

India
Healthy Forests, Healthy People, and a Healthy Climate: An Initiative for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods in the North Western Ghats

News from the Field

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Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF)

This project was carried out by the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), an Indian NGO

Seedling nurseries for native tree species

The forests owned by communities in the northern part of the North Western Ghats face constant threats in the form of indiscriminate cutting by logging companies, and the spread of cashew nut and teak trees by people using subsidies. As a result, the forests are deteriorating in health and quality is falling in ecosystem services such as pollination by insects and provision from natural water sources. In order to improve continuity that allows management of a wide region and enables animals to cross from one important biologically diversified region to another, plans have been made to conduct reforestation in numerous locations through the planting of native tree species by way of conservation agreements. To this end, two seedling nurseries were created at the field station in Devrukh, Ratanakiri. During the three months from January to March, 3,200 seedlings covering 36 species were raised. Among the seedlings raised are economically valuable tree species and species whose fruit is food for birds such as the hornbill and the nilgiri wood pigeon.



Seedling nurseries for growing native tree species' seedlings

Introducing high-combustion-efficiency cooking stoves

In the countryside of the North Western Ghats, wood is still the most common home fuel, and about 80% of households are said to rely on such fuel as their energy source. This places

tremendous pressure on forests and leads to the loss of biodiversity. An improved cooking stove running on waste material was developed. These stoves give off minimal smoke and have a high combustion efficiency, as shown by their blue flame. To determine how these cooking stoves could lessen the impact on the surrounding forest, a survey was conducted covering 185 households in seven villages. The results showed that 90% of households use wood fuel and that each household uses on average 1.5 tons of wood fuel annually. The improved cooking stoves were demonstrated in 10 villages. Instead of providing the stoves for free, we decided that it was more important to have the villagers purchase them on their own, so we sold the stoves below cost. Stoves were purchased by 50 households in four villages. Awareness-raising activities were held at 25 schools to inform students of the effect that using wood for fuel has on the forest. During these lessons, it was discovered that most of the schools spent 10,000 rupees a year to buy wood fuel to cook the school lunches.



Demonstration of a cooking stove



Gathering wood for fuel



Improved cooking stove (left) A family receives their improved cooking stove (right)

Training and capacity building

As reported in the last issue, AERF received FAIRWILD certification, which makes it possible for local communities to earn a higher income. In the first week of March, ahead of the once-a-year certification, training was held for collectors of *Terminalia bellirica* trees. This training is a prerequisite for undergoing the certification audit. Ten collectors participating in the training, which was led by trainers invited from international certification institutes. Participants underwent a mock audit that deepened their understanding of the auditing process.



At the training

Ways to achieve sustainable livelihoods

In accordance with protocol designated under the FAIRWILD certification scheme, sustainable collection of the fruit of the *Terminalia bellirica* tree has been conducted together with local communities. This year, 4,000 kilograms of the dried fruit has been collected. In addition, four women have received 165 days of work processing the fruit.



Fruit of the *Terminalia bellirica* tree (left) Transporting fruit for drying and processing (right)



Terminalia bellirica being stored for drying (left) Women processing the fruit (right)

At the end of February, under the requirements of FAIRWILD certification, 10,000 rupees was sent to each of the certified villages.



Presentation of the FAIRWILD certification plaque

Community meetings on conservation agreements

Community meetings were held with local leaders in nine villages to raise awareness of the importance of the forests. Talks focused on protecting forests through conservation agreements as an approach to sustainable livelihoods, and the importance of adapting to climate change. These villages were ones that have been participating in conservation activities through AERF, villages designated by the Indian government as Ecological Sensitive Areas, and villages with primeval forest or forests deemed valuable for conservation purposes.



Discussions with village leaders



Meetings with village representatives

Launch party

In the first week of February, a project launch party was held to welcome participants from Daikin. Joining the festivities were about 100 residents from six villages, people in environmentally related work, and members of local government.

The event also provided a valuable opportunity to discuss what the forests mean to local communities and to talk about the conservation agreements. We hope that Daikin members can learn more about the landscape, people, and culture of the northern part of the North Western Ghats.



Daikin employees pay a visit