various activities, such as providing agricultural labour to large land owners, small scale business and so on. In addition, these groups also have the opportunity of accessing loans from various schemes of the local and state government. Members avail of loans from the corpus that their respective groups put together for financing income enhancing initiatives. Typically these consist of agricultural yield enhancement and small scale businesses.

The initial thrust of Samrakshan's efforts in the BBCCL has been in 5 *Aking*s that are strategically located in the interceding land area between the Balpakram National Park and the Baghmara Reserve Forest, two government owned forests in the BBCCL.

2.2 THE GROUP BUILDING PROCESS

The process of institution building is a gradual exercise in each *Aking*; meeting the headman, holding village level meetings, visiting each household, interacting with people at public places like tea-stalls, having meals and spending nights with the villagers have been some tools used for establishing initial rapport with the local community. As a consequence, our team members are an integral part of the villages where we work, sharing with the people social occasions, such as Sunday Church sessions and local festivals. Our experience in the Garo Hills during the first year suggests that the group formation process takes close to twelve months. With due investment in time, today community has come together in form of SHGs in all the above-mentioned *Aking*s.

The table below provides a concise view of the operational details of the groups existing on reporting date.

Sr.	Group's Name	Category	Member-ship	Aking	Date of First Meeting	Day of Meeting	Time of Meeting	Bank A/c No.
1	Simsang Women SHG	Female	12	Alokpang	28-Aug-04	Saturday	7 am	01170065234
2	Balsrigittim Women SHG	Female	10	Alokpang	3-Apr-05	Saturday	7 pm	01170065260
3	Balsrigittim Male SHG	Male	9	Alokpang	17-Jul-04	Sunday	3 pm	01170065251
4	Rongcholgittim Male SHG	Male	10	Alokpang	6-Aug-05	Saturday	3.30 pm	01170065233
5	Pring Prang Women SHG	Female	10	Ampangre	3-Sept-04	Saturday	7 am	No.
6	Dokua Mix SHG	Mix	10	Ampangre	20-Feb-05	Saturday	3.30 pm	No.
7	Dosigipil Women SHG	Female	10	Gongrot	23-Jan-05	Sunday	9 am	01170165259
8	Chitmang Songgittal Male	Male	11	Gongrot	22-Jan-05	Wednesday	7 pm	01100050182

² Affinity groups pertain to people with similar characteristics - caste, creed, sex, occupation, geographical area, place of origin, language, income levels, age, etc. For a group to have affinity, some amount of homogeneity is necessary, but this does not mean that all homogenous groups are affinity groups or vice versa.

	SHG							
9	Dosingkal Chirring SHG Mix	Mix	5	Gongrot	1-Apr-05	Sunday	1 pm	No.
10	Dabajol SHG Male	Male	11	Halwa-Atong	21-Aug-05	Wednesday	2.30 pm	No.
11	Areng Abri Women SHG	Female	11	Halwa-Atong	11-Sept-05	Tuesday	2 pm	No.
12	Totengkal Women SHG	Female	7	Halwa-Atong	2-Feb-06	Thursday	4 pm	No.
13	Chikasin Women SHG	Female	10	Panda	21-Aug-05	Sunday	1 pm	No.
14	Chibasal Women SHG	Female	10	Panda	25-Sept-05	Sunday	2 pm	No.
15	Bolsilgre Women SHG	Female	8	Panda	24-Aug-05	Sunday	2 pm	No.
16	Rongrikim Women SHG	Female	4	Panda	14-Sept-05	Saturday	4 pm	No.
17	Mebit Male SHG	Male	7	Panda	12-Sept-05	Sunday	3 pm	No.

2.3 FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY SHGS

In addition to following the rules that various groups lay out for themselves, they also perform a number of other activities. A glimpse of such activities is provided below:

1. The SHGs undertake activities that are of larger social benefit to the *Aking*. For instance, members have been repairing small bridges and footpaths that are used by all villagers. Such an engagement promotes unity within the village and encourages other people to join groups (or form new groups) through which they can unitedly work towards improvement of their village/*Aking*.
2. In order to increase the corpus of their respective group, the SHG members undertake wage works like cleaning of orchards. The income accruing from such activities is pooled together to enhance the corpus of the group.
3. Certain groups have started innovative income generation activities like making and selling eatables, near the church on Sundays.
4. The mature groups have bank accounts that help them to keep their money safely and earn interest on the same. The accounts are opened in the name of the SHG and operated by the representatives appointed by the groups.
5. Members from some of the groups have begun reporting incidents like births, deaths, illness and other issues of concern in the *Aking*s to the concerned government departments. The SHGs are thus playing a larger role in improving the livelihood situation in their *Aking*.
6. The groups have started internal loaning among their members. These loans are availed of by group members from the corpus accumulated by the group. As has been observed with the pattern of SHG loans, initially these loans are for consumption activities such as purchase of food and buying of medicines for treatment of the members' children. The loan amounts have been ranging from Rs. 50/- to Rs. 2,000/-. These loans have to be repaid with interest according to a pre decided schedule.
7. SHG members are being encouraged to consider basic conservation issues such as the use of catapults by members of their family, particularly children, hunting of animals in the *Aking*, the movement of elephants and ways in which human interaction with elephants can be minimized. There have been incidents where SHG members have played an active role for the protection of wildlife.

One of the SHGs in Gongrot has procured a kerosene dealership for 2 villages from the district authorities. The agency is in the name of the SHG and enables easy access of kerosene for lighting lamps to the villages, this is important as the village is bereft of electricity. The SHG is able to earn on its savings and simultaneously the villagers are getting kerosene at regular intervals at a price half of what they paid earlier.

2.4 STATUS OF EACH GROUP ON THE BASIS OF VARIOUS PERFORMANCE PARAMETERS

Sr.	Group's Name	No. of Meetings	Saving Amt	No. of Loans	Amt disburse	Amt Repaid	Interest	Fines	Cash in hand	Cash at bank	Income Generated
1	Simsang Women SHG	73	4,125	8	1,250	915	113	1,751	266	7,300	3,642
2	Balsrigittim	52	2,587	22	6,450	6,175	500	462	820	5,600	3,687

	Women SHG										
3	Balsrigittim Male SHG	73	1,875	-	-	-	-	585	355	2,600	1,540
4	Rongcholgittim Male SHG	35	1,705	20	4,600	3,715	160	575	610	-	1,965
5	Pring Prang Women SHG	81	3,485	8	1,450	1,000	83	594	640	5,150	3,134
6	Dokua Mix SHG	58	840	14	5,700	4,380	145	185	1,040	-	945
7	Dosigipil Women SHG	59	988	3	600	605	10	1,040	481	5,532	4,015
8	Chitmang Songgittal Male SHG	62	1,513	1	100	105	5	762	1,035	3,000	3,880
9	Dosingkal Chirring Mix SHG	47	444	8	1,000	1,080	80	20	1,453	-	740
10	Dabajol Male SHG	33	688	3	600	-	-	191	1,896	-	901
11	Areng Abri Women SHG	30	729	7	1,200	1,340	295	373	1,932	-	932
12	Totengkol Women SHG	5	22	-	-	-	-	-	87	-	65
13	Chikasin Women SHG	26	1,155	7	3,650	1,300	100	360	280	-	1,480
14	Chibasal Women SHG	27	1,360	12	3,500	1,350	230	40	825	-	510
15	Bolsilgre Women SHG	18	645	2	1,500	550	50	157	337	-	560
16	Rongrikkim Women SHG	12	315	1	200	220	20	75	1,070	-	490
17	Mebit Male SHG	24	426	-	-	-	-	85	390	-	75
	Total	715	22,902	116	31,800	22,735	1,791	7,255	13,517	29,182	28,561

2.5 CAPACITY BUILDING OF SHGs

Robust capacity building is at the crux of the SHG centric model of community based natural resource management. A south India based organisation MYRADA, which has pioneered the SHG concept, has generated a user friendly capacity building manual for SHG practitioners. Samrakshan has adapted this to make it conducive to conditions prevalent in the Garo hills. Effective use of charts and games is also made to enhance the learning experience and make the training sessions interesting. A training session usually lasts up to one hour, though there are some sessions that may stretch up to two hours as well – depending upon the topic, methodology and age of the group. The SHG members have to record, in a register maintained for this purpose, the learning from the training and the decisions on future action taken by the group based on the training.

Sr	Group's Name	Introduction	Structure	Concept	Communication	Loans
1	Simsang Women SHG					
2	Balsrigittim Women SHG					
3	Balsrigittim Male SHG					
4	Rongcholgittim Male SHG					
5	Pring Prang Women SHG					
6	Dokua Mix SHG					
7	Dosigipil Women SHG					
8	Chitmang Songgittal Male SHG					
9	Dosingkal Chirring Mix SHG					
10	Dabajol Male SHG					
11	Areng Abri Women SHG					
12	Totengkal Women SHG					
13	Chikasin Women SHG					
14	Chibasal Women SHG					

15	Bolsilgre Women SHG					
16	Rongrikkim Women SHG					
17	Mebit Male SHG					

2.6 BOOK KEEPING

Book keeping skills are pertinent to members not only for Self Help Groups but also in their day-to-day lives and particularly when they undertake livelihood-enhancing activities. In many ways book-keeping is thus the cornerstone of robust institutions, particularly in rural areas where

1. Literacy levels are low.
2. People are reluctant or not habituated to recording things in writing.

To overcome these Samrakshan Trust has

1. Designed a hands-on book keeping training schedule that is ongoing and not carried out in a one off manner.
2. Introduced books in phases depending on the capacities and willingness of each group.

Sr.	Group's Name	Minute Book	Attendance Register	Admission Register	Cash Book	Individual Pass Book
1	Simsang Women SHG					
2	Balsrigittim Women SHG					
3	Balsrigittim Male SHG					
4	Rongcholgittim Male SHG					
5	Pring Prang Women SHG					
6	Dokua Mix SHG					
7	Dosigipil Women SHG					
8	Chitmang Songgittal SHG					
9	Dosingkal Women SHG					
10	Dabajol Male SHG					
11	Areng Abri Women SHG					
12	Totengkal Women SHG					
13	Chikasin Women SHG					
14	Chibasal Women SHG					
15	Bolsilgre Women SHG					
16	Rongrikkim Women SHG					
17	Mebit Male SHG					

2.7 AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT

The goal of the community institutions (SHGs) is to enhance livelihood security in a manner that is sensitive towards the conservation needs of the landscape. The institutions are a tool that would play a pivotal role in achieving these goals. Since agriculture is the primary source of income for the people, we decided to focus on optimizing the yield that people are able to get from their agricultural fields. Overtime we would also look at diversifying the income earning basket. However at this stage our focus is on assisting people to optimize yields from existing agricultural fields. Such an approach would also ensure that the impetus to bring fresh natural vegetation under plough is reduced.

The North East Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCRMP) operational in our neighboring district of West Garo Hills has demonstrated effective techniques of intensive utilization of limited tracts of land for boosting agricultural productivity. In order to learn from the experiences of the NERCRMP, experienced technical personnel from their team were invited to train the SHG members on vegetable cultivation. These "Hands On" training sessions were held in the Akings to enable the SHG members and other villagers to attend and learn on their crop fields. The NERCRMP personnel by virtue of their having worked in the neighbouring district of West Garo Hills were well versed with the landscape, crops grown and vernacular. This made the training sessions pertinent and easy for the SHG members to comprehend.

Samrakshan Trust members attended training on basics of cultivation practices at Rural Resource and Training Centre, Umran (Meghalaya). This session helped the Samrakshan members design a basic module on Cultivation Practices for the SHGs. The topics include:

1. Basics of cultivation.
2. Vegetable cultivation.
3. Kitchen Garden.

4. Organic Manuring

The table placed below depicts the trainings pertaining to agricultural improvement undertaken for the SHGs.

Sr.	Group's Name	Manuring	Vegetable Garden
1	Simsang Women SHG		
2	Balsrigittim Women SHG		
3	Balsrigittim Male SHG		
4	Rongcholgittim Male SHG		
5	Pring Prang Women SHG		
6	Dokua Mix SHG		
7	Dosigipil Women SHG		
8	Chitmang Songgittal SHG		
9	Dosingkal Women SHG		
10	Dabajol Male SHG		
11	Areng Abri Women SHG		
12	Totengkal Women SHG		
13	Chikasin Women SHG		
14	Chibasal Women SHG		
15	Bolsilgre Women SHG		
16	Rongrikkim Women SHG		
17	Mebit Male SHG		

ENGENDERING CONSERVATION CONSCIOUSNESS

4.1. SCREENING OF CONSERVATION FILMS IN COMMUNITY LANDS

Need and Approach

The Garo community has shared this landscape with wildlife for generations. Various customs and traditions have developed in the shadow of the incomparable natural values that occur here. As is the case with nearly all forest dwelling societies, hunting is an integral part of the social life and wildlife is often perceived to have a functional nutritive value. With an increase in human population and easy availability of guns, hunting has obviously taken a heavy toll on all forms of wildlife.

In order to create an atmosphere conducive to the persistence of wildlife, Samrakshan has attempted to devise a structured and dynamic approach for addressing this significant threat. On a pilot basis, an exercise has been initiated in our target *Aking*s of screening wildlife films depicting charismatic wildlife and followed by discussion groups. The immediate objective is to engender greater pride among community members within the BBCCL for wildlife in their lands, particularly flagship species such as the elephant. Though the Garo Hills has one of the highest densities of elephants in India, this population is poorly protected and is increasingly coming into conflict with humans. Thus by engendering such conservation consciousness the local community would be encouraged to desist from activities that degrade elephant habitat and cause general harm to wildlife. Further, such inputs also provide a degree of indemnity against possible reprisals against elephants when they enter crop fields. Such awareness building also helps generate the vital link between the community development component of Samrakshan's work and conservation, particularly preventing elephant habitats from being degraded. Eventually we hope to generate a cadre of local land stewards who value the wildlife occurring in their lands and are committed to its protection.

Films Screened in the *Aking*s

Sr. No.	Name of the Film	Language	Producer(s)
1.	Living with Giants	English & Hindi	Ashish & Shanti Chandola
2.	Birds of the Indian Monsoon	Hindi	Stanley Breeden & Belinda Wright
3.	Elephant – A God in Distress	Hindi	Earth Care Films
4.	Nagarhole – Tales From an Indian Jungle	English	Shekar Dattatri
5.	Silent Valley – An Indian Rainforest	English	Shekar Dattatri

The Process

All the films are on compact disks and are screened either at a small video hall in Alokpang *Aking* or at the residences of villagers possessing television sets and VCD players. While Panda is the only *Aking* that is electrified, in rest of the *Aking*s, the television sets run on batteries while the video hall mentioned above has a generator set. The people are given prior information about a screening and each film show is followed by discussions on the theme highlighted in the film and linking it to the situation in the Garo Hills. Samrakshan team members have prepared write ups in vernacular for each film screened. These help them to guide the discussions.

Apart from creating a climate in favour of wildlife, such discussions also help Samrakshan members understand the perceptions of the community vis-à-vis particular wild animals and towards nature in general. Further, such discussions have generated valuable information ranging from local names of specific animals to reasons for decline in population of animals like Hoolock gibbons in the area.

People from 6 *Aking*s (Alokpang, Ampangre, Halwa Atong, Gongrot, Panda and Rongrengpal) have been a part of this exercise so far. 26 films were screened and the total number of people who have viewed the films stands at 1316.

Tangible Benefits Accruing from this Exercise

1. The greatest benefit has been the role of films in increasing the sensitivity of our team members towards conservation issues. The significance of this development accrues from the fact that team members have been drawn from the same community with which we are working – a community where hunting and

conservation are non issues. Our team members are now confidently able to broach such issues within the community and talk about protecting forests and animals.

2. The sensitivity of people towards wildlife appears to have increased following this process. There is now a realization that the best place for wildlife is their natural habitat. The SHG members released a slow loris caught up a villager from the crop fields, to its natural habitat, this incident is reflective of this change in attitude. Further, people from these *Akings* have begun sharing information on activities that threaten wildlife.
3. This exercise has helped build a platform from which Samrakshan Trust members can address various conservation issues within the community - it has provided a lever to initiate a discussion with people on wildlife and conservation.
4. The films have helped in mobilizing support of the head men and other influential people towards conservation actions like participatory elephant monitoring being carried out in the *Akings*.

4.2. SKETCHING COMPETITION FOR CHILDREN

Need and Approach

While the film shows are primarily targeted at adults (though children also attend them), a strong need was felt to address another important segment of the community - children. Anecdotal information revealed that children cause significant damage to birds and small wildlife by

1. Extensively using catapults to kill birds and squirrels.
2. Disturbing nests, removing eggs and fledglings.

It was therefore felt that the effort to inculcate conservation consciousness should also explicitly target children.

On an experimental basis sketching and coloring events have been organized in the *akings* where we are working with SHGs. These create opportunities to interact with the children on birds and other wildlife. These events are conducted after discussion with village elders and schools teachers and held after the regular classes in schools. Posters depicting birds and other wildlife are displayed at the venue in course of the event during which the participants draw on the chart papers with the crayons given to them. The participants enjoy putting on paper colours and shapes of birds and other wildlife they have come across. The focus then shifts to a brief talk by Samrakshan members focusing on how birds play a vital role in the forest system. Hornbills, for example, found in their *Aking* play a very crucial role in disbursing seeds of different plants and trees in the forests, enabling them to grow at different places. Trees cannot move from place to place, but hornbills can, they drop the seeds of the fruits they eat. These seeds then grow into trees. They are lucky to have hornbills and other amazing birds in their *Aking* and should be proud of it. Just as the birds show their affection for us by nesting in our *Aking*, we too should care for them by desisting killing them or disturbing their nests. Birds, like us, feel happy being at home with their parents and enjoy being free with friends. We should not cage them. The children are encouraged to share these ideas with their parents and friends as well.

People and Elephants: Community Based Monitoring of Elephants

5.1. THE PROBLEM

A significant hindrance in our effort towards safeguarding habitat integrity in community lands for the persistence of elephants has been the absence of reliable information on the distribution and movement of elephants in the *Akings*. The lack of such information prevents the optimization of the conservation benefits from social outreach activities since the targeting of these interventions becomes somewhat inaccurate. Specifically, the lack of accurate information about elephants inhibits our ability to identify spaces that are critical for elephants and as a corollary, hinders us from strategically targeting our activities to secure such spaces on priority. Further, such information, if available, can be shared with various developmental agencies and line departments to enable them to undertake development activities like schools, roads and other future development interventions in the *Akings* in a manner that they do not come into conflict with the elephants.

5.2. METHODOLOGY

The following methodology is adopted for this exercise:

1. A reliable local person who can act as a record-keeper has been identified for each *Aking*. These selected record keepers are trained in methods of gathering and maintaining information about elephant activity in their respective *Akings*. Each record-keeper is given an exercise book in which data will be recorded according to a pre determined format:
2. For the purpose of this exercise, the support and cooperation of the head man of the *Aking* (called the *Nokma* in the local language) and other influential people of the *Aking* has been enlisted by holding several meetings with them during which the value of this exercise has been demonstrated. It has been emphasised that through such a process, conflict with elephants can be reduced by minimising human-elephant interactions.
3. The objectives and purpose of this exercise have been publicized among the villagers through similar meetings and the villagers have been requested to pass on the following information about every instance of elephant presence in their *Aking* to the record keeper:
 - a) Location - Record any landmark near which elephants were sighted
 - b) When were they there – date and approximate time when the animals were sighted
 - c) How many were there - record group size
 - d) Any other unusual characteristic.
4. Based on information reported by villagers, the record keeper fills the data sheet in his/her exercise book.
5. This information is collated monthly at the Samrakshan field office. In order to ensure that the information is systematically gathered, Samrakshan team members visit the record-keeper at the end of each fortnight.
6. The record keepers do not proactively search for elephant presence in their respective *Akings*. Rather they record information brought to them by villagers. They also attempt to collect information from villagers from common gathering points such as tea shops, bus waiting sheds and churches.

Capacity Building of Record Keepers

In order to streamline the monitoring exercise and lend it greater uniformity, trainings are organized at regular intervals for all the record-keepers and other influential people. The goals of such a training session are:

1. To help the participants better understand the rationale behind this exercise.
2. Clearly understanding the methodology of the exercise to ensure uniformity.

The trainings begin with various participants, who are from different *Akings*, interacting with each other and sharing their experiences about their association with Samrakshan Trust – some of them also belong to the SHGs that Samrakshan is nurturing. This is usually followed with film show that brings forth the participant's sensitivity on issues pertaining to wildlife and conservation and set the tone for further interactions.

We then arrive at the primary purpose of the gathering – recording of elephant presence in the *Akings*. Samrakshan Trust members explained the manner in which the activity was being carried out and more importantly, why it was being undertaken. It was explained to the participants that the idea behind the exercise was to gather structured and systematic information on the locations and habitats being used by the elephants over a period (one year). This would give a clear picture of the areas within these *Akings*, which are used by the animals and their movement patterns. This information collected by the informants and collated by Samrakshan Trust would be shared with people in the *Akings* and government authorities. This would, besides other things, help in planning of development and other initiatives like schools, roads, people's vegetable gardens and

orchards such that they do not fall on the routes / spaces used by the elephants. Thus, conflict between humans and elephants could be reduced.

The data collection format that had been given to the record-keepers was also discussed threadbare. This was to ensure that all the record-keepers and Samrakshan Trust members had a similar understanding of the format and uniformity was maintained in information collection. Mock exercises were also carried out with the record keepers. There were several questions on part of the participants about recoding information.

The exercise is enabling us to generate information as desired but since the efforts began in July 2005 it is too early as on reporting date to analyse the data and hence the same is not presented here.



PART 5
CAPACITY BUILDING

Samrakshan's effort in the Garo hills focuses strongly on nurturing a team of local conservation leaders who can eventually become the fulcrum of our activities. This approach is in order to avoid depending upon importing expertise from outside in the long run. We also see this as an opportunity to develop and nurture a sense of pride and ownership among the local community for its natural heritage. Such a message is likely to be much better received if delivered by others who share similar ethnicity. With these aims in view, Samrakshan has invested significant time and monetary resources in capacity building and providing exposure to a team recruited from within the BBCCL.

Table placed below depicts the training programmes attended by Samrakshan team members during the reporting period.

Sr. No.	Particulars	Conducted By	Members Attending	Month & Year	Duration (Days)
1.	Human Elephant Conflict – Lessons and Experiences from South Asia	W.W.F. (World Wildlife Fund - Kathmandu)	1. Nimesh Ved	June 2005	3
2.	Participatory Perspective Planning	I.G.S.S.S (Indo Global Social Service Society - Guwahati)	1. Nova Sangma 2. Nimesh Ved	July 2005	3
3.	Shifting Cultivation – Regional Workshop	N.E.R.I.W.A.L.M. (North Eastern Regional Institute of Water and Land Management - Tejpur)	1. Nimesh Ved	July 2005	2
4.	Nurturing of Community Institutions and their Capacity Building.	MYRADA (Bangalore)	1. Idalisha Marak 2. Nova Sangma 3. Kamal Medhi 4. Nimesh Ved	November 2005	6
5.	Management of Forests In India For Biological Diversity & Forest Productivity – A New Perspective.	W.I.I. (Wildlife Institute of India)	1. Kamal Medhi	December 2005	2
6.	Reconciling Conservation & Livelihoods in Practice	A.T.R.E.E., (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & Environment)	1. Nimesh Ved	December 2005	3
7.	Basics of Cultivation Practices & Organic Manure.	Rural Resource and Training Centre (R.R.T.C.), Umran	1. Lambu Sangma 2. Nova Sangma 3. Kamal Medhi 4. Idalisha Marak 5. Nimesh Ved 6. Mohanto Momin	January 2006	4
8.	Monitoring and documenting Elephant presence, Movements & Carcasses.	Monitoring the Illegal Killing of elephants (M.I.K.E.)	1. Babita Sangma 2. Nimesh Ved	February 2006	3
9.	Conservation Biology	Aaranyak	1. Babita Sangma 2. Nimesh Ved	February 2006	6

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

During the course of our work, we have developed linkages with a number of experienced agencies and individuals in order to avail of the best possible expertise for our work.

The most significant development that has come about during the reporting period has been the partnership developed with the state government of Meghalaya as described in the box below:

MOBILISING RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

In August 2005, Samrakshan was invited by the District Administration of South Garo Hills to enter into a formal MOU with the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) in order to foster and train community based institutions in a part of the Rongara Community Development Block (roughly coinciding with the BBCCL) on behalf of the DRDA. Samrakshan thus now has an official mandate to enhance social development within the BBCCL. This development provides Samrakshan with a unique position to be able to work towards the twin goals of livelihood security and elephant habitat preservation in the following ways:

1. It opens up the door to considerable state funding for groups fostered by Samrakshan. Thus, Samrakshan has successfully linked its activities and groups to state programs.
2. This development implies that funding made available to Samrakshan from its donors becomes catalytic with the state pitching in with significant funding for specific income enhancing activities that the groups will undertake.
3. This reduces the burden from Samrakshan of securing funds for investment in various groups that it is fostering for their income enhancing activities.

1. Our primary partner in the Garo Hills is the North East Community Resource Management Project (NERCRMP). The NERCRMP project in the neighboring district of West Garo Hills has evolved a number of approaches for assisting upland communities to improve livelihood security through intensification of cultivation and other income generating methods. Samrakshan is trying to build upon the learning's emerging out of the NERCRMP's experience and adapt them to the conditions prevalent in the South Garo Hills since the primary tool for safe guarding elephant habitats from further degradation is to enable people to intensively cultivate small plots of land, thus leaving at least some portions of the *Aking* free for use by elephants and other wildlife.
2. We have also established a collaboration with Myrada, an organisation based in south India, widely credited as being the pioneer of the "SHG" micro credit concept and focusing on mobilising and nurturing appropriate people's institutions. Not only has our team been trained at Myrada's training centre at Holalkare in Karnataka but we interact on a regular basis with the Myrada staff on the progress made by the team.
3. In order to access cutting edge knowledge regarding elephant ecology and in order to integrate it with land use planning, Samrakshan has teamed up with GIS unit of WWF India to access expertise for preparing a land use map of the BBCCL. The team leader also attended a workshop organized by WWF Nepal on human elephant conflict and the interactions at the event and successfully enriched his knowledge on the issue.
4. Dr. M. D. Madhusudan a conservation biologist with the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) paid a 10-day visit to Samrakshan Trust's field base in the Garo Hills in April 2005. During the visit Dr. Madhusudan helped design wildlife / conservation related surveys which are currently being carried out by Samrakshan members in the BBCCL.
5. Mr. Mathew Sangma visited Samrakshan to evaluate the efforts being undertaken towards mobilization and livelihood enhancement. This was a pre funding evaluation visit undertaken for Association for India's Development (AID) as a representative.
6. Mr. Ritupon Gogoi, project executive with Indo Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) visited Samrakshan to evaluate the undergoing project supported by IGSSS.
7. Samrakshan also had a group of visitors from Sund Folk School – Norway. The group, a teacher and 3 students spent a week at Baghmara and in the villages where Samrakshan is working trying to understand the socio economic scenario in remotely located region of north east India.

Donors

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Part 8
THE TEAM

Samrakshan Trust believes that nurturing and enhancing capacity of a team consisting of local youth is the optimal approach towards building a sustainable and effective work force. Accordingly significant resources in training of local staff and the Meghalaya team today consists of 11 personnel out of whom 9 are locals.

Sr.No.	Name	Sex	Designation	Educational Qualification	Age (in yrs)	Organizational Role
1.	Nimesh Ved	Male	Team Leader	BCom.	30	Coordinator
2.	Kamal Medhi	Male	Sr. Project Officer	B.A.	26	Supervisor – Mobilization
3.	Babita Sangma	Female	Sr. Project Officer	MSc.	27	Supervisor – Wildlife
4.	Nova Sangma	Female	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	26	Administration
5.	Idalisha Marak	Female	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	26	Community Mobilizer
6.	Mohanto Momin	Male	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	23	Wildlife
7.	Bensen Sangma	Male	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	22	Wildlife
8.	Lambu Sangma	Male	Project Assistant	9 th Class.	31	Campus Help
9.	Ericstone Marak	Male	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	22	Wildlife
10.	Leonard Sangma	Male	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	25	Community Mobilizer
11.	Rolingstone Marak	Male	Project Officer	Undergoing Graduation	28	Community Mobilizer