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Action plan for change

Key recommendations

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Since the inception of Project Tiger in the early 1970s, the country has consistently invested in the protection and conservation of the tiger. The Tiger Task Force report has reviewed the work done over these years; the crisis; and the challenges ahead, to recommend reform in the framework of action.

The report advocates that the following needs to be done urgently:

- a. Reinvigorate the institutions of governance.
- b. Strengthen efforts geared towards protection of the tiger, checking poaching, convicting wildlife criminals and breaking the international trade network.
- c. Expand the inviolate spaces for the tiger by minimising human pressure in these areas.
- d. Repair the relationships with the people who share the tiger's habitat by building strategies for coexistence.
- e. Regenerate the forest habitats in the fringes of the tiger's protective enclaves by investing in forest, water and grassland economies of the people.

Sariska

1. Sariska is an important reserve supporting the largest intact habitat of the tiger in the Aravalli ecosystem. The reserve is also the catchment for innumerable streams in this otherwise dry region. Urgent steps must be taken to restore the park and rehabilitate tigers in the reserve.
2. The state government must fix accountability for the events in Sariska. This is essential, for it will act as a deterrent to other officers in Rajasthan as well as in other parts of the country; what happened in Sariska is unacceptable.
3. The state government must take steps to improve the internal working of the park. It must also make a firm, time-bound, commitment to the Project Tiger directorate in this regard and draw up benchmarks for its performance review and assessment.
4. The relocation of villages within the key tiger habitat must be done with utmost care and with full consultation with affected villagers. Park authorities should realise that villagers living within the park are forest-dependent and, therefore, the land available for their relocation must be able to either meet their grazing needs, or there must be sufficient investment for them to switch over to land-based livelihoods.
5. Park authorities, working in cooperation with the Project Tiger directorate, must evolve a plan for the remaining villages that will continue to exist in the park because relocation is not possible or feasible for all.
6. A plan should be developed to further manage pilgrimage traffic; it must be ensured that the benefits of tourism are shared with affected villagers and the park.
7. Park authorities should work on an agreement with villagers living on the periphery (fringe) to increase investment in their lands, in return for their cooperation in protecting the reserve.
8. An institutional mechanism — a park-level management committee — should be constituted to monitor progress in habitat improvement and people's involvement.

Institutional mechanisms

1. Reorganise the Union ministry of environment and forests to create two separate departments: that of environment and that of forests and wildlife.
2. Revitalise the National Board for Wildlife. The prime minister could be requested to chair the steering committee of the Project Tiger for the coming few years.
3. The Project Tiger directorate should be converted into a Project Tiger Authority by giving it administrative autonomy. Project Tiger should report annually to the Indian Parliament so that political commitment to the project deepens.
4. To ensure that project states follow the guidelines and prescriptions laid down for the project, a system of having a 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU) with these states can be instituted. Any deviation or default from the MOU should be reported to the steering committee.
5. Considering the multifarious nature of work

handled by the director, Project Tiger, it is essential to strengthen the directorate with autonomy and personnel.

6. The director, Project Tiger, should be delegated powers to deal with states under Section (3) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, especially for the enforcement of Project Tiger guidelines.
7. The role of director, Project Tiger, should not be confined to tiger reserves. Instead, it should extend to other crucial forest areas as well which have viable tiger populations.
8. A state steering committee for Project Tiger

should be created, with the chief minister of the tiger range state as its chair.

9. Management committees should be set up for each protected area. These committees will include local community representatives, NGOs and researchers.
10. Create a sub-cadre of wildlife specialists and professionals.
11. Independent audits of each reserve must be conducted annually; the information generated must be placed in the public domain.
12. Build collaborative networks with researchers to monitor change.

Protection

1. Each reserve must have a specific and detailed strategy for protection. The independent monitoring of the reserve must include an assessment of the enforcement mechanisms in place and the patrolling efforts of field staff, so that policy interventions can be designed.
3. A clear strategy for protection is needed in the northeastern reserves, where local people will be the only ones capable of traversing and protecting the area. There should also be a clear strategy for the reserves controlled by naxalites and other insurgent groups, where armed intervention by security forces might be the only option.
4. Further recruitment of staff — foresters as well as guards — should be reserved for local villagers. The criterion for recruitment should be amended so that it relaxes the formal educational qualifications needed for these positions and instead, values skills in jungle craft. In addition, there should be provision for in-service training for locally recruited staff.
5. Institutionalise training so that each reserve has skilled and committed personnel.
6. Disincentives and rewards based on independent

monitoring should be built into the system. The incentives must be withdrawn in reserves that score low on the rating chart. This should be done with complete transparency so that it is not seen as political or discriminatory. In fact, this move will be a test for the independence and rigour of the independent assessment as well.

7. Investments in basic facilities should be made for the frontline staff:
 - a. Housing camps in neighbouring district towns, usually where the project headquarter is based, for families so that the education of their children can be secured;
 - b. Free rations for guards living in the camps. This practice is followed by many protection forces and helps in their work.
8. A staff welfare fund can be created for each reserve, out of the income from tourism. This can be used to supplement medical and other benefits for the staff.
9. There must be an urgent review of the crisis in forestry services and steps that have been taken to address issues of training, personnel development, staff reviews and salaries.

International trade in wildlife products

1. Very proactive and strong measures are needed on the matter of international trade in wildlife and wildlife products. The Union ministry must work to shape the agenda at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to ensure that the global market for tiger products is investigated. The international community must be put under pressure to combat and destroy this trade.
2. A bilateral relationship must be built up with China to combat the trade in tiger parts. The environment minister should take the lead by discussing and developing this relationship with his Chinese counterpart, and this dialogue must be kept alive and ongoing. It is critical that India takes the leadership on this issue and does not leave it to global institutions which are proving inadequate in this regard.

Domestic wildlife crime

1. The wildlife crime bureau must be set up immediately, based on the modifications suggested in the report:
 - a. At the central level, a strong bureau is needed with a capacity to develop a country-wide database of wildlife crime to enable coordination, investigation and legal follow-up.
 - b. At the state level, there must be a node of the wildlife crime bureau with the capacity to both investigate and to follow up on the crime.
 - c. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) must be given the responsibility to investigate organised wildlife crime and to take over charge of certain special cases, for instance, the Sansar Chand case.
 - d. Regional forensic facilities must be set up to investigate wildlife specimens and the evidence in wildlife crime.
 - e. The wildlife crime bureau must be made a statutory body under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to make it effective and give it autonomy.
2. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 should be amended as suggested in the report, so that the provisions related to crime are tightened and made more stringent, particularly for designated critically endangered species. This will provide for deterrence for criminal actions against these species and result in speedier trials.

Innovative protection

1. Identify the major hunting tribes and communities in proximity to, or operating in, a reserve. Each park authority must work to develop plans to use the expertise of these hunters for protection as well as for gathering basic ecological information.
2. The independent monitoring of each park must evaluate the work done by the park management on working with its forest-dependent traditional hunting communities. The park management and Project Tiger must work on locale-specific approaches with these communities. These efforts should be supported and carefully monitored, so that the learning can be disseminated and can become practice.

The science

1. The Tiger Task Force has reviewed the revised methodology proposed by the Project Tiger directorate and the Wildlife Institute of India for estimating/monitoring tiger status and its habitat, and endorses the approach. It hopes that the national tiger estimation, which is to be conducted from November 2005, will be done using this evolved methodology.
2. The Project Tiger directorate must set up a scientific expert group immediately with expertise in relevant technical disciplines for overseeing the process. This group should work from the very inception of the process and assist in suggesting appropriate ways of analysing and interpreting the data.
3. All efforts should be made to encourage and facilitate intensive research and monitoring studies of source population of tigers using a variety of tools — photo-identification and monitoring, camera traps, radio-telemetry and DNA-based genetic studies in different landscape units.
4. The work in the field of molecular techniques for estimation needs to be supported. Encourage the Wildlife Institute of India and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) to take on pilot programmes at a landscape level using this technique. The CCMB should be asked to provide inputs in the development of molecular techniques for identification of individual tigers.
5. The inclusive, open approach that we advocate depends crucially on free access to all information, except where very evident security concerns are involved. In modern times, this would be best ensured by posting all pertinent information on the Web, in English as well as in all Indian languages.

Research

1. Put in place institutional mechanisms that would streamline existing procedures for clearance and coordination of research and ensure better utilisation of the research output. To do this, panels should be set up at the state and national levels, chaired by the inspector general of forests (wildlife) or chief wildlife wardens, and including the secretary of the National Biodiversity Authority or the State Biodiversity Board and other experts in ecology, social sciences and biostatistics. These panels must serve as 'single window' clearing houses for all matters relating to wildlife research, so that they streamline current procedures, rather than create another layer of decision-making.
2. The process of designing and implementing the management plans for each tiger reserve needs to be reworked. The plans must be updated regularly, taking into consideration the scientific and socio-economic research that has been conducted; these plans should be put in the public domain and be used for the independent evaluation of the reserve.
3. The independent audit must be used to create a reputational advantage for the reserve.
 - a. The Project Tiger directorate should work to further improve its criterion and indicators for the rating. The criterion must be developed to benchmark the progress and problems in all critical areas and set targets for its improvement.
 - b. The rating should then be used for management decisions and for creating an informed and involved public opinion on the working of individual reserves.
 - c. It must be used to inform Parliament of the progress being made in tiger conservation and the challenges ahead.

Relocation

1. There should be an urgent and realistic review of the number of villages that actually need to be relocated from the reserves. The decision must be based on the fact that the villages that need to be relocated are made to do so because they are situated in the critical habitats — tiger natal areas and key conservation priority areas. There must be a criterion for the identification of these villages, so that it is clear which village is to be relocated and why.
2. There must be a tight schedule of one year to study settlements and list the ones to be relocated. This schedule must be strictly complied with.
3. Based on this list, the Project Tiger directorate should draw up a time-bound action plan to complete the process of relocation. The action plan for relocation must be completed in terms of its financial and land provisions before it is finalised and accepted.
4. During the formulation of this action plan, the responsible agency must keep in mind the experience of past relocation efforts to ensure that the process of relocation does not lead to further resource degradation or loss of livelihood of people.
5. The financial allocation for the relocation scheme must be revised and enhanced so that it can take into account the needs, particularly, of providing irrigated land and other facilities to ensure livelihood security.
6. The scheme must take into account the options for livelihood in the resettled village. It is important for planners to keep in view the fact that people who live within the reserves are forest-dependent communities, and survive within agro-silvo-pastoral economies. The relocation package must be designed to provide viable alternatives.
7. The classification of land after the families are relocated must be changed from forest to revenue land, which will allow the settlers advantages of development and other facilities.
8. Set up a task force at the Central level to monitor the quality of relocation and to ensure that there is careful coordination and follow-up in the relocation work.

Coexistence

1. People will continue to live in protected areas: policy must accept this. It is not possible to settle the rights and relocate all the families living in the reserves. The facts are clear: in the last 30 years, less than 10 per cent of the families in tiger reserves have been relocated.
2. If people live in protected areas, ways must be found to secure their use of resources and livelihoods. The current legal framework does not account for the use of resources by communities, because people are not expected to be in the national park at all, and in a limited way in the sanctuaries. The law provides that during the time the rights are settled and people live in protected areas, the state government has to provide alternative sources of fuel, fodder and other forest produce. In short, the rights of people cannot be expunged without providing alternatives.
3. In this situation, the selective interpretation of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which curtails the use of resources by people without taking into account the safeguards, has only led to greater unrest around our protected areas and has been detrimental to conservation.
4. Strategies for joint-collaborative-inclusive management of our protected areas are then essential, so that this “illegal” use is made legal and regulated.
5. All use need not be destructive. The question is how the use will be regulated or managed. In order for the resource use not to be destructive, the participation of local communities in decision-making and in management becomes essential. Regulation is best possible if all are parties to the decision.
6. It is important that this approach of inclusive protection is incorporated into conservation management urgently. For this, the following must be done:
 - a. Each tiger reserve (to begin with) must take into account the current needs of people who live within the reserve and evolve a plan for resource management and use. This strategy must be developed in consultation with local communities, researchers and local NGOs.
 - b. The strategy must include plans for careful monitoring and evaluation.
 - c. The Project Tiger directorate must have internal capacity and staff to be able to monitor and guide this process carefully. Every effort must be made to encourage innovation and experimentation.
 - d. Begin this process immediately. The plans for each reserve must be completed within one year and be available publicly.
7. The independent monitoring of tiger reserves must provide a high weightage for the work done by park managers in collaborative management. The improvement in relationship between people and parks must be a key criterion in the review. Each tiger reserve must be rated for this work and the best and worst identified for rewards and penalties.

The fringe

1. The tiger’s habitat cannot be secured unless we secure the future of the millions who live on the fringe. Currently, there is little information about the numbers or their impact on the reserves. Studies, preferably on a GIS-based platform, should be carried out to collect this information, which can be used for the reserve’s management. Place these studies and their results in the public domain along with all empirical data, so that other institutions and researchers can then build on this information. It should be a part of the work of the Project Tiger directorate to encourage and undertake research on people-wildlife interactions within and on the fringes of the reserves.
2. Timely payment of compensation for livestock death and human injury and death, which falls in the purview of the field directors, should be made one of the criteria that the park management is measured for during the evaluation of the reserves and their ranking.
3. Pay compensation for crop damage as well. In addition, compensation must be paid to families who continue to live within the reserves.
4. The Tiger Task Force understands that the government is currently working on the next phase of an externally aided ecodevelopment plan. It is important that all the issues listed in the report regarding the opportunities and failures of the first phase of the ecodevelopment project are carefully considered and incorporated into the plan. The country cannot afford such expensive experiments, unless they are carefully crafted and skillfully executed.
5. The joint forest management programme in the vicinity of the reserves must be revamped so that people living in the fringes can be given management decisions and rights over the

produce of forests; this will improve the productivity of the resources as well. The answer to the crisis within the reserve lies in our abilities to rebuild the resources outside.

6. The government must increase the per capita expenditure in the development of forests, grasslands and water on the fringes of the tiger reserves. For these investments to be productive, they must be made in tune with the natural
7. The additional funds for development must be spent as a reciprocal arrangement with local villagers — increased investment in their resources to build collaborative and protective fences around the reserves.

Tourism

1. The regulation and management of tourism in tiger reserves must remain in the charge of the forest department. The Ranthambhore experience clearly shows that tourist interests, if allowed to take precedence over those of conservation, can be extremely detrimental to a reserve. If the park management does not have the capacities to manage tourism, efforts must be made to involve local communities and staff welfare associations in the running of affairs. These interested communities will bring benefits to the conservation efforts in the park, for their own interests are enjoined with its protection.
2. The areas adjacent to the park — its fringe and high impact zone — must be reserved for homestead-based tourism run on a small scale by local communities. This zone should ideally extend up to three km from the outer periphery of a reserve's boundary. In case it is not possible to extend this zone up to three km, the reserve management must decide how far the zone should extend, after due consultation with the Project Tiger directorate.
3. All other resorts and hotels can only be allowed beyond this zone reserved for homestead tourism. This 'reservation' will promote alternative tourism and provide for opportunities for local communities to directly benefit from this economic activity.
4. The Union ministry of environment and forests must finalise an eco-tourism policy for tiger reserves that incorporates this land-use reservation into the Environment Protection Act, 1984.
5. Reserve managements must increase gate ticket prices by imposing an ecological cess, which should be ploughed back into each reserve — explicitly to be shared with local communities who continue to live within its boundaries and for staff benefits.
6. Hotels within a radius of five km from the boundary of a reserve must contribute 30 per cent of their turnover to the reserve. Make this a compulsory cess on the hotel industry, for this industry is drawing advantages out of investments made from public funds for the protection of reserves. The hotels can be allowed to claim 100 per cent income tax benefit for the same, as an incentive.
7. The tourism plan for each reserve must be developed and approved by the Project Tiger directorate. The plan must designate the tourism zones, clearly demarcate the zoning plan and be based on carrying capacity studies. The plans must be available in the public domain along with all tourism-regulating rules.
8. The reserve must ensure that all possible avenues of engaging local communities are exhausted before it resorts to using other resources as guides and for other employment and work opportunities.
9. Designate the pilgrimage sites inside the park as sacred groves with strict controls and regulations. All transit camps and places of stay for such pilgrimages inside the park must be minimised and severely restricted. The benefits of the pilgrimage activity must accrue to local communities. The temple boards should be persuaded to allow this to happen.

Ecological services

1. The Project Tiger directorate must take urgent initiative to begin a definite and time-bound programme of payment for ecological services to stakeholders. It must work with the tiger reserves to carry out an evaluation of the ecosystem services that accrue to the nation from the reserves, and must formulate the mechanism for charging the city/area/districts that get water from the watersheds secured by this reserve. The revenue so earned can be shared between the reserve authorities and the people in and around the reserve in an equitable fashion.