Elephant Conservation Welfare Training for Temple Mahouts and Cawadi

Interim report for the period 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2017

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Project starting date: 1 January 2017
Anticipated completion date: 31 December 2017
Overall and specific conservation needs this project addressed:
The people of Tamil Nadu state and the entire population in the southern region of peninsular and rest of India, has a very close association with elephants and it is reflected in their culture as big mammals like elephants are maintained and managed by state government bodies and also some private holders. The state ministry, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments HR&CE that take care of the temple elephants maintain captive elephants in different institutes within Tamil Nadu including temples. In addition to it equal number of elephants are owned and maintained by private people. A study in 2008 on the status of captive elephants in Tamil Nadu state recommended that those elephant handlers require proper training so as to improve the welfare of the temple and private elephants. This project is to fulfil the above recommendations especially with reference to private owned captive elephants. The HR&EC conduct elephant rejuvenation chats for the temple elephants however, the same benefits are not available for the private owned elephants. Elephant handlers are not exclusively trained and they do not get opportunities to attend such trainings, nevertheless they have more than 10 years of experience with the elephants. This project is to conduct elephant welfare training programs for elephant handers namely Yaani pahan (mahout)’ cavadi, managers of private elephant owners who handle about 40 elephants in Tamil Nadu state. Hence this project will be addressing these issues and coordinating for training programs in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department, veterinarians, temple authorities, industrialists and selected individuals.

Goals and objectives:
The goal of the project is to improve the welfare of captive elephants in Tamil Nadu state.

The objectives
• To train elephant handlers to teach about husbandry management animal care
• To create a network of elephant handers and find a way for daily reporting system

There is no change or diversion in the goals and objectives of project.

Actions taken:
One of the two objectives is to conduct training programme for elephants handlers to teach about husbandry management, animal welfare and welfare of elephant handlers. This training is planned for the 7/8th month of the project period and as per the time table of action, training program has been planned for August. First seven months of the project period can be considered as a preparatory phase of the project. During the preparatory phase multiple rounds of discussions with the collaborators viz., Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department, Tamil Nadu Forest
Department, Temples in Tamil Nadu (some of the temples are yet to be approached), owners of private elephant holders, veterinarians, industrialists interested in elephant welfare, and selected NGOs was conducted. During the process details of the elephant handlers, and the elephants were collated. Point persons for the workshop location was identified and briefed about the project.

One of the main requirement of the project is the preparation of a husbandry manual in vernacular language. The contents of the manual was developed in consultation with experts on captive elephants. Contributors for the manual were identified and approached for unit contribution. Development of the manual is in progress. Translation work will be taken up after the completion of the manual. Collection of photos for the illustrations were done.

It is very important that the mahouts and owners of the private elephants are met in person so as to brief them the objectives of the training and their contribution. In order to achieve this owners and elephant handlers were met in person in their location (photos attached). This helped the PI to develop personal contact with them and to gain their confidence. The PI is in constant touch with them through phone that will help in the constructive participation of the elephant handlers. Handers of private owned elephants will be invited for the training and details of the elephant handlers will be updated until the training period. In the mean time potential workshop venue(s) suitable for the training has been identified and logistic preparations are in progress. Resource persons for the training has been identified.

Second objective is to create a network of elephant handlers. This objective will be fulfilled after the conduct of the training. In order to achieve this a questionnaire has been developed with the help of international elephant experts (Dr Heidi Riddle) which will be utilised during the training program. The questionnaire will have the history of the elephant and also the elephant handers. The fields in the questionnaire will be used to develop a mobile application which will be a stand alone project.

Describe any activities that differ from the original proposed actions and explain the reason for the change.

There is no change in the activities from the proposal. In the proposal we had planned for three training with the financial support from other institutes but as committed to IEF we will be conducting one training program for the elephant handlers and addition trainings will be conducted subsequently after raising sufficient funds from other agencies. Attempts so far to raise the remaining funds are unsuccessful however, results of the training to be organised with the support of IEF will be used to raise more funds from other funding agencies. As per the proposal all commitments will be fulfilled during this project period.
Describe the conservation outcomes for elephants, other wildlife, habitat and human communities, and list major findings and accomplishments to date.
The outcome of the project can be fully come to light after the completion of the training and the network. At this point of time visit to captive facilities, especially to the private elephant owners has created lots of interest and anxiety among the owners and elephant handers. They are looking forward to take part in the forthcoming training programs.

Approximately how many humans are impacted by your project?
Approximately how many elephants are impacted by your project?
Details can be given during final report.

Describe any problems discovered or occurring during this grant period
There is absolutely no problem towards execution of the project since Zoo Outreach Organisation has good relationship with the forest department. However gaining the confidence of the elephant handlers is a biggest challenge.

Was your project successful? State short and long term goals that you are using to evaluate your accomplishments.
Details can be given during final report.

Based on this Project, what is the “next step” for this project and does it have implications for future conservation actions?
Due response can be given after the completion of the project.

Provide at least one human interest story.
During the visit to elephant facilities, it was amazing to observe the attitude of the mahouts who had a wide range of extremes of positive and negative response showed by the handers. The PI literally had to spend time to bring the elephant hander to a comfortable zone before introducing about the training, especially with the temple elephant holders compared to private owners. In one of the visit the PI visited a temple to meet the mahout. The PI waited for the appointed time and he had to literally listen to the mahouts talk for more than a hour (who spoke indifferently) before telling the purpose of the visit. The discussion continued for about three hours. The second and third hour spent with the mahout was really useful and interesting who came up sharing with with captive elephant experiences and finally the mahout became a very close friend of the PI. On to the other extreme a mahout at Rameswaram was so friendly to the PI right from the time we met. Like wise the elephant was also very friendly.

In 500 words or less, summarize the progress and results achieved. This will be used for media and donor recruitment.
Due response can be given after the completion of the project.
List all organizations associated with this project and their roles in the project.

2. Tamil Nadu Forest Department, - Regulates Private owned elephants. Collaborator
3. Veterinarians, Tamil Nadu Forest Department - Resource
4. TVS Ltd., - Industry - External assistance
5. Nalam Hospital - Health screening and resource
6. Heidi Riddle - External resource