

# Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action (IELA)



**Established 2015**

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# Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action

*Relevance of Geo Spatial tools for real time action research to operationalise decentralised ecological governance*

## **Background:**

Towards the end of the financial year 2022-23, IELA brought out a paper titled *A Participatory Approach for Integrating Community Knowledge in Ecosystem Assessment: Relevance of Geo-spatial tools to enhance Community Participation: Case Study of Ashankur*. The paper helped to crystallise experiences of working with diverse rural communities showing how Geo Spatial tools helped to place Community knowledge of Ecosystems in a ready to use and engage format.

[https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/A-Participatory-Ecosystem-Assessment-of-issues-in-Ahmednagar-region\\_Relevance-of-Geo-Spatial-tools-to-enhance-community-participation.pdf](https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/A-Participatory-Ecosystem-Assessment-of-issues-in-Ahmednagar-region_Relevance-of-Geo-Spatial-tools-to-enhance-community-participation.pdf)

The action research training programmes with Ashankur in Ahmednagar and elsewhere have since focussed on the kind of capacity building needed by Civil Society Organisations and Local Communities to translate individual assessment processes and knowledge into a coherent form that can facilitate informed community action on aspects related to ecology, livelihoods, nutrition, health, education and overall well being.

Separate to this, a process that was in place with Science Centre, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh culminated in a training of 25 teachers on the Eureka kit across three States and one Union Territories of Western India (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Goa and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. This kit, development of which members of IELA have actively participated in helps children to study issues related to soil, water, air, astronomy and climate change. Apart from the kit, the process helped to develop a coherent group of dedicated teachers across these States and Union territories.

Following up on the above two processes, IELA has worked out a partnership with St Mary Senior Secondary High School Fatehpura to help provide a social and ecological perspective to the students on the lines of the 17 SDGs. While the formal collaboration is expected to be initiated next year, this year has focussed on providing an action based orientation and perspective building programme to the teachers who are expected to provide leadership to the programme.

An important development during the year has been the invitation by ECHO Network to become a special consortium partner due to IELA's contribution to issues related to ecosystem valuation and its role in the development of ecosystem stewardship. In this connection, IELA has pressed for a cross country approach to understanding the diversity of issues pertaining to different ecosystems across the country and the relevance of a community/ federation based approach to dealing with questions related to democratic

governance of such diverse ecosystems so as to take into account relevant aspects of local and traditional knowledge in the understanding and management of such ecosystems.

Building on the role that IELA is playing in the National Platform of Small Scale Fish workers as convenor of the wetlands groups, IELA used the occasion of World Wetland day to considerably enhance its engagement on the questions and dimensions related to wetlands. The perspective being developed on this thematic platform, provided IELA with an approach to engage meaningfully to a request by Foundation for Ecological Security to participate in a collective process to provide meaningful inputs to the Task force on grazing ecology set up by the State of Rajasthan.

## **Annual Report 2023-24**

### **Relevance of Geo Spatial Tools to enhance community participation in Ecosystem Assessments:**

As mentioned above under the leadership of IELA Joint Managing Trustee Dr Sunil Dubey and Scientific Advisor to IELA, Amit Daiman, IELA was able to simplify application of technology so as to be within reach of local communities (with the support of experts at the back end). Right from the beginning IELA has maintained that technology is no substitute for own own understanding and effort. Rather technology is limited by the same. Leading up to the exposure to Geo Spatial tools in February 2023, both IELA Managing Trustee, Viren Lobo and Joint Managing Trustee, Dr Sunil Dubey were at pains to explain to Ashankur staff that one's own understanding is primary. The exposure to the technology therefore first began with Ashankur's own understanding of the biodiversity on their campus and proceeded to show how this understanding could be more accurately and better depicted on the google map with the help of GPS readings from the Note cam App on the mobile.

Over the year, the staff were able to understand the glitches that could take place in the readings and in the two follow up trainings were able to apply the knowledge to the field as well. In October 2023, members of Ashankur staff were exposed to how technology could help them improve the reports written by them as these could be backed up with maps produced by Geo Spatial tools and real time photos of Geo tagged events. The feedback related to action research training schedule, led IELA to modify the approach to training giving more time for the staff of Ashankur to grasp the link between the eapplication of techniques in the field and its relation to the real time live questions being examined by Ashankur.

[http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Action-Research-Training-and-Orientation-Workshop-at-Ashankur--9th-15th\\_October\\_2023-compressed-compressed.pdf](http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Action-Research-Training-and-Orientation-Workshop-at-Ashankur--9th-15th_October_2023-compressed-compressed.pdf)

The training programme in February 2024, revisited Ashankur's programme with new eyes and showed concretely how base line data required under the SDGs could be generated with the help of these tools and the cooperation of the local communities. This exposure will be

tried out by members of Ashankur over the next six months of the following year. It is expected that this will help Ashankur in developing pilot micro plans in five villages around the SDGs.

[http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Action-Research-Training-and-Orientation-Workshop-at-Ashankur--9th-15th\\_October\\_2023-compressed-compressed.pdf](http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Action-Research-Training-and-Orientation-Workshop-at-Ashankur--9th-15th_October_2023-compressed-compressed.pdf)

The experience of Ashankur is being shared with select representatives from other ecosystems across the country namely with Adivasi Jan Utthan trust, Bhekadiya in Chhota Udepur, St Mary Senior Secondary School, Fatehpura, Udaipur, Government Senior Secondary School, Tulsi Das ka Sarai, Udaipur District, students of Xavier Institute of Social Sciences, Ranchi, students who have passed out from Xavier Institute of natural Resource Management, Ahmednagar, students from Uttarkhand associated with Echo Network, Bengaluru, CEO of Habitat Ecological Trust, Visnagar, Gujarat, Civil Society members from Pune, Kolkatta and Brisbane, Australia. How this sharing will help work in other regions will be taken up in other sections of this report.

### **Prakriti Media Shala: The relevance of the Eureka kit for cultivating a practical approach to science by Children**

Sponsored by National Council for Science Technolgy and Communication (NCSTC), Science Centre , Bhopal Madhya Pradesh had taken up the responsibility for training teachers on the use of the Eureka Kit developed by them on behalf of NCSTC and development of an online platform for sharing experiences amidst the teachers. Dr Sunil Dubey, Joint Managing Trustee IELA was among those who helped Science Centre, Bhopal bring this about. After the first training programme held in Bhopal, IELA volunteered to collaborate with Sceince Centre, to facilitate training across the country for which the next training took place at udaipur in September 2023. 25 teachers from the States of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Goa and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli participated in the training programme. To facilitate sharing of experiences among the teachers, a What's app group was created. Teachers have periodically shared their experiences on this platform.

### **Collaboration with St Mary Senior Secondary High School Fatehpura on Social and Ecological Governance around the 17 SDGs**

Following up on the invitation of IELA to participate in Prakriti Media Shala, St Mary Senior Secondary High School Fatehpura invited IELA to help it develop an outreach strategy for the future based on an exposure to the SDGs and agenda 2030. Accordingly a series of three meetings were held with the Principal after which 14 teachers were chosen to participate in monthly meetings with IELA. Two outreach activities were chosen to start with. The first being the creation of a herbal garden at St Mary and the second an engagement with Nari Niketan. Three groups namely Nature Enquiry, Herbal Garden and Prajakta were created to facilitate the activities in a more decentralised manner. During the year, teachers were exposed to the SDGs, issues related to ecological governance, outreach programme with Nari Niketan and the organising of a programme on the occasion of World Wetland day for which

members of St Mary went on a reconnaissance visit to Menar ( a bird wetland area about 50 kms from Udaipur. To develop the herbal garden, two visits were organised to Forest Nursery at Sisarma from where plants were purchased. Teachers of St Mary have also facilitated an exposure of the students to the biodiversity of the school campus and presentation of the value of medicinal plants was organised by the students as well. A draft letter to the parents to involve the children in the programme has also been prepared. It is expected that a more comprehensive programme for the children inclusive of field visits to understand the biodiversity and the ecosystems around Udaipur will be organised next year.

### **Participation in Echo Network on issues related to Ecosystem Stewardship**

Following the workshop on the relevance of the Aravallis in September 2022, the report was shared with Echo Network of a follow up of an action not possible by the Network due to COVID. Echo Network invited IELA participation in a meeting on valuation of natural resources and sought its help to mentor Senior Ambassadors. Accordingly Soundary Acharya was chosen. Her study over two months helped IELA contribute meaningfully to the network on issues related to Ecosystem Stewardship for which IELA was made a Senior Consortium partner. As part of this process, IELA has outlined a cross country programme to facilitate ecosystem stewardship in diverse ecosystems of this country. Among the achievements for IELA was the initiation of a process of collaboration with Xavier Institute of Social Sciences for the Summer Internship Programme early next year. Accordingly IELA selected five students for the internship from April to June 2024. The studies are expected to follow up on the Jarkhand study done by IELA. The study had highlighted issues related to the contradictions facing the State and the people in relation to mining of coal, electricity generation in the State and impact on livelihood and conservation of forest dependant communities and natural resources of the State. The studies aim to cover issues related to coal mining, elephant corridors, millet cultivation, climate resilient agriculture and water quality issues. Four Districts of Jharkhand namely Ramgarh, Ranchi, Garhwa and Sahibganj and one District of West Bengal namely Purulia are being covered in the study.

### **Participation in National Platform of Small Scale Fish Workers**

The participation in National Platform of Small Scale Fishers Workers (NPSSF) during the year has the following dimensions

- a. Development of State Platform of Small Scale Fish workers in the three lakes of Jaismand, Mahi and Kadana where the local tribal fishing community was organised into cooperatives by the Rajas Sangh.
- b. Development of District level Platform of Small Scale Fish workers in Ahmednagar region with the help of Ashankur in Takli Bandh, Bargaon Nandur and Jenpur where local communities of fishers are working
- c. Development of the agenda related to the link between the health of wetlands and the health of the fisher communities starting with the need for fishermen to assert their concerns relating to the governance of water bodies and its impact on local fishing communities.

d. Highlighting these concerns at the National/ Regional meetings of the NPSSFW and using the outcome of these meetings a means to provide a common link for the fishing communities across the two States

## **Engagement with the Forest Department of Rajasthan on the question of Critical Wildlife Habitat and other questions**

### **Celebration of World Wet Land Day**

This year IELA has considerably enhanced its profile in relation to the celebration of World Wetland Day.

[https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Report-of-World-Wetland-Day2024\\_IELA-Partners\\_FINAL-compressed.pdf](https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Report-of-World-Wetland-Day2024_IELA-Partners_FINAL-compressed.pdf)

Apart from the fisher communities, schools and NGOs were involved in the States of Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The events highlighted the importance of wetlands, need for communities like fisher communities, village communities, schools, civil society to articulate their concerns related to the health of the water bodies and the related biodiversity and livelihoods of communities dependant on such bodies.

### **Other Associations**

IELA has participated actively in the forum created to provide inputs to the task force on grazing ecology in Rajasthan. Some of the documents shared on this forum are given below.

<https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IELA-recommendations-to-the-task-force-on-grazing-ecology.pdf>

[https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Ecosystems-approach-to-land-use-ecology-and-livelihoods-in-Rajasthan\\_A-policy-brief.pdf](https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Ecosystems-approach-to-land-use-ecology-and-livelihoods-in-Rajasthan_A-policy-brief.pdf)

These reports highlight the importance of the grazing lands of Rajasthan for the ecology and livelihood of the State. As a result of its interventions IELA has been made co-convenor of the policy group and is contributing actively on the grazing ecology group and the GIS technology group as well. Given this IELA will be working on strategic interventions over the course of the next few years that give shape to the concerns articulated here.