

**MINUTES OF 3rd STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**OF THE**  
**CITES MIKE SOUTH ASIA PROGRAMME**

**19<sup>TH</sup>-20<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2005**  
**CHITTAGONG, BANGLADESH**



## **1. INAUGURAL SESSION.**

The Sub-regional Support Officer (SSO) CITES-MIKE South Asia set the context for the Steering Committee Meeting by explaining the origins of the CITES MIKE programme, its function, administrative set up and salient achievements.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of Bangladesh delivered the inaugural address by welcoming all delegates to the meeting, thanked the CITES MIKE secretariat for holding the meeting in Chittagong, as the region was very important for the conservation of elephants in Bangladesh and requested that the meeting take up important cross border elephant issues that Bangladesh experienced with its neighbours, India and Myanmar.

The Chief Conservator of Forests, Forest Department of Bangladesh thanked the Ministry for their support in holding the meeting and looked forward to a productive output that could assist in conserving elephants in Bangladesh and the entire sub-region.

The Chairperson of the Steering Committee (SC) for MIKE South Asia and Inspector General of Forests, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, expressed his pleasure and gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh for the opportunity of holding this meeting at Chittagong and expressed his appreciation to the CITES MIKE programme for all the support provided to the respective South Asian governments in implementing the programme.

The Director, CITES MIKE reiterated his gratitude to the Govt, of Bangladesh for its support in holding the meeting, briefly explained how the MIKE programme could be of assistance in the conservation of elephants and expressed his confidence that the meeting would facilitate the CITES MIKE process.

## **2. SALIENT FEATURES OF COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS**

### **2.1 Bangladesh**

Presentations were made by the Steering Committee member from Bangladesh, the National Officer and the Site Officer, Chunati MIKE Site.

#### SC member

Facts and statistics on the status, distribution and threats of elephants in Bangladesh with special focus on elephant human conflict and consequent elephant and human mortality were presented.

The following key points were emphasized.

- Elephant-human conflict caused by fragmentation of forests and high human density, is exacerbated by migrations of elephants from Meghalaya, India into Mymensingh, Bangladesh and at smaller level, from Assam, India into Sylhet Bangladesh.
- There is a need to initiate cross border discussions on managing these shared populations in an attempt to curb EHC.
- In Bangladesh for most instances, once elephants are poached, it is not possible to trace the tusks.
- In Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary and MIKE Site, crop raiding elephants are sometimes killed and tusks removed and sold.
- The Forest Department requires assistance in training staff in recording conflict incidents and elephant mortality.

#### National Officer, Bangladesh

Details were provided on the elephant human conflict occurring on the Indo-Bangladesh border. These included details on the nature of migration, economic loss incurred and human mortality arising.

The following recommendations to alleviate the problem were made

1. Restoration of original habitat
2. Declaration of MIKE site
3. Prevention of habitat loss
4. Cash compensation
5. Public awareness and motivation
6. Alternate source of income
7. Alternate cropping
8. Development of water facilities

#### Site Officer, Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary

Details of the land use, legal status, biodiversity and existing threats within the Chunati MIKE site and data on elephant numbers, sex and age structure within were provided. The patrolling activities and the entry of MIKE forms were discussed. The following observations were presented.

- The Field staff performing carry out patrols regularly
- In the field level they are reluctant to complete the MIKE Patrol Forms.
- At least two organized patrol operations were carried out every month since April/03.

In summary it appears that only two patrols per month out of a possible 10 patrols are recorded systematically on the MIKE forms

## 2.2 Bhutan

The delegate from Bhutan, representing the SC member, provided a brief overview on elephant status and distribution in Bhutan. He provided details on important elephant conservation initiatives, including formulation of a national elephant action plan, training undertaken for implementation of elephant conservation strategies and MIKE implementation and recent progress made in carrying out population surveys of elephants in Bhutan with the assistance of MIKE.

The progress review of MIKE data collection was not passed on by the National Officer to the delegate from Bhutan due to the lack of time. The SSO clarified that, during his last meeting with the Site Officer of the Samtse MIKE site, he was assured that all forms were being filled up regularly and sent to the National Officer till October, 2005.

## 2.3 India

Presentations were given by the SC member from India and the National Officer, MIKE India.

SC member

The SC member from India described the CITES-India Management authority's structure, national wildlife legislation for protection of wildlife and to control illegal trade, the setting up of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau and the functioning of Project elephant and its achievements. He provided mortality statistics and indicated that data from population surveys carried out in different elephant reserves in 2005 were being compiled and would be available soon.

### National Officer

The National Officer described the special features on MIKE in India that were

- MIKE is an approved activity under Project Elephant.
- The following aspects of MIKE are of special interests to India:
  1. Establishment of a management information system
  2. Capacity building of field staff
  3. Regional cooperation where:
    - The wildlife authorities of South Asia share a lot of rapport with each other.
    - The platform provided by MIKE can be used for:
      - Cooperating with each other in combating elephant poaching & curbing illegal ivory trade.
      - Monitoring elephant populations and their corridors across international borders.

- Collaborating with each other in mitigation of human-elephant conflict.
- Cooperating with each other in capacity building programmes

The presentation included tables that provided the status of site data for each site

He highlighted the impediments to the MIKE programme that included

- Shortage of frontline staff in some Elephant Reserves
- Law and order problems
- Inadequate infrastructure at forest range level

However the future prospects for MIKE were very positive as

- Staff were very motivated in MIKE sites
- Good Central Govt. support for implementing the programme
- Adequate technical Assistance from MIKE

## 2.4 Nepal

There were two presentations from Nepal, given by a representative of the SC member and the Site Officer of the Royal Sukplaphanta Wildlife Preserve and MIKE site.

### SC Member Representative

The representative of the SC member from Nepal provided a background on the biodiversity of Nepal, the status and distribution of elephants, facts and data on elephant human conflict and its mitigation and associated recommendations to alleviate the problem.

The delegate also suggested the following

- Two additional MIKE sites be created in Central and Eastern Nepal
- MIKE should assist in creating a relief fund for compensating victims of elephant human conflict.

### Site Officer

Details were provided on the land use, administration, staffing patterns, budget, community level conservation and enforcement strategies of the MIKE site. An estimate of the numbers of elephants using the site and the finding that no elephant mortality was reported in the site for the last 12 years were also provided. Useful statistics on the illegal activity encountered in the site were provided. MIKE reporting was regular and on schedule and forms were being sent to the National Officer and SSO.

## 2.5 Sri Lanka

A single presentation was given by the National Officer of Sri Lanka on behalf of the SC member and himself.

### National Officer

An overview of status, distribution of elephants and conservation measures taken by the Department of Wildlife Conservation was given. Conflict mitigation with special reference to the ongoing elephant drives was emphasized. Data on elephant and human mortality was presented. The results of the recent population survey conducted at the Wilpattu MIKE site were discussed.

The following impediments to the MIKE programme were highlighted.

- Natural resistance to change
  - MIKE protocols “do not provide” positive contributions to “conceived” mandatory day to day activities.
- Lack of Funds
  - to carry out training programs
  - to undertake the second phase of elephant population surveys
- National level priority development programs have the following consequences
  - Full strength of DWC staff are needed for elephant drives
  - Census figures will also be invalid until after the drives are completed
- The MIKE database is not supporting data sharing with existing information database
  - The same data is required to be entered twice for MIKE sites
  - Department Database needs to be modified to support MIKE data fields with two systems better integrated

The following solutions and action will thus be carried out

1. MIKE database programme has to be integrated with other databases in Sri Lanka
2. Carcass and patrol forms are to be made mandatory by issuing circular in January, 2006.
3. Entry in patrol forms at the two MIKE sites will commence from January, 2006
4. The National Officer will collate 2004 and 2005 patrol data and enter into MIKE monthly report format
5. Annual reports for 2004-2005 will therefore be provided

### **3. SSO PROGRESS REPORT PRESENTATION**

The SSO presented the progress of the MIKE programme from the last Steering Committee meeting held in June, 2004. The progress report was made available to all SC members prior to the meeting. A brief summary of status of MIKE reporting and impediments faced during implementation are given below.

For Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal it seems evident that reporting is more or less up to date and complete, though forms have not been received by the SSO from the first two countries. For India there has been no reporting from one site. The other major concerns are partial reporting from several sites that have many forest divisions within and no forms being received by the NO from several sites.

The following impediments were indicated by the SSO.

- Poor data flow from sites to National Officer and SSO
- Poor spatial referencing of patrol data.
- Lack of communication between SSO and range states (e.g. Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) on training and other needs.
- Slow known progress on the installation of site base-maps on computers located at the site and national offices

#### **4. COMMENTS TO PRESENTATIONS:**

The Chairperson of the SC (CSC) and the Steering Committee member from Bangladesh (SCB) commended the excellent work carried out by MIKE and its South Asian Support Unit.

The Director MIKE (DM) commended the inclusion of site status tables in the Indian presentations and requested all range states to design their presentations to provide for more focus on the implementation of MIKE.

He also suggested that if Sri Lanka would like to merge the MIKE database with their own database, the process should be two way and involve MIKE. This has been done in the past when the MIST database of Uganda was merged with the MIKE database.

He encouraged that data analysis should be carried out rapidly at the Site level for attaining management objectives and MIKE would readily assist this process.

In response to several requests to expand MIKE but noting that countries like Nepal did not have resources to do this, the DM said that expansion of MIKE is to be encouraged but at present MIKE does not have the resources to support this in terms of providing equipment etc. Countries should first look to their treasuries to obtain funds or seek government assistance in obtaining bilateral external funding. MIKE would be very happy to provide training for implementation of the programme in these additional sites. This was corroborated by the CSC.

In response to the above the (SCB) stated the following

- Prior to implementing monitoring programmes, countries should invest time and effort in conservation activities such as habitat improvement and protection.
- He also encouraged that fair exchange of MIKE data should occur across all South Asian range states.
- He further suggested that CITES MIKE should be very proactive in facilitating dialogues between India and Bangladesh to solve cross border elephant issues. Furthermore as Bangladesh and Myanmar also share elephant populations, Myanmar should be brought into a cross-border format.

The DM said that MIKE would be very happy to facilitate cross border dialogues but suggested that these issues be brought up during the appropriate session the next day.

The Site Officer from Nepal wanted to know whether he could send forms directly to the SSO by-passing the NO.

The DM responded by stating that this decision rested with the Govts. But MIKE had no problem if the Govts wanted to do this.

The SSO agreed to the above, but said that in his experience, data in forms with him, occasionally did not correspond with those with the NO. To prevent this it would perhaps be better to send forms through the NO.

## **5. MIKE BASELINE SCHEDULE AND ACTION NEEDED.**

The DM indicated that prior to the CITES Conference of Parties (COP) 14 in 2007 the Standing Committee would meet in October, 2006 where the DM would give a report on the establishment of the MIKE baseline. Compilation of this report would begin in May, 2006 and be sent to the CITES Secretariat by August, 2006. For this report to be ready, the baseline should thus be in place by June, 2006. The DM went on to describe his understanding of the present status of MIKE reporting within the 10 baseline MIKE sites in South Asia. He presented a spread-sheet format that will be used to collate carcass data with law enforcement effort and elephant density to set the baseline for future trend analysis. He then presented a sample graph as an example of the analysis that will be used for assessing changes in the patterns of illegal killing rates. He next discussed the relevance of gathering data on the selected influencing factors thought to affect illegal killing rates and displayed a matrix that will be used to compile this data.

He finally requested cooperation from all range states in maintaining the deadlines required in achieving the baseline.

## **6. CROSS BORDER ISSUES**

The CSC opened the discussion by indicating that the Govt. of India recognized the problem that Bangladesh has with elephants migrating from, India. The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India has briefed the concerned ministries on this issue.

The DM confirmed receipt of a letter from the Government of Bangladesh requesting the MIKE programme to facilitate cross border dialogue with India. He stated that the MIKE programme would be very happy to assist in facilitating this dialogue and others that may be necessary. Cross border elephant dialogue could be facilitated by MIKE, especially where MIKE sites were concerned, as allowed for under CITES Conf 10.10 (Rev. CoP12. The DM emphasized that this process did not pre-empt the involvement of other agencies concerned in cross-border protocols. The advantage of a MIKE facilitated meeting was that technical issues could be resolved and recommended solutions prepared that respective Governments could then take back and apply through appropriate cross border mechanisms. In the Indo-Bangladesh context, such a meeting could be addressing the reasons for the cross border movements and the changes in such movements and looking for solutions that could mitigate the increased negative impacts that seem to be occurring.

The CSC welcomed the offer of MIKE's role in facilitating such dialogues and felt it made sense, particularly as it was a mechanism already agreed by Governments under CITES for addressing elephant cross border issues under a sub-regional and regional approach, by addressing the causes and possible solutions, prior to involving other agencies. However he felt that holding prior discussions with other concerned departments may be important. The CSC then asked whether the DM would consider involving other countries in such dialogue meetings.

The DM responded that 3 bilateral meetings were being recommended, India- Bangladesh, India -Nepal and India- Bhutan. This was because the issues involved were different and it was difficult to deal with solutions simultaneously, given the different geographical locations.

The SC representative from Nepal emphasized the need for India -Nepal dialogues. In Eastern Nepal, bordering India, the number of elephants from India is steadily increasing and is presently around 70. They originate from the Mahananda Sanctuary in West Bengal. Around 50,000 people are affected by these incursions and 30-50 people have been killed so far. Crop and property loss is valued at \$50,000.

The Site Officer from Nepal explained that more cooperation is needed between India and Nepal to solve elephant-human conflict problems. However due to present rules, visits by Indian officers to Nepal are tedious and impede exchange. Cross border strategies should recognize this problem.

The SCB requested MIKE to take up the facilitating role immediately as the situation is becoming serious and the District Commissioners of the affected districts have been frequently and vociferously bringing up this issue with the Forest Department.

The SSO pointed out that IUCN Bangladesh has already commenced studying this problem and any future strategies should recognize their findings. The SCB however mentioned that, though the IUCN report is very good, the mitigation methods suggested are inadequate for the present. The DM and the CSC agreed that past work should be considered but under a platform of greater bilateral discussions as any solutions had to take into account both sides of the border and a

major policy issue could be involved as to whether the elephants should be allowed to move across the border or otherwise.

The DM then requested SC representatives from Bhutan and Nepal to alert their respective governments on the outcome of these discussions.

The CSC summarized the session by agreeing to the following resolution

“The Steering Committee recognizes the valuable role that MIKE can provide under existing protocols for facilitating dialogues for discussing technical solutions to cross border issues. However, in order to ensure no misunderstanding, it was important that agencies normally involved in cross border protocols are informed of such meetings. As MIKE would only facilitate technical discussions regarding causes and recommended solutions there should not be any problems in gaining such understanding”.

## **7. PROPOSED UNDP-GEF INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE MIKE IN SOUTH ASIA**

The SSO elaborated on the MIKE SASSU efforts to seek UNDP-GEF support for promoting the MIKE programme in South Asia. He identified the steps through which UNDP-GEF had expressed interest in the programme including working on the suggestion that Project Elephant forwards the proposal to GEF on the behalf of all 5 range states. Discussions with the Ministry of Environment and Forests on adopting this suggestion had been undertaken, but some clarification was still required. However for GEF medium size grants, there was a 2 phased approach. The first step required the project initiation phase, requiring the submission of a project development facility (PDF) document. This first step facilitates the development of the main project proposal. The SSO emphasized that in both phases, co-financing from range states is a GEF requirement.–Co-financing could be in cash or in kind (e. g. staff time, infrastructure for meeting etc). However since the first step was principally about a team of two (SSO plus one other) working with the 5 range States on preparing a main proposal, the co-financing requirement was not likely to be a problem.

The SSO and DM then clarified that UNDP-GEF now required evidence of strong support from all range states for considering the PDF and indications of the volume of co-financing they were willing to provide.

The CSC then said that the Ministry of Environment and Forests had had informal discussions with the SSO and Dr. Ravi Chellam, Programme Officer, UNDP, India about the proposal but he was still unclear on what the implications of the GEF suggestion for India to forward the proposal might be, given that 5 countries would be involved. In particular he required more details on what financial and administration mechanisms would be in place for implementing the project. The CSC did not feel he could take the matter further until these issues were properly clarified.

The SSO suggested that GEF requirements, though still somewhat ambiguous could be interpreted as support letters to the Director, Project Elephant endorsing the idea of the proposal, indicating volume of co-financing and requesting India to go ahead with the proposal submission on behalf of the other 4 countries.

The DM then suggested that, India as the present Chair of the SC, could be mandated by the entire Steering Committee to submit the proposal on its behalf through endorsement letters from the concerned governments.

The NO from Sri Lanka indicated that any endorsement from the Government of Sri Lanka would require a request letter from the Chairperson of the SC.

In response the DM suggested that the CSC should then send a letter to all range states requesting expression of support to the proposal. Attention will be given to any financial and administrative concerns raised that could include the beneficiary's of such funding and the mechanisms of disbursement of the funds.

In response to the above suggestion the NO from Sri Lanka asked whether MIKE could submit the proposal and manage the funds.

The DM responded that if GEF could accept the MIKE SASSU as the secretariat of the South Asia Steering Committee, then it might be possible to submit the proposal and manage the funds. In this regard, it might be important to try and change GEF's current perspective of the SASSU as a technical partner to that of the SASSU being the institutional support to all 5 range States in relation to technical, financial and administrative support.

The former NO of Bangladesh enquired whether 5 separate proposals could be sent to the GEF under the umbrella of the MIKE programme. The CSC however said that this will involve too much bureaucracy and delay the whole process.

The DM suggested that it was important to keep in mind the two phases of the GEF project proposal. The PDF step was simple, involving possibly some US\$25,000 for preparing the main proposal and with no funds flowing to the 5 range States. The financial and administrative issues were therefore more pertinent to the main phase. Therefore once the PDF was submitted and approved, another SC meeting could be held where GEF representatives attend and mechanisms of fund administration are clearly elucidated. Given the above clarification the DM requested to know whether the CSC was comfortable with MIKE developing the PDF. The CSC affirmed this.

The SCB suggested that to simplify the process SC members could endorse the proposal mandating MIKE to implement the programme. He also asked whether the CSC (India) could simply sign on behalf of the SC mandating MIKE to manage the funds. The CSC however did not think that the GEF would allow India to unilaterally mandate MIKE on the behalf of the SC.

The DM then suggested, given the agreement that MIKE could proceed with developing the PDF and that there was no real financial implications re the PDF, that India as the Chair of the SC be authorized to submit the PDF and this would then give more time to work on the funding mechanisms.

The CSC asked the range states whether SC members would require government approval to endorse the proposal. All range states replied in the affirmative. He then suggested the following next steps to proceed with the process.

He would call for a meeting with GEF and CITES MIKE to work out the necessary GEF requirements and would then proceed forward. He then suggested the following resolution from the meeting and session.

“The SC welcomes and appreciates the initiative of preparing the proposal and is willing to make staff available for the visit of the team formulating the PDF. Depending on the outcome of the meeting between the Chair, SSO and GEF representatives. The MIKE Secretariat will write to the concerned range states on the future course of action”.

This resolution was fully endorsed by the SC

## **8. FUTURE ACTIVITIES UNDER MIKE**

1. The SSO would liaison with all range states to ensure that MIKE baseline requirements are met.
2. MIKE will undertake to provide training for statistical analysis of MIKE data and use of the provided GIS software for spatial referencing of LEM data, etc.

Acting on a suggestion from the NO, India, the SSO suggested that the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehra Dun, could be involved in training MIKE officers from the sub-region. The CSC welcomed this suggestion and said that he would discuss this with the Director, FSI. He suggested that Project Elephant could support the attendance of MIKE officers from India at the training but requested MIKE to support the attendance of officers from the other range states. The SSO and the DM agreed to do this

3. The methodology used and results from the 2005 population surveys conducted in India once compiled, need to be reviewed by a panel of experts to address what refinements and improvement might be required to the survey methods under consideration in particular . MIKE would be quite happy to facilitate such an activity with the support of Project Elephant.
4. MIKE would like to support the attendance of a few officers from the Sub-region for the Distance sampling workshop held yearly at the St. Andrew’s University Scotland.

## 9. APPENDIX 1.

*List of participants at 3<sup>rd</sup> SC meeting, CITES MIKE South Asia.*

1. Mr. Osman Gani Choudury, Steering Committee Member from Bangladesh and Chief Conservator of Forests, Forest Department of Bangladesh
2. Dr R.B. Lal, Chairperson, Steering Committee, MIKE South Asia and Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife), Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India
3. Mr. Thinley Dorji, Representative of Steering Committee member from Bhutan and Park Manager, Royal Manas National Park, Royal Bhutan Government
4. Mr. Baburam Yadav, Representative of Steering Committee Member from Nepal and Department of
5. Mr. Dammika Pebotuwa, Representative of Steering Committee Member from Sri Lanka and OIC – Elephant Drives, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Govt. of Sri Lanka.
6. Mr. Monoj Kanti Roy, National Officer, CITES MIKE Bangladesh and Conservator of Forests, Wildlife and Nature Circle, Forest Department of Bangladesh
7. Mr. Shamshur Rahman, Former National Officer, CITES MIKE Bangladesh and Conservator of Forests, Planning and Administration, Forest Department of Bangladesh
8. Mr. Tapan Kumar Dey, Site Officer, Chunati Sanctuary and MIKE site and Divisional Forest Officer, Chittagong Wildlife Circle, Forest Department of Bangladesh.
9. Mr. Santosh Tewari, National Officer, CITES MIKE India and Deputy Director, Wildlife Preservation, Northern Region, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt, of India
10. Mr. Tikaram Adhikari, Site Officer, Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve and MIKE Site and Chief Warden, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Royal Government of Nepal
11. Mr. MSRLP Marasinghe, National Officer, Sri Lanka and Assistant Director Planning and Administration, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Government of Sri Lanka
12. Mr. Nigel Hunter, Director, CITES MIKE Programme
13. Dr. Arun Venkataraman, Sub-regional Support Officer, CITES MIKE South Asia Support Unit
14. Ms. Anisha Arora, Programme Support Officer, CITES MIKE South Asia Support Unit (Logistics)