

# LiveDiverse

## SUMMARY-REPORT FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> STAKEHOLDER FIELDTRIPS: INDIA, 7<sup>TH</sup> – 15<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2009



Pictures: A. Allan, M. Claasen, A. Guignier, Shruti Vispute, Y. Yasuda.



Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement No. 211392

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## Presentation of the field trip

The India field trip had several objectives: to raise awareness on the Livediverse project; to identify and understand the key issues related to biodiversity and livelihoods from different perspectives (national, provincial, local; governmental/ non-governmental); and to identify existing initiatives and projects within the case study areas that complement the aims and objectives of LiveDiverse project.

The field trip was organized by the Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), LiveDiverse case-study partner and leader of WP 7.

The trip was based in two urban centres: Pune and Kolhapur, with the majority of the trip being spent in and around the latter. The first day of the fieldtrip was devoted to the exploration of Pune. The team visited Gandhi National Memorial, earlier called Aga Khan Palace, where Gandhi was interned for two years by the British in 1942; Shaniwar Wada, ruins of a former palace and the Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum which gathers the most important personal collection of Indian daily life objects.

The first major academic engagement, an International Workshop on “*Ecosystem Management: Experience sharing by the case study countries of the LiveDiverse project*” was organized at the Department of Environmental Science of the University of Pune on the second day of the fieldtrip. The first part aimed to present the national legal and policy framework in the three non-Indian case-study areas of the LiveDiverse project and the second part of the workshop intended to share policies and experiences on ecosystem management in India (protected areas, displacement, water, climate change, and environmental education). The audience of the workshop included not only academics and students but also NGO representatives.



The LiveDiverse team left Pune to reach Kolhapur and the case study area. On the way to Kolhapur, the team could see the eastern boundaries of the Chandoli National park which is covered by wind farms. The team also could witness many socio-cultural events like wrestling at Kokrud village, which is annual event and it is part of the annual “jatra” (or festival). This is an all-male affair as women do not participate in the wrestling competition, nor do they go to witness it. They also could see the market for the bullocks where thousands of bullocks are brought

for sale.

The team also visited the Shirala temple where every year on Nagapanchami day (day celebrating/venerating the snake, generally in the month of August) the snakes are worshipped. Thousands of people come there. It is an important socio-cultural-religious event in the region. Some of the rationalist groups and animal lovers oppose this because on that day lots of snakes are caught and publicly displayed for money and cruelty to snakes and superstition have become the issues now.



Kolhapur sits slightly outside of the case study area around the Chandoli National Park, but is the local political centre and provided the best location for access to key local places of interest to the project. It is around 6 hours drive south of Pune.

The Kolhapur part of the field trip began on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December with a visit to the Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), in charge of Chandoli National park, Dajipur and Koyana wild life sanctuaries – all of them situated in the northern part of the Western Ghats. Following the meeting, the group went by bus to the confluence of the Warana river with the Krishna River at Haripur. On the way to Haripur the group was able to see the prevalence of sugar cane as an agricultural crop, and saw for the first time the living conditions of the itinerant cane cutters, seeing a number of the workers' cane husk tent communities on the roadside.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, the group attended the International Workshop on “*Issues related to Biodiversity, Socio-cultural Traditions and Livelihoods in Warana River Basin and other Case Study Basins of LiveDiverse Project*” at the Vilasrao Kore Sabhagrah Engineering College at Waranagar. This workshop allowed LiveDiverse case study partners to present details of their own national case study areas to a group of students, academics and relevant local stakeholders, followed by interesting presentations from local experts on biodiversity, socio-cultural traditions and livelihoods in the Warana region more specifically.

On the way back from the workshop we stopped at one of the many jaggery making units, locally called gural, that can be seen in the area. The agriculture in the lower part of the Warana basin is dominated by sugar cane production. Much of this cane goes straight to the large sugar processing plants that are nearby, but local jaggery production still goes on in small factories.



The following day, the group drove up to the Chandoli National Park itself. The morning was spent driving up from Kolhapur to the park boundaries and to visit Khundlapur village on national park boundary (basically a village of Dhangars or shepherds, one of the ethnic groups in the case basin).

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, the LiveDiverse group visited a large open-cast mine extracting bauxite from the hills near the village of Sonavde, almost inside the Chandoli national park. The operation of the mine necessarily involves the removal of all topsoil as the bauxite lies several metres under the ground. Once the ore has been extracted, there is nothing left except bare rock. Nevertheless, some efforts of reforestation are under way in some sections of the mine by the mining company.



Further down the hill from the mine, the access road winds through the Udgiri sacred grove, one of the largest sacred groves in Maharashtra. There is no access to the mine without going through the grove. These groves centre are around a sacred place which may be a large tree or spring. These

sacred places will have associated temples, and are governed by particular rules regarding the use of their natural resources. For instance, no wood can be taken from them, even if it is dead, although this rule may not prevent exploitation in some cases.

At the end of the day, the Livediverse team drove to Sonawade village, where it attended the weekly Jyotiba temple ceremony. It seems that around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the village suffered a number of calamities. In an effort to gain some respite, the villagers instituted a regular weekly ceremony to honour their local deity. The village began to recover from the earlier traumas and the villagers decided that it would be wise to continue with the ceremonies, which are unusual because such celebrations are normally held much less regularly. Each of the tasks performed in the elaborate ritual must be made by people from certain castes. The team very much enjoyed the visit to the Jyotiba ritual as it was a unique window on to the spiritual lives of local people that would otherwise not been available to them. From the LiveDiverse perspective, it gave the team some insight into the importance of spiritual health to the local people. The villagers were extremely welcoming and the team appreciated their openness very much.

The field trip ended by a visit to Jyotibacha Dongar, one of the most famous cultural-spiritual centre of Maharashtra and Panhala fort.

### **Conclusions of the field trip**

The India field trip was extremely useful for the LiveDiverse project. The team left with a much greater awareness of the biodiversity in the area, the way in which spiritual elements interact with everyday life, and an impression of the economic and physical conditions of those living near the national park. The trip also highlighted the difficulties faced by the authorities in protecting vulnerable ecosystems.

The trip also provided an excellent platform for the team to meet many local stakeholders and to gauge the physical scale of the basin. The issues raised by the villagers next to the national park are crucial for the project in identifying the particular areas of vulnerability applicable to their situation. The spiritual dimension of the forest areas and water sources was constantly being reiterated through visits to local temples, chance meetings with religious groups and travelling deities, and through the participation and observation of the Jyotiba ceremony. The team appreciated the invaluable experience of being able to draw on the combined learning of relevant local experts who were on hand at all times to respond to questions. It also helped the team better identify the similarities and differences between the Indian and other case study areas.

Important contacts were made with institutions and people in the basin who may be in a position to assist with future project work and dissemination, and whose views and intellectual inputs will have a strong impact on the project's conclusions.

*Acknowledgement: The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme [FP7/2007-2013] under grant agreement n° 211392*