



Role Of Manas Maozigendri Eco-Tourism Society (MMES) In Sustainable Development And Conservation: A Study

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Abstract: This article delves into the significant contributions of the Manas Maozigendri Eco-Tourism Society (MMES) in the sustainable development and conservation of the Manas region in Assam, India. Established in December 2003, MMES has played a pivotal role in fostering community participation, promoting eco-tourism, and preserving the rich biodiversity of the Manas Biosphere Reserve. The paper outlines the historical context of conservation efforts in Manas, dating back to its designation as a reserve forest in 1907 and subsequent recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tiger Reserve, and Biosphere Reserve. Highlighting MMESs efforts in community awareness, wildlife protection, and eco-tourism, the article underscores the societys impact on socio-economic and educational development in the region. MMESs achievements, including numerous awards and recognitions, reflect its commitment to conserving Manas natural heritage while fostering sustainable livelihoods through eco-tourism.

Keywords: *Manas Maozigendri Eco-Tourism Society, Sustainable Development, Conservation Efforts, Community Awareness, Eco-Tourism Initiatives*

1.Introduction and Historical Background of MMES

The government in our country perceives Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) not just as facilitators for implementing their programs but also as collaborators in shaping policies and initiatives. Numerous NGOs across the nation are actively engaged in areas such as environmental protection, conservation, and raising social awareness. This paper aims to -

1. To describe the different conservational and social awareness activities conducted by the MMES towards the sustainable development of Manas.
2. To study the role played by MMES in sustainable livelihood management through eco-tourism.

The Manas Maozigendri Eco-Tourism Society (MMES) is an NGOs established 13th December, 2003 in Baksa District of Assam. It is a community-based Conservation and Eco-Tourism Society. It has become an associate organization of the Manas National Park.

The conservation of Manas started since 1905 when it was declared as the proposed Reserve Forest by the British Government. Since then the chronology of Manas are found as follows--

1907--- Manas Reserve Forest.

1928--- Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (360 sq.km.)

1973--- Declared as Tiger Reserve under Project Tiger (2837 sq. km.)

1985--- Declared as World Heritage Site (Natural) by UNESCO for universal conservation value.

1989--- Declared as Biosphere Reserve under Man and Biosphere programme of UNESCO (2837 sq.km.)

1990--- Declared as National Park (500 sq.km.)

2003--- Declared as Chirang-Ripu Elephant Reserve under Project Elephant (2600 sq. km.).

The Manas completed its centenary year in 2005. The forest authority continued the enforcement of forest law of the country. None of the government and NGOs mobilized community participation programme in the fringe areas of Manas for its protection. Since none of the authorities nor NGOs attempted the people living in fringe area of Manas people were ignorant about the importance of Manas and its conservational values. As a result the local people who were lured by some unscrupulous businessmen sitting in towns and cities started rampant poaching of wild animals and timber felling in most areas of Manas. In the mean time, local youth and the youth working in All Bodo Students Organisation (ABSU), and other elite organizations of Bodos under the lead of ABSU realized the need of community participation for the better protection of Manas. The dreams to protect Manas got strengthen with the successive settlement of the Bodos Political Movements with the State Government and the Central Government because the political settlement of Bodo movements diverted the attention of the Bodo youths and the leaders in the fringe area of Manas towards protection of biodiversity and thus creating a beautiful planet.

Manas Maozigendri Eco-Tourism Society (MMES) is established on 13th December, 2003 is a community based society for conservation and eco-tourism. Maozigendri is the name of a rivulet that flows down through the eastern most part of Manas National Park (MNP) under Bhuyanpara Range at Koklabari Forest Reserve, now unanimously known as Manas Maozigendri Area. The name has been collected from a reliable source, an elderly local individual, Dr. Chilarai Uzir and accordingly the history goes like this.

The Bodo Accord creating Bodoland Territorial Council was signed on 10 Feb. 2003. The issue of restoring of MNP and making it an International Tourists Spot is incorporated as one of the special packages in that accord. Meanwhile, being enthusiastic with this success story local ABSU youths did a lot more and through a collective decision CKAC/ ABSU & NKU/ABSU activists with some of the local advisors contemplated to create a tourist destination centre of their own by developing **Manas Maozigendri Bird Watching Centre Cum Model Tourist Spot** in and around Koklabari Reserve Forests.

However, the idea of creating **Manas Maozigendri Bird Watching Centre Cum Model Tourist Spot** was dropped in the long run as the idea was too small as compared to the existing status of Manas because it is already a National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tiger Reserve, Biosphere Reserve,

Elephant Project and also an Important Bird Area. On June 1, 2004 the aforesaid committee was renamed as **Maozigendri Eastern Manas Ecotourism Society (MEMES)**. Again on February 27, 2005 this Society was finally renamed as **Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES)**. The promotion of tourism in the area based on conservation of Manas was one of the principal goal that circulated in the mindset of the activists and the activists gathered suggestions which led to the formation of Manas **Maozigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES)** with the following objectives:

2. Main Objectives of MMES:

A. Conservation and Ecotourism:

- i) To conserve Manas Biosphere Reserve with preference to its core zone.
- ii) To establish Manas Maozigendri Conservation & Ecotourism Model.
- iii) To establish and develop Ecotourism & Community Tourism based on Conservation of Manas.
- iv) To preserve the most ideal traditions and culture of Boros.
- v) To motivate and create awareness towards Conservation of Nature and Environment among the people.
- vi) To bring about a Socio-Economic and Educational development in the fringe villages of MNP through Ecotourism and Community Tourism.

The very objectives of developing eco-tourism along with conservation were rightly caught after the first visit of Mr. Raj Basu and Mr. Asit Biswas from Help Tourism, Siliguri and Mr. Partha Pratim Das from Ashoka Holidays, Guwahati in 2004. They gave a new boost to the beginning of Ecotourism in the area. Their visit to Manas confirmed that conservation cannot be sustained without eco-tourism. They are the two sides of the same coin. Because eco-tourism is must for sustainable livelihood management.

3. Activities conducted in the field of community Awareness and Conservation till 2018

Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES) has been doing the most vital job in Conservation of Manas Tiger Reserve and Manas National Park, the UNESCO World Heritage Site, by joining hands with the Department of Forests since 2003. The Society has its own **modus operandi** and transparency and credibility in the Field of Wildlife Protection and promotion of Ecotourism through Community participation.

Some of the Community awareness programmes:

- i) Exhibition of Stall at the Annual Conference of ABSU, at Mushalpur on 17/02/2005.
- ii) Cycle Rally on the eve of World environment day, in the fringe area of Manas on 05/06/2005.
- iii) Manas Centenary Celebration at Kamardwisa Lwkhibazar on 29th & 30th Dec.2006.
- iv) High level Awareness Campaign On Environmental Protection at K.C.College on 02/10/2007.
- v) Workshop On adopting Conservational Strategy at MMES office, 13/08/17.
- vi) MMES workers took part in the training of Assam Biodiversity Portal Organized by ATREE, at Manas Choki, Subankhata Reserve Forest on 21/08/17.

- vii) MMES staff met honourable Minister of Forest and Environment, Govt. of Assam for the regularization of Conservation Guards working under MMES for the greater interest of conservation of Flora and Fauna of BTAD on 02/09/17.
- viii) MMES staff had a discussion with Honourable Mr. Kampa Bargoyary Deputy Chief, Govt. of BTC regarding Conservation issues and Ecotourism development on 12/07/17.
- ix) Extended possible financial help to the house destroyed by elephant for the reconstruction of the house on 24/01/18.
- x) Exhibition of Manas Maozigenderi Mouseum at 57th Annual Conference of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, on 04/02/18 to 06/02/18.

Apart from these the MMES organize many awareness campaigns on conservation of nature and importance of ecotourism for the sustainable livelihood development of fringe villagers each year. Following programme are organized in this field.

World Environment Day

The 5th June is observed as World Environment Day each year. The dignitaries like MLA, MCLA and forest administrator OSD of Manas national Park, DFO Baksa Division Normal Forest, Deputy Director Manas Tiger Project and some IFS officer have already attended in last program. Many local intellectuals, Teachers, Students, Guardians also take part in the said Awareness, Plantation and Cleanliness program.

World Tourism Day

The World Tourism Day has been celebrated on 27th September each year. In 2017, it was observed in collaboration with Bodoland Tourism, Govt. of BTC and Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES) at Lwkhibazar. The dignitaries including the Director cum CHD Bodoland Tourism and OSD Manas National Park witnessed the colourful celebration.

Birthday Anniversary of MMES

The Birthday Anniversary of MMES is celebrated with huge community participation every year. Speech on Manas and Drawing competition on Manas National Park are generally conducted among students coming from different ME and High schools of fringe area.

Awareness Campaign

Awareness campaign along with many national organizations like All Bodo Students' Organisation, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Assam Science Society, etc. for the conservation of Flora and Fauna.

National Workshop on Bird Watching

A two day National Workshop on Bird Watching is organized at Manas National Park on 13th and 14th February 2018 with support of Bodoland Tourism, Govt of Bodoland Territorial Council. In that program 35 heart core Birders and Guides from many places like Paro (Bhutan), Thimpu (Bhutan), Calcutta, Shillong,

Guwahati, Arunachal and many upcoming Tourists Guide from fringe area of the Manas National Park took part actively. Apart from these, around 200 High School students along with their Teachers took part. Many local NGOs like Manas Choki Ecotourism Society, Manas Agrang Conservation and Ecotourism Society, etc also actively participated the program

MMES has done many Conservational activities and some of these are:

- i) MMES volunteers rescued a Barn owl from B.B. Kishan College, Jalah as informed by the college management on 28/10/17.
- ii) Punishment to two adult male for cutting alive trees after they were caught red handed in Daodhara Reserve Forest, Daodhara on 28/11/17.
- iii) Repair roads inside Manas for conducting patrolling by conservational guards inside the Manas National Park on 16/12/17.
- iv) Two bi-cycle caring a long of woods seized in Dharmapur, Daodhara Reserve Forest during the patrolling duty done by the MMES volunteers from Hewali camp accompanied by the forest department guard respectively on 13/11/17.
- v) Stray out Rhino is driven back to the Manas National Park by MMES Conservation staff on 26/12/17.
- vi) MMES office patrolling caught red-handed wood transporters in the midst of jungle under Daodhara Reserve Forest on 08/01/18.
- vii) A group of women were caught red handed during their illegal fishing at Teklai River, Manas National Park by MMES patrolling team on 28/01/18.
- viii) Conservation Secretary and Public Relation Secretary of MMES shared some ideas on Environment with College Students coming for their field study at Manas on 24/01/18.
- ix) On 24-01-2018 wild elephant destroyed a house of a poor family and damaged their belongings. MMES Active members rushed to the family and extended possible help to reconstruct the house 24/01/18.

Other conservational initiatives:

The Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society is an Associate Organization of Manas National Park. The MMES provides fifty Conservation Guards. They have been giving full time service for the protection of Flora and Fauna of the Manas Tiger Reserve and carrying out following activities:

Joint Patrolling with Forest Guard: There is huge shortage of forest staff in the park. So, there is a company of one or two Forest Guards from the Department in each of our patrolling team.

Joint Patrolling with SSB: Whenever we get information of any possibility of Poaching or Timber logging then we immediately organize joint patrolling with SSB staff of their nearest camp at suspected area.

Seizer Programme: All kinds of anti-forest activities are directly prohibited by MMES conservation guards. Villagers sometime try to violate the Wildlife Protection Act due to their ignorance. Under such situation,

they only seize their anti forest belongings instead of sending them to jail and mobilize them regarding the Forest Act and importance of conservation of nature.

Night Patrolling and Camping: Many parts of the park area are not covered by Protection Camps. Therefore, to prevent the possibility of poaching and timber smuggling night patrolling is done.

4. Eco-Tourism Practices

It is a practice which automatically come out from the conservational activities. It gives many direct and indirect benefits. MMES is now a committed and dedicated community based society in the field of conservation & Ecotourism and vibrant enough to keep up its job. The persistent efforts in conservation have reaped great rewards, resulting in substantial resurgence of the wildlife population. As a result MMES has successfully started providing Ecotourism services to tourists. Since 2003 many tourists from India and foreign countries like Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Japan, Portugal, Switzerland, South Africa, USA, and UK have stayed at jungle camp at Lwkhibazar-Khamardwisa in the district of Baksa in BTR area of Assam, lauding the conservation efforts done by the MMES. The income generated through the Ecotourism venture is used for funding the conservation activities of the society. This formed a direct benefit. But beyond that many tourists from the country and abroad have come and stayed in the houses of fringe villages of Manas. They are interested in knowing regarding the traditions and cultures of the people living in the fringe villages of Manas. They exercised the cultures whatever the fringe villagers enjoys. Such scopes have enabled the fringe habitant of Manas to earn income for their living and the community as a whole getting scope to expose the cultures of our own to the globe.

MMES has been working for the identification of birds and other faunal species of Manas National Park. Rustom Basumatary is a very successful young boy in guiding tourist with dedication and high motivation. He has been able to identify more than 500 species of birds found in Manas. He has been entitled as “The Eagle eye” for his excellent identification and guiding on the birds observation.

There are some important points or places where endangered species of Birds and Wild animals are easily sighted-

- i) Koklabari Seed Farm :** The Bengal Florican which is the most critically endangered species of Birds is easily found in the area.
- ii) Alabari Point:** The endangered Great Hornbill and Oriental Pied Hornbill and many more endangered bird species are easily sighted at Alabari. It is the Eastern Core Zone of Manas National Park. Scenic beauty of grassland and hilly forest is very attractive.
- iii) Bison Field:** The area is also known as Thangwnmara grassland. During revival movement of Manas, Indian Bison were spotted first in that grassland by MMES Conservation Volunteers and since then the area was named as Bison Field. The critically endangered Royal Bengal Tiger has been being sighted at the area by visitors and our conservation guards.

iv) Daula Bilw and Dongo Gwlao: These are the two Natural Water Bodies in Thangwnmara side. The same thing is surprisingly located at the top of hilly forest. During the revival movement of Manas, Royal Bengal Tiger was spotted first in that pond. Not only the Royal Bengal Tiger but also various types of Leopard including Black Panther have been being sighted at the area by visitors and our conservation guards. Further many more endangered bird species and wild animals are being sighted at this area. Since it is the only water body in a vast area in winter, Elephants, Indian Bison, Sambar, Hog Deer, Barking Deer and many other animals use to gather to drink water and meditation in the same place.

v) Kalapani Grassland: The area is very rich habitat of Flora and Fauna. There is a vast grassland on the south and a very dense woodland on the north with a flowing river from west to east. Too many birds and wild animals use their different habitat with happiness. Many domestic and foreign tourist use the place for their Recreation.

vi) Shangri-La water body (Chikarinala): This is a Natural Water Body in Disami area. The Royal Bengal Tiger is quite easy to locate at same place. Not only the Royal Bengal Tiger but also various types of Leopard including Black Panther have been being sighted at the area by visitors and our conservation guards. Further many more endangered bird species and wild animals are being sighted at this area.

vii) Dwimari Hot Spot Area: It's the most beautiful place inside the Manas National Park. There are combination of grassland, woodland and river behind the hills area of Royal Manas of Bhutan. All the visitors coming from abroad enjoy this Biodiversity Hot Spot.

5. Achievements of MMES till 2018:

For successfully leading the Conservation Movement for the Revival of Manas World Heritage Site and National Park MMES has been conferred the following recognitions.

- i. The “Prestigious Amrita Devi Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award 2006” The Ministry of Forest & Environment, Govt. of India.
- ii. The “Anirudh Bhargava Environmental Award 2005” from INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage)
- iii. Certificate of Proficiency in Conservation by Kolkata Conservator of Nature
- iv. Certificate of Appreciation for Conservation from the Government of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).
- v. MMES is also a Member NGO of the State Board for Wildlife of Assam
- vi. An Associate organization of Manas Tiger Reserve.

6. Conclusions

Since its establishment in December 2003, MMES has played a pivotal role in fostering community participation, promoting eco-tourism and preserving the rich biodiversity of the Manas Biosphere Reserve. While doing these jobs the MMES encounters numerous problems as the dwelling houses, crops and other assets of the fringe villagers are being damaged by the wild animals several times. In spite of all these the people living in the fringe villages of Manas are now very much aware of protecting their Manas. The MMES has been very successful in bringing back the lost glory of Manas National Park which was badly damaged during the political movement of Bodos and Volunteers of MMES fringe villagers feel proud that it is only because of MMES joining hands with the Forest Department the security measure in Manas National Park has improved considerably and as a result WTI and WWF India, ATREE and other NGOs have been able to undertake their projects like Rhino Rehabilitation/Translocation and Elephant Reintegration Program (WTI) and IRV-2020 (WWF, India) respectively. The replication of this conservation model can now also observe along the southern periphery of Manas.

The MMES has more than 100 volunteers to maintain all the affairs of conservation and ecotourism activities. Now, they believe ecotourism as a tool for conservation. They work with a motto 'Ecotourism **for a Sustainable Conservation and all-round Community Development.**' With this motto MMES has been striving for sustainable livelihood of community people and enduring Conservation in Manas Tiger Reserve.

Suggestions to overcome the problems faced by MMES for the protection and conservation of Manas and for creation of beautiful planets for all:

1. Giving relief to the community people living in the fringe area of Manas for the depreciation caused by wildlife, particularly by wild elephants.
2. Helping out the people in the fringe area with minimum compensation for the damages caused by elephants.
3. Regular awareness campaigns to be done in the villages nearby Manas Biosphere Reserve.
4. Livelihood intervention programs to be done meticulously through trainings for some income generating avenues.

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