

Minutes of the meeting of State Level Steering Committee chaired by Shri T.T. Dorjee, IAS, Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim (Chairman, SLSC-Wetland Conservation) on 30/11/2009 in the Chamber of Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok.

The CCF (Env.) welcomed the Hon'ble members of the State Level Steering Committee and he briefly dealt on the various aspects of the Wetland Conservation activities carried out in the State since 2006.

Sikkim has more than 227 wetlands spread mainly North, East and West district in high altitude areas of the state. Some of the wetlands are in the process of degradation due to various interferences and lack of scientific management. The conditions of wetlands in the East starting from Bhutangla, Zelepla and Chola ranges is extremely fragile as there is no permanent source of water in the form of glacier, permanent snowed clad mountains and rivers. Intensity of the seasonal snow fall has abruptly reduced from 4-5 months to hardly 1 month to 11/2 months. There has been instance of late snow fall which is not favourable for water conservation and adversely affect the landscape. Several observation have been made on the sources of the wetlands in North and West and reports indicated change in the depth snow fall, of glacier etc. affecting the water level.

Considering the physical changes in the wetlands, the department has invited expert from Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India to recce and to identify important wetland for conservation and protection in the year 2006. After visiting the West and East District, few wetlands were identified for scientific management and inclusion in the National Wetland Conservation Programme.

A stakeholder consultation meeting with close coordination with WWF, Sikkim Branch was conducted on 28/09/06 which was attended by 22 representatives from various organizations, community and even para military forces.

On the basis of the consultation meeting and advice of expert hand, wetland conservation action plan for seven wetlands prepared and submitted to the Government of India for inclusion in the National Wetland Conservation Programme and for financial support was submitted on 08/06/2006 on constitution of State Level Steering Committee and Advisory Committee on 09/02/07 and 07/05/07.

The fresh water lakes do not qualified for wetland criteria and norms. Accordingly, watershed vis-à-vis catchment base strategies were worked out and number of fresh water wetland of a specific site having common drainage was considered as wetland complex for conservation and management. Accordingly, Government of India has considered inclusion of the following wetland in the National Wetland Conservation Programme on 07/05/08.

1. Khecheopalri
2. Tamze
3. Phedang
4. Gurudongmar
5. Tambao
6. Tsomgo

The funding of three wetlands Tsomgo, Phedang and Gurudongmar received financial support by 2007-08 and Khecheopalri wetland during 2008-09 for conservation and management for biodiversity conservation, community participants, alternative livelihood development, sustainable fisheries and education and awareness.

Proposal for wetland conservation under Ramsar site for three wetlands were prepared to place in the schedule Ramsar Manager meeting from 14th – 16th Septemeber 2009 at Manali which was postponed due to poor weather condition. The Member Secretary also pointed out that some of the lake in the East are suffering from heavy biotic interferences and are greatly threatened. Manju Lake at Sherathang which is one of the potential breeding site for brahmani duck is on the fast degradation. The sludge and garbage generated from the Indo-China Trade Centre are directly deposited into the lake. The Chief Secretary and the members appreciated the efforts of the department he made the following observations were made by the Chairman to be followed for Wetland Conservation Programme in the State.

The Chairman suggested that the strength of the members of the State Level Steering Committee should include Secretary, Power & Energy Department, Secretary, Mines & Mineral Geology Department and Secretary, Science & Technology Department as a permanent member. He advised the department to built wetland data bank duly cooperating information from various stakeholders and utilized same for preparation of Wetland Conservation Action Plan. The Mines, Mineral & Geology should find out the stability of the wetland site for planning structures. He also said that any construction should not only depend on the engineers

but human resources of similar stakeholder and department should be outsourced for integrated planning and drawing action plan of wetlands. The Chief Secretary also recently been to Khecheopalri and found that there is no substantial increase in water level and he has suggested that the cleaning of the lake may be considered for sustainability of water volume.

The Chairman has pointed out that various schemes and project on water source development are being implemented by RMDD and PHED, but same should have close coordination and planning with the Forests, Environment & Wildlife Management Department, Government of Sikkim to enhance the water resource availability in a plan manner. The CCF (Env) informed that the scarp and other religious offering in the lake have been stopped. The cleaning of bug in the fringes of the wetland has been tried but due to some sentimental and religious issues, it is not successful. The Chief Secretary also directed the PCCF-cum-Secretary to synergize the resource like nursery, plantation works and other forestry activities to develop and conserve not only the wetlands but also other catchment areas of the rivers. He emphasized that one or two wetlands should be given to a particular officer for over all management and development of the wetlands and monitored the success of implementation.

The Secretary, Culture & Heritage Department informed the meeting that they also have some schemes to be implemented in some selected wetland of the state. He proposed to construct a ramp over the some portion of the lake for the tourist facility which was opposed by the members of the committee and the chairman directed the Secretary to transfer the fund to the Forests, Environment & Wildlife Management Department to be included in proper plan.

The Secretary, PHED also informed that the Tamze Valley is the main catchment of Gangtok water source and the rate of siltation in these wetlands is very high and proposed to construct wall across the wetland which was again not accepted by the members of the committee as construction of permanent wall will interrupt flow of water into the lake. The Chairman desire that there should be a proper study outsourcing experts from various levels and plan of action should be prepared.

The PCCF-cum-Secretary, Forests pointed out that the introduction of fish fauna in any wetland required pre-condition to research, which was agreed by all.

The Secretary, RMDD pointed out that the wetlands near the villagers may be identified for enhancement of water availability and distribution which can be supported by NEGRA Project. He also informed that the lakes can be made approachable with CC footpath which of course was not encouraging scheme. The members suggested switching over to eco-friendly footpath rather than one pointed out. The PCCF-cum-Secretary also pointed out that the CC footpath along the Gurudongmar Wetland Complex is an awful example which is not blending with the landscape. The Secretary, Tourism has suggested the members that there should not be any construction near any wetland and a notification should be drafted for information of all departments to restrain from any construction

The Chief Secretary also suggested the department to explore possibility of propagating of some flora in the catchment of the wetlands so that the potentiality of water percolation regime is maintained and increased the water volume.

The In-charge, G.B.Pant Institute, Dr.Singh presented some works carried out by them to the Chief Secretary. The CCF (Env.) has requested Dr.Singh to explore possibility of carrying out some research work on selected species of flora in Gurudongmar Wetland Complex so that the green cover around the wetland can be increased.

CCF (Env.) gave a presentation on Ramsar Site proposal of the following wetlands.

1. Gurudongmar Wetland Complex
2. Tsomgo Wetland Complex
3. Khecheopalri Wetland Complex

The proposal for Ramsar Site inclusion and conservation action plan of the approved wetlands for the year 2009-10 and 2010-11 unanimously approved and recommended by the State Level Steering Committee for Wetland Conservation, Sikkim.

Sd/-

(C. Lachungpa, IFS)

CCF-cum-Member Secretary (SLSC for Wetland),

Forests, Environment & Wildlife Management Department,

Government of Sikkim.