



(Friends of Elephants)

A Preliminary Report of the activities of “Hati Bondhu, Assam” for the year 2019 specially in respect of paddy and napier plantation for elephants and its effect in mitigating human-elephant conflicts during the period of ripening of paddy in the paddy fields.

1. Introduction :

Hati Bondhu, Assam, is spreading itself as a **fraternity of people** to specially help, the wild elephants who are in serious distress for various reasons,

- (a) to improve the quality of the shrinking elephant habitats of Assam
- (b) to improve the immediate “food security” for the wild elephants in their habitats.
- (c) to plant Napier, other suitable species and rice in strategic locations, to mitigate the human-elephant conflict at the time of ripening of paddy
- (d) to prepare maps of the area of activity showing elephant movement corridors, foraging corridors etc. for better understanding and subsequently for better management of the human elephant conflict.
- (e) to set up an Elephant Rehabilitation Home for aged elephants and baby elephants.



2. Area of present Activity of Hati Bondhu, Assam

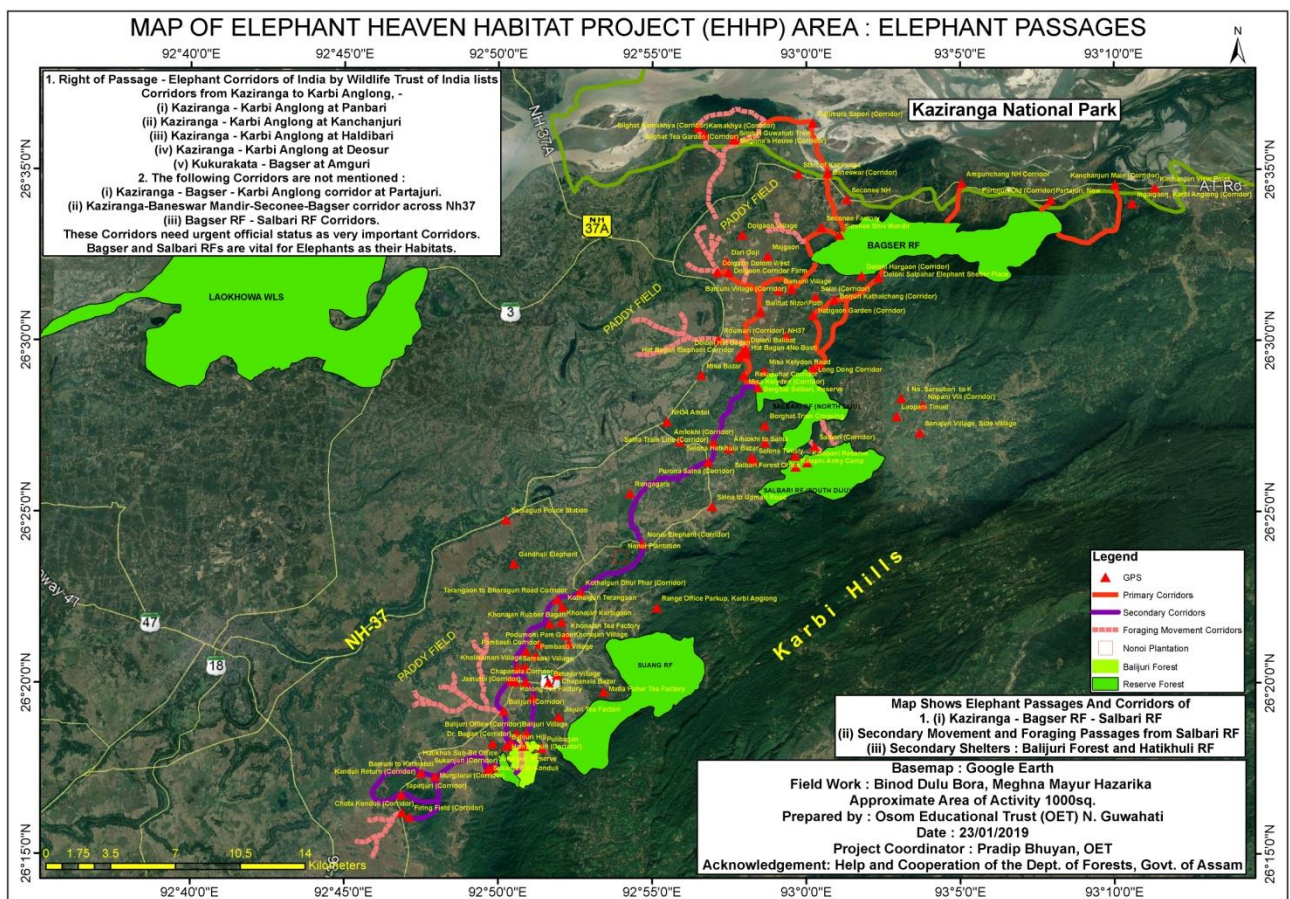
The area of present activity is from Bagser RF contiguous to and South of Kaziranga National Park upto Kondoli along the foothills of the Karbi Hills. Total length of activity area will be about 70km.

Area of activity will be extended each year to embrace other conflict zones.

3. Activities of 2019

Preparation of the following maps based on field study was completed.

- Bagser to Kondoli – showing elephant corridors, foraging corridors etc.
- Panbari of KNP upto Garampani Beat House covering the Numaligarh area.
- A plantation map showing locations.
- A proposed map for a PA south of the KNP for elephants.



e) **Habitat Improvement Programme: For immediate benefits as food supplement, - planting of Napier Grass, Para Grass etc & Kako Bamboo, Outenga (Elephant apple), Kothal (Jack Fruit) to ensure longterm habitat improvement.**



Plantation of Napier Grass in the Nanoi Gufa Mandir area with permission of the Priest and Community participation was taken up in April'19. Also, Kako bamboo was planted in a big area along with outenga (elephant apple), kothal etc. Total area of plantation is about 30 acres (90 bighas) in the first phase.



The Napier Grass was an experimental plantation because we did not find any existence of such plantations for elephants anywhere else. The Napier Grass was planted in April 2019 and within 3 months grew to heights of 10'-12'. Also, elephants came regularly to eat the Napier grass. Elephants did not pluck the Napier clump,- ate at halfway height, but in no time, the clump grew to its original height, thus giving a **perennial source of food for the elephants**. Once planted, no care is needed for the growth of the Napier Grass. Also, a Napier clump will yield many 'Napier Sticks' for expansion of the

plantation.

Some may say it is not a natural food source for the elephants. But the reality is that the elephants habitats have shrunken drastically. Also, quality of habitats, have deteriorated. In Karbi Hills, the bamboo, which was one of the main food item of the wild elephants, have been cut down by the agents of the Nagaon Paper Mill and thus a major component of elephant food was removed from the forest habitat. The paper mill is now closed but it will need 4-5 years for bamboo to regenerate. **In such a scenario, introduction of Napier Grass as an immediate food substitute is rational.**



Improvement of the quality of the forest will take place automatically, if human activities within the forest is curtailed. Forest Department's plantation scheme, Eco Task Force's plantation activities in some areas, will accelerate the process of improving the quality of the forest.

(f) Man-Elephant Conflict Resolution : Planting of rice

Human -elephant conflict is increasing, - magnitude of the conflicts are also growing each year, specially in the harvesting period of the rice. Both men and elephants are injured or killed from these conflicts.

We, the Hati Bondhu, Assam, decided to plant rice for the elephants, to keep the herds tied up for 20 -25 day to enable the villages downstream to harvest their crop without any conflict with the elephants.



Villagers of the RongHong Karbi village, very generously agreed, to give over 200 bighas (68 acres) of their paddy land for Sali rice cultivation by Hati Bondhu, Assam for the elephants,- a gesture which is unique and there is no such record of a community giving land for cultivation of rice for elephants. Hati Bondhu, Assam planted these 200 bighas of paddy in July'19 for the elephants.



Elephant movement in the area :

Normally, by middle of Oct, elephants in herds (জাক), arrive at Salbari RF (North & South). Over 300 elephants congregate each year and half of the elephant as congregated used to remain in the Salbari RF and the other half used to move towards Hatikhuli RF area.



Elephant visits to the Napier Plantation

But this year, the lure of the rice being planted in Hatikhuli area moved all the elephants to Hatikhuli side. They remained near the rice plantation for more than 7 days or so without entering the rice plantation area. The



rice plantation was opened for the elephants to eat, in lots, by Dulu Bora & Meghna M. Hazarika of Hati Bondhu, Assam on 30th Oct till 16th Nov'19, by which date the rice field was completely eaten up i.e. the elephants were held up from going down to eat villager's paddy for $7+18 = 25$ days during which period most of the paddy was harvested by the villagers without any conflicts. The elephant herds during this period, ate Napier Grass as well, a number of times in the Nanoi Plantation.



The rice and Napier plantation, helped the community in the following areas, namely *Sukanjuri, Borbari, Jolah, Bamuni, Kholiyamari, Pambosti, Bhoraguri, Pudumoni, Samchoki, Bordol, Balijuri, Kothalguri, Nanoi, Matiapahar, Rubber Bagan*, **directly**, as the villagers were able to cut their paddy without conflict with any elephant herds entering their paddy fields.

Also, **indirectly**, because all the elephants moved towards Hatikhuli area, the paddy field areas north and east of Salbari RF were spared from elephant herds.

These areas are :

Dariguzi, Chekonee, Gohain Gaon, Hat Bagan – Doloni, Balibat – Nizaripath.

The direct and indirect areas that benefitted from the rice plantation are thousands of bighas of vulnerable areas from conflict with elephants at the time of paddy harvesting.



(4) Hati Bondhu Assam is also conscious of the following issue and is trying to mitigate them as best as possible

(a) Cruelty to Elephants:

Cruelty to elephants is a common site as shown in TVs. People pelt stones, when the herd is merely crossing of road.

To chase away elephants people resort to missiles of all kinds and also shoot at the elephants with pellets from guns. The pellet wound becomes infected and becomes a constant source of pain and irritation for the elephants. People also throw red chilli pepper etc. at elephants.

(b) Death of elephant by touching overhead electrical lines

In 2018, The Hati Bondhu, Assam, raised 288 sagging electrical lines through community participation by bamboo posts and wooden bracket.



Not a single elephant has died due to touching of live electrical transmission lines in the area of Hati Bondhu activity in 2018 and 2019. Normally 4-5 elephants used to die regularly by electrocution in these areas.

Also, elephants are killed by live electrical wires placed in paddy fields by criminal minded persons. This is a very serious issue which needs resolution through law and awareness.



(5) Cooperation with the Forest deptt and the Administration :

The Hati Bondhu, Assam has worked in close cooperation with the Forest Deptt. and the District Administration, **as it is one of Hati Bondhu, Assam's basic working principle.** Our work this year was concentrated in the Nagaon District and we worked in close cooperation with the District Forest Officer (DFO) and the field staff of the Deptt.

(6) Activities Recommendations :

- (a) Habi Bondhu, Assam, strongly feel that all vacant forest areas should be planted with Napier grass, as an immediate food supplement for the elephants.

Also, Koko Bamboo should be planted in a big way, alongwith outenga, kothal, etc. as long term habital improvement process.

We can also plant Para Grass in moist and low lying areas. It will grow up to 5m in height and is an excellent fodder.

If each DFO who has elephant habitat areas under him takes up such activities, a very big step will be ushered in to in improve the food security of the elephants, which in turn will have a positive impact in reducing man-elephant conflicts.

Hati Bondhu, Assam, is fully geared up to be of assistance in such projects and we will also take up various plantation works on our own as well.

- (b) Though Hati Bondhu, Assam has successfully delayed the elephant herds, for 25 days or so by planting rice in 200 bighas of strategically located land at Hatikhuli areas in the foothills of the Karbi Hill in Nowgaon Dist. Assam, which allowed the villagers to harvest their rice without conflict, but, **this is not recommended as a means to tackle Human-elephant**

conflicts of the ripe paddy season. Holding back a large herd of elephants for 25-27 days by allowing them to eat paddy in small patches only is a very specialized effort and may not be possible in all areas.



But Sufficient Napier Grass, bamboo should be planted in points of entry by the elephants for foraging in the paddy fields.

How to send back herds :

Elephant herds must be sent back by powerful white lights and noise from gongs etc. No missile of any kind must be hurled. No gunshot must be used. Contraptions that release chilli powder etc are to be banned. No physical injury must be inflicted to elephants. They must be sent back with a sense of love.

When the elephants are sent back **by trained protection units**, they will go back to their starting point and will eat the Napier, as may be planted, to remove their hunger. We strongly believe that **drastic improvement of the elephant habitats will reduce man-animal conflict significantly.** Elephants will be less aggressive as they will know that when they go back after being sent back by the Protection Forces, they will have plenty to eat. Hati Bondhu, Assam will be happy to share their experience of sending back herds of elephants in the winter of 2018 with the Protection Forces as raised.

(c) Nora Bhog Prayer

After the paddy is harvested, the villagers of all faith, should pray one day in love, calling the elephants to come and eat the noras (paddy straws) without any disturbance. Hati Bondhu, Assam has already conducted such a prayer meeting in Hatikhuli recently.

It is a gesture of love which elephants will understand and also reciprocate. Also, it is a gesture for the humans as well, for love and compassion for the elephants.



- (d) The Hati Bondhu, Assam strongly feels that if compensation or ex-gratia payment for damage of crop by elephants is paid within 3-4 days, people's animosity level to the elephants will be reduced greatly and intensity level of the Human Elephant Conflict will be reduced.
- (e) To create awareness, specially amongst to school children about the issues involved and to induct them as young Hati Bondhus, - friends of elephants.



- (7) Hati Bondhu, Assam, has an objective to open an Elephant Rehabilitation Centre for aged elephants and elephant babies, and will pursue this objective for early implementation.
- (8) Hati Bondhu, Assam has plans to plant paddy in the 200 Bighas of land as given by the villagers of the Rong Hong village, in July 2020. Also it plans to plant additional Napier grass, and also Para grass in low lying lands as immediate food supplement for the elephants, alongwith Kako Bamboo, Outenga etc for long term improvement of the habitat.

We must realize that there are less than 6000 wild elephants in Assam whereas huge herds used to roam in the plains a little over a century. Elephants are an endangered species when viewed in a long term perspective. Men have occupied

their territories. They are the victimized ones. We, the humans need to extend a helping hand of love and compassion to these magnificent animals.

A detailed report with maps etc will be published separately.



For Hati Bondhu, Assam,

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