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3 Projects in Northeast India

4   **Authors:**

5   1. SAYAN BANERJEE

6   Affiliation when the work was done: Junior Research Fellow, Humanities and Social
7 Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology- Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

8   Present affiliation: PhD Scholar, Animal Behaviour and Cognition Programme,
9 National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

10   sayan.workspace@gmail.com

11

12   2. AMBIKA AIYADURAI

13   Affiliation: Assistant Professor, Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of
14 Technology–Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

15   a.ambika@iitgn.ac.in

16

17   **Corresponding Author Details:** Sayan Banerjee,

18   PhD Scholar, Animal Behaviour and Cognition Programme, National Institute of
19 Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

20   sayan.workspace@gmail.com

21

32 **ABSTRACT**

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34   Participation by local communities in wildlife conservation projects have long been
35   advocated since it is socially just and is effective to reach conservation and development
36   goals. Socio–economic variables that drive participation and impact of participation have
37   been studied, but the contextual process that stir up local community participation remains
38   understudied. In this paper, we studied factors facilitating community participation in three
39   wildlife conservation projects in Northeast India. Through ethnographic fieldwork at these
40   sites we identified conservation actors and examined interactions between them.

41   We found common modes of participation at these sites and these were related to gaining
42   material incentives, providing labour, attending consultative workshops. Levels of interaction
43   and coercion were found to be different in three sites. Three critical factors that drive
44   participation were: (1) trigger, (2) negotiation and (3) sustenance. Trigger factors kickstart
45   participation through establishment of a crisis narrative and facilitation by external actors.
46   Negotiation factors emerge from day–to–day interaction between local community and
47   external actors and involve effective entry stage activities, income opportunity, mediating
48   voices within the community and intra–community dynamics. Sustenance factors affect the
49   long term participation by community in the conservation project and involve
50   tangible/intangible results, capability development of locals, funding and availability to
51   critical information.

52   In our paper we argue that investment of time and fund to understand the stakeholders and
53   their concept of participation, periodic feedback sessions, capacity development of locals for
54   self–mobilization, innovative information dissemination and securing long term funding are
55   necessary for effective local community participation.

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69   **Declaration**

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74   **Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest associated
75   with this work.

76   **Ethics Approval:** Ethics approval was obtained from Institutional ethics committee of Indian
77   Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar.

78   **Consent to Participate:** All the human respondents in this study were informed about the
79   study objectives and consent clauses and they provided written and/or oral consent to
80   participate.

81   **Consent for Publication:** All the human respondents in this study provided written and/or
82   oral consent to the authors to publish the findings of the study. Both the authors have given
83   their consent to publish the findings of the study.

84   **Availability of Data and Material:** The data is mostly in the form of fieldnotes, audio
85   recorded interviews and transcripts. The data will not be publicly available as it contains
86   sensitive information about lives of human respondents. However, the data is available with
87   the authors and can be provided upon reasonable request.

1. INTRODUCTION

Participation of citizens in development studies has long been researched and debated. People's participation is seen as democratic and people's views and engagement in projects are considered crucial for its success. Active participation of citizens was sought in 'alternative development' paradigms[1] but the concept became malleable enough to signify almost anything that involved people's engagement in any level and degree (Cornwall 2008). Participation as product and process was first described by Arnstein (1969) as 'a ladder of citizen participation' where participation and empowerment were seen as a continuum from passive participation or non–participation in the bottom to active engagement or citizens obtaining 'full managerial power' at the top. Such approach assumes that full participation of local people is preferred since it is more transformative for the community. Pretty (1995) on a similar normative tone provided the practitioners' perspective. Representation of communities, therefore became just another stakeholder in the project without giving them power of decision–making and was termed as 'manipulative', 'passive' and 'consultative' participation. It is followed by functional participation where communities provide time and labour to mobilize themselves and thereby control every decision. Other classifications include 'communication', 'consultation' and 'participation' on the basis of information flow between actors (Rowe and Frewer 2000). Based on objectives of the project, Michener (1998) suggested planner–centred versus people–centred participation. However, apparent distinctive boundaries of these typologies are often blurred as it is a product of engagement among actors with different perceptions of participation (Cornwal 2008).

The role of local communities in wildlife conservation is increasingly becoming crucial in conservation projects. History of people's participation in conservation has experienced a paradigm shift from exclusionary 'Fortress' approach (Brockington 2002) to inclusive community–based conservation (Rodgers et al. 2003). Involving local people in conservation is favoured as it is seen as legitimate, fair and just (Brockington 2002, 2004) and also efficient and cost–effective (Mehta and Heinen 2001; Badola et al. 2012). Studies in Asia and Africa show that engagement between external and internal actors and the degree of participation of various groups create differential perception and attitude towards the impact

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[1] This development paradigm counters the growth–based development. It comprises concepts of bottom–up approach to development, human development, people–centered development, participatory development.

122   of the conservation programs (see Songorwa 1999; Lepp and Holland 2006; Badola et al.

123   2012) but the process of local community participation in state–driven or community–driven

124   or co–managed conservation process has not been examined in detail. In this paper, we aim to

125   shed light on the people's participation in wildlife conservation projects in India.

126   Level of community participation in natural resource management in India differs

127   according to various regulatory regimes and land tenure system (Krishnan et al. 2012). Co–

128   management systems[2] were criticised as 'recentralizing while decentralizing' as a top–down

129   approach with a paternalistic attitude towards local communities who were often seen as

130   passive beneficiaries rather than equal partners. Idea of participation as paying lip–service

131   under the rhetoric of 'participatory management' undermines the people's knowledge and

132   their rights to govern natural resources leading to further dispossession of marginalised

133   groups (Lele 2000; Baviskar 2003).

134   Decentralized institutions and autonomous community efforts have often been

135   considered as a better model for community mobilization to conserve natural resources

136   (Pathak 2009) but the scale of ecological impacts is questionable (Bajracharya et al. 2005;

137   Shahabuddin and Rao 2010). Though seen to be effective in some cases, degree of

138   participation in natural resource management programs was found to be influenced by

139   economic factors (income, land, livestock), social factors (gender, age, education, caste,

140   norms), benefits from resources (firewood, fodder) and access to influential people (Agrawal

141   and Gupta 2005; Agarwal 2001). Most of the wildlife conservation projects in India are

142   largely implemented and managed by biologists, with little or no training in social sciences.

143   In Northeast India, wildlife conservation projects are often implemented without engaging in

144   the socio–political and historical realities of how communities work. Conservation workers

145   often have little or no appreciation of the local people's concept of nature conservation or

146   even local ways of conservation (Aiyadurai 2016). Northeast India, with its rich biodiversity

147   has attracted a large number of NGOs and conservation organisations who have reached out

148   to the local communities to engage as partners in wildlife conservation projects. Various

149   models of conservation exist in Northeast India ranging from state driven protected areas[3]

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[2] In India, Joint Forest Management and Eco–Development Projects are managed
jointly by forest department and local community.

[3] For example, Pakke Tiger Reserve (Arunachal Pradesh); Kaziranga National Park
(Assam); Intanki National Park (Nagaland).

150 (PAs) to community conserved areas[4] (CCA). Different actors are also involved in these
151 projects such as Government agencies, NGOs, media, researchers and the local community.

152   In this paper, we examined three wildlife conservation projects in Northeast India to
153 understand the factors driving community participation. We anlayzed the notion of
154 participation as a process, rather than a product. The aim is to understand why communities
155 participated and instead of exploring the socio–economic and political measurable indicators
156 of participation (as done in Agrawal and Gupta 2005) we studied the contextual process
157 which result from the everyday–interaction between different stakeholders which ultimately
158 enhance or hamper participation. Through our understanding of participation as a process we
159 also aim to present how conservation practitioners could improve their understanding of local
160 community participation.

161 **2. METHODOLOGY**

162   For our study of the conservation projects, three sites in Northeast India were selected
163 purposively, based on the reports that these projects have a substantial degree of community
164 participation with central theme of wildlife conservation. The details of these three projects
165 are provided in Table 1. Fieldwork was carried out in 2017 -2018 at the selected field sites in
166 the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland (Figure 1). Community-based
167 conservation projects at Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh were concentrated in one single
168 village at each location, Pangti and Singchung, respectively. We selected both the villages for
169 our research. The conservation project at Goalpara, Assam was carried out over several
170 villages within the landscape. For our study, selection of villages in Goalpara was based on
171 the high frequency of elephant presence and damage due to Human Elephant Conflict and
172 community's interest to collaborate with the NGO in planning and implementation of the
173 strategies.

174   [Insert Table 1 here]

175   [Insert Fig. 1 here]

176   We used semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and observation as our
177 approach. A total of 32 semi–structured interviews of individuals from local community and

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[4] For example, Thembang–Bapu Community Conserved Area (Arunachal Pradesh);
Sendenyu Community Biodiversity Reserve (Nagaland).

178   9 key informant interviews were carried out across these three sites. Questionnaire for the

179   local community respondents consisted of questions related to their perspective towards the

180   conservation project in the area, their nature of participation in the project, their perspective

181   on costs and benefits related to the project and their willingness to continue participating in

182   the project. Questions for the key informants were slightly different and consisted of queries

183   related to their to-date experience with the conservation project and community participation

184   and their perspective on future of the conservation project. The local community members

185   were chosen through snowball sampling where the respondents themselves indicate the

186   researcher to people who could be potential respondents. Key informants were chosen

187   through purposive sampling, since we purposefully chosen these people due to their specific

188   knowledge about the project and the landscape. Interviews were conducted in Bengali,

189   Assamese and English languages, with the help of an interpreter as and when required. Each

190   interview lasted for 40-50 minutes. With due permission from the respondents, all the

191   interviews were audio recorded and later the interviews were transcribed. The narratives were

192   coded and further analysed to identify the themes concerning to our objectives.

193   We observed nature of community participation in different community-based

194   conservation activities, knowledge dissemination forums and workshops conducted by the

195   different conservation actors. These observations provided valuable information on

196   community's perspective related to participation. We observed these activities as a third party

197   and we were neither member of the community nor member of the other external actors.

198   Thus, data was collected by being 'partially participant observer' (Bryman 2012: 443).

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1 Elephant Conservation Project in Assam

201   Human–elephant conflict in Gaolpara district of Assam is a serious issue. From 2006–

202   2008, 1.24 km^2 of crop area worth 14,364 GBP and 362 number of properties worth 14,973

203   GBP was damaged and 7 persons were killed (Wilson et al. 2015). The area has a mixed

204   population of Assamese and Bengali community and tribal Garo and Rabha community. The

205   landscape is a mosaic of villages, farmland, rubber plantation, Sal (*Shorea robusta*) –

206   dominated reserve forests and wetlands (locally called *beel*). Historically elephants were

207   absent from this area, but according to respondents herds started coming from Garo hills in

208   neighbouring state of Meghalaya from 1993.

209   Assam Hathi[5] Project (AHP) was initiated here in 2003–04 by two collaborating

210   conservation agencies one regional and another international[6]. The project activities mainly

211   aimed at building crop damage protection measures to reduce frequency of damage from

212   elephants and to promote sustainable livelihoods through supplementary incomes (AHP

213   2016). The regional NGO consulted with local community, village elders, administration, and

214   forest department. For the mitigation strategies, low–tech and low–cost techniques such as

215   spotlights, chilli–based deterrents were deployed and solar fencing was erected. For the

216   fencing, materials were allocated by the project but its construction and maintenance was

217   carried out entirely by the communities. Such community involvement was solicited so that

218   people donot get an impression that fencing was a free gift. Some funds were raised from

219   participating households for future maintenance. Village committees were constituted for

220   fence protection and to engage households in a rotation basis. The fencing was however not a

221   barrier for elephants' movements as it protected only the homestead and not the crop fields.

222   Among these, spotlights and solar fencing were preferred due to their perceived effectiveness

223   against elephants.

3.2 Bird–Based Tourism in Arunachal Pradesh

225   Forests surrounding Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in West Kameng district of

226   Arunachal Pradesh came into prominence in world of conservation when a tiny colourful bird

227   was first described from this place in 2006. The bird was named Bugun Liocichla (*Liocichla*

228   *bugunoram*) after the local tribe, Bugun in order to convey their efforts to conserve

229   biodiversity. Singchung village near the sanctuary where the study was conducted is

230   inhabited by local Bugun tribe[7]. The discovery of this bird created a stir in the bird–watching

231   community and it became a mascot for bird–based tourism in the following years. With the

232   help of an eminent bird–watcher and conservationist, a local Bugun leader started the 'high–

233   value knowledge–based niche' eco–tourism programme which is running successfully with

234   increasingly more domestic and foreign birders arriving at this place. From the outside it may

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[5] Hathi in Assamese and Hindi mean elephant.

[6] Chester Zoo–North of England Zoological Society, London and Ecosystems–India,
Guwahati. later this project received grant under Darwin Initiative in 2007.

[7] Buguns are Buddhist and their major occupations are daily wage labour, farming and
livestock rearing. The village is also inhabited by migrant Nepalis who do not have land
entitlement but are living for long.

235   seem that Buguns were employed in this business, but most of the staffs were from other
236   communities such as Nepali and Monpa and many were from different parts of the state.

237   The 'real' community involvement in conservation started when Buguns earmarked
238   17 km^2 of their community land as Community Reserve (under Wildlife Protection Act,
239   1972) in 2017 and named it Singchung Bugun Community Reserve (SBCR). The process was
240   facilitated and negotiated by the present Divisional Forest Officer and researchers working in
241   the area. In 2018, the Singchung Bugun Community Reserve was conferred with prestigious
242   India Biodiversity Award for institution–based biodiversity conservation.

243   **3.3 Amur Falcon Conservation Project, Pangti, Nagaland**

244   The widely known Amur falcon conservation project unfolded in Pangti village in
245   Wokha district of Nagaland[8] since 2012. Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) is a migratory
246   raptor, which roosts in Pangti in large number every year (October– November) during their
247   4000 km trans–equatorial migration (Bildstein 2006). A sensational documentary prepared by
248   a conservation advocacy group on falcon hunting was broadcasted in 2012 which
249   documented hunting these falcons. The graphic images drew attention from the conservation
250   community and the stories were reported in leading ornithology magazines, online and print
251   media (Fischer 2012; The Siberian Times 2012). Amidst national and international outcry,
252   Nagaland State Government came under pressure and Wokha District Administration and
253   Nagaland Forest Department implemented the 'No–hunting' order asking the village
254   councils[9] to take immediate action otherwise their development assistance would be curtailed.

255   The community–led Amur Falcon Roosting Area Union (AFRAU) was set up to keep
256   a check on the birds and the members patrol the area during the season. In 2016, a monolith
257   was unveiled near the Amur Falcon roosting site to commemorate the Amur Falcon
258   movement in Pangti. Presently the conservation story is deemed as successful as zero–
259   hunting of falcons has been recorded since 2013. Pangti village council has been conferred
260   with many regional and national awards for successful conservation.

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[8] Pangti is the largest village for the Indigenous Lotha tribe (one of the 16 major tribes in Nagaland). Lothas are Christians and their main livelihood is shifting cultivation and fishing.

[9] Village councils in Nagaland are empowered under special provision in Indian constitution to administer development and frame rules in the concerned villages.

261 **4. RESULTS**

262   We discussed how community was integrated into the conservation process at the

263 three sites in Northeast India. Ten factors were identified that affected the process of

264 participation of local people. These factors were not mutually exclusive of each other and did

265 not linearly follow each other in the process. These factors also overlapped and even

266 affecting each other. We further grouped these ten factors into three broad categories: trigger

267 factors, negotiation factors and sustenance factors (See Table 2). Trigger factors are

268 responsible for kick–starting the projects and the participation of local people in the

269 conservation project. Negotiation factors were induced by day–to–day interaction between

270 local community and external actors and also intra–community dynamics. Sustenance factors

271 affect the long term existence of community participation in the conservation project. In the

272 following sections, the three categories are discussed.

273   [Insert Table 2 here]

274 **4.1 Trigger factors**

275   4.1.1 *Crisis narrative*: All the conservation projects were preceded by a crisis

276 narrative. In Goalpara, severe damage of assets and loss of human life due to elephants; in

277 Singchung, conservation of the newly discovered bird and in Pangti, international shame

278 brought to the village due to mass–scale hunting triggered the local community to participate

279 to overcome the crisis. Even though these projects operate at different levels, the crisis has

280 not been averted. Elephants still damage property and kill humans; Eaglenest and adjoining

281 forest face anthropogenic pressure and shame could return if Pangti goes back to hunting. So

282 a crisis narrative is necessary as a trigger for a conservation projects and community

283 participation. In a Garo[10] tribal village in Goalpara, elephants' presence and damage was

284 significantly reduced and the community became complacent thinking the crisis was over.

285 They stopped maintaining the fence resulting in more damage. In 2017, without any help

286 from the NGO, the villagers contributed for a new fence by themselves and erected it.

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[10] Garos are listed as Scheduled Tribes in India. Presently majority of the Garos are
Christians and few follow animism. They mostly live at the Garo Hills districts in the state of
Meghalaya and pockets of population are in Goalpara, Kamrup and Karbi Anglong districts
of Assam.

287   4.1.2 *Facilitation by an external actor*: In all the sites, communities did not trigger

288   the initiation of the project and there were other actors involved: in Goalpara, it was the

289   regional NGO; in Singchung, it was wildlife researchers and later forest department and in

290   Pangti, it was regional and national NGO, media, administration and forest department. The

291   focus of these external actors was to achieve conservation goals in a socially just and

292   convenient manner by integrating community at various scales. The designing, planning and

293   implementation of the project was carried out by exernal actors.

4.2 Negotiation factors

295   4.2.1 *Effective entry stage activities*: The external actors at the initial stages carried

296   out many activities including biological surveys, awareness programmes, meetings and

297   dialogues. In Goalpara, socio–economic surveys along with mapping of village boundary,

298   resources and elephant movement paths were documented. Few villages were selected for

299   monitoring and documenting elephant movements and conflict on a regular basis. Repeated

300   trial of field based conflict mitigation kept community interested in the project. In Singchung,

301   initial biodiversity assessment helped the eco–tourism to boom. Initial meetings, workshops

302   and negotiation by the forest officials and researchers with the Buguns took place for almost

303   two years. With the agreement of the majority, the village council allowed the forest

304   department to notify the community land as community reserve. In Pangti, after the ban of

305   hunting, the NGOs set up 'Friends of the Amur Falcon' as a conservation education program.

306   With the help of national and international donors, they launched eco–clubs in several

307   schools and trained educators. Interactive reading materials and posters, badges were

308   developed for the eco–clubs where kids would learn about the migratory nature of the bird

309   and its conservation importance. Another NGO paid the ex–gratia to the village council to be

310   distributed to the affected landowners and constructed a guest house in the village. Forest

311   department put forward livelihood schemes like poultry and piggery and built watchtowers to

312   augment tourism.

313   4.2.2 *Mediating actors from local community*: It was extremely difficult for the

314   NGOs to convince the whole community in one go. So, committed individuals from the

315   community were selected; who were inflential social leaders and elites. The legitimacy these

316   individuals carry helped in convincing the larger community to participate in the project. In

317   Goalpara, the AHP staff themselves were from the project site and they became the main

318   driver of building rapport and continued communication with the project villages. These

319   staffs were selected strategically as one of the AHP staff puts it, "we did not select on the
320   basis of any degree or education status. Since the work involved community, we wanted
321   people who were from the very place and who have themselves been victims of elephant
322   conflict. Today I am not a face of AHP, but my staffs are." In Singchung, a respected elder in
323   Bugun society was particularly instrumental in setting up the tourism and spearheaded the
324   formation of the community reserve. In Pangti, village council chairman and the president of
325   fishermen union in Pangti played a vital role in establishing AFRAU which looks after the
326   protection of the Amur falcons. These mediating actors also become spokespersons for the
327   community. According to one of them, "we had meetings with the village council. That year
328   was also the jubilee year. We took pledge while holding a candle in our hand that we will not
329   hunt those birds. Majority agreed with the decision." But when individuals become
330   indispensable part of these projects, the community tend to rely on them. The forest official
331   of Eaglenest WLS who supported the community reserve was afraid that it would be
332   disastrous to the reserve if he gets transferred to other place. The AHP staffs in Goalpara
333   were of the same opinion.

334   4.2.3 *Additional/alternate income opportunities*: The conservation projects presented
335   explicit or implicit additional/alternate income opportunities for the communities which were
336   seen important for participation. In Goalpara, in partnership with other NGOs and
337   government departments, livelihood trainings were conducted every year for farmers and
338   SHG (Self Help Groups) on organic horticulture, pig and poultry, fishery, weaving and bee–
339   keeping. In Singchung, the villagers now look at the community reserve as a Pandora's Box
340   for development and other benefits. One of the community members said, "if tourism
341   happens, then it will be helpful. Singchung will develop. People will know about Singchung
342   and they will know about us, Bugun." In, Pangti, the community thought that development
343   and employment would 'arrive' to this village 'riding' this bird. As one of the villages said
344   that, "the motivation is development. That is why we are protecting this bird. We are chasing
345   for development. We have asked for road development, eco–tourism, and guest house and so
346   on. Let's see what happens."

347   4.2.4 *Intra–community dynamics*: Intra–community dynamics are often overlooked
348   in conservation projects and this affected the projects in unpredictable ways. A village in
349   Goalpara could not expand fencing because few moderately well–off households were not
350   particularly affected and therefore refused to pay for the maintenance. This increased
351   contribution per capita for the affected households. Consensus could not be reached due to

352   disagreements on solar fencing. During such incidences, the numerically dominant tribe

353   (Rabha[11]) accused the minority (Bengalis[12]) for their negligent attitude. According to the

354   Bengalis, "those who live in the middle of the village do not care about the fence. They think

355   it is the responsibility of the people who live in the boundary of the villages. So we face

356   public shame. We will maintain it even if others do not. Penalty is not an issue for us, but

357   such public humiliation is shame for us."

358   In Singchung, the tourism project created tension between an influential member and

359   other Buguns. Most of the Buguns with limited knowledge about the tourism and felt that

360   there is no transparency. In Pangti, presently under the 'success' of zero hunting tension is

361   fuming. According to the village council chairman, the majority of the affected people have

362   lost hope for development and given the dire need for livelihood, they want to return back to

363   hunting. He said, "people have sacrificed here so much, but they hardly got anything out of it.

364   If it continues for 2–3 years, the desperate groups can form majority and could get consent

365   that the hunting ban should be withdrawn. If nothing happens and if people want, I may have

366   to roll back the resolution"

367   **4.3 Sustenance factors**

368   4.3.1 *Tangible/intangible results*: Having a positive tangible or intangible result was

369   necessary to keep the community interested. In Goalpara, strategies reduced conflict

370   incidences in the project and cultivating high yielding value cash crops was promoted within

371   the fencing boundary to offset economic losses. According to a villager, "the fencing is a

372   community material. If some problem happens, the whole community comes up to work. We

373   check which part needs repair, which post needs replacement. They (NGO) have given to us,

374   now we will maintain it. If any person fails to come to maintain the fence, he or she is

375   penalised Rs. 30." In Singchung, the tourism was successful within the first year. In Pangti,

376   the situation was complex and result were mixed. The media hailed the people as 'hunter–

377   turned conservationists' working for a new hope in Nagaland as no falcons were reported

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[11] Rabhas are listed as Scheduled Tribes in India who largely follow Hinduism. They are mostly concentrated in Goalpara and Kamprup districts (Assam), Garo Hills district (Meghalaya) and Jalpaiguri district (West Bengal).

[12] Bengalis are Bengali speaking migrant community who had been staying in the area for two generations.

378 hunted till date since 2013. Tourist numbers also increased, especially foreign birdwatchers,
379 but monetary benefits could not reach more than 50 individuals and the amount is negligible
380 as compared what they were earning from hunting. Therefore, alternate livelihoods could not
381 be sustained. One of the villagers expressed that "Pangti has sacrificed its land and Pangti is
382 preserving the falcon. But Pangti did not get any benefit in return."

383   Pride was an intangible outcome of these projects and acted as a catalytic element of
384 participation. Communities at all the sites were proud that their villages and their name have
385 national and international recognition due to the conservation project. "Earlier people from
386 plains do not know about us. Some people have come to know about us due to the bird which
387 was named after us", said a resident of Singchung. Three falcons at Pangti were fitted with
388 radio transmitters for understanding their migration route and they were named 'Pangti',
389 'Naga' and 'Wokha' after the name of the village, the tribe and the district respectively. This
390 created immense pride among the locals.

391   4.3.2 *Capability enhancement of local community*: In Goalpara, due to repeated
392 hands–on training and workshops the villagers felt that they learnt new skills, gained
393 confidence and their decision making power improved. The AHP staffs were particularly
394 positive about their enhanced skills gained through exposure visits to national and
395 international conservation project sites and workshops on elephant ecology and conservation.
396 The staffs are now able to take field level decisions independently and keen to continue their
397 work. "I want to continue doing it. I like this work. First of all, it is an income source.
398 Secondly, I feel great working with nature. I get to know and do so many things about
399 animals. I get to meet so many people. It feels good", said one of the AHP staff.

400   In Singchung, the patrolling scouts were able to plan activities independently. They
401 were also given training on GPS mapping, wildlife rescue and species identification. But
402 respondents perceived the ad–hoc community reserve management committee to be incapable
403 of taking decisions. The patrolling scouts favoured communicating with the forest official
404 directly for guidance rather than the committee. The forest officials felt that the community is
405 not motivated enough, there were more 'Do–ers' rather than 'Thinkers' and the community
406 was not taking initiatives independently and had to be spoon–fed everything.

407   In Pangti, exposure of many external actors helped the community to bargain
408 for development with higher authorities. They were able to process the benefits and loss

409   of participating in the project and now in a dilemma how to bring development while

410   also protecting the falcon.

411   4.3.3 ***Funding***: Funding was the most important external factor for community

412   participation and sustenance of a project. AHP suffered due to discontinuation of funding and

413   it halted any new community centred activities. The staffs were motivated enough to look

414   after the existing interventions even though the project was in peril. The project proponents

415   are now looking for domestic funding to continue. In Singchung, initial funding was

416   necessary to set up the eco–tourism and assessing biodiversity. In the community reserve,

417   funding was necessary to employ the local youth which actually motivated the other youths to

418   get interest in the reserve. In Pangti, development was affected due to perceived

419   mismanagement of conservation fund contributed by Govt.

420   4.3.4 ***Role of information***: Availability and accessibility to information affected

421   community's willingness to participate in all the sites. With information in hand, community

422   was clear about benefits and losses and they were more supportive of the activities. It

423   facilitated space for more dialogue and effective conflict resolution. The technical know–how

424   of interventions (in case of Goalpara) and knowledge of law (in case of Singchung) was

425   concentrated among few external actors (NGOs, forest department). In Singchung, although a

426   community fee is levied from the tourists, which goes to the village council fund, the

427   information about it was strictly confined among few influential people. In Pangti,

428   inaccessible information about how village council was working with the NGO and forest

429   department caused intra–community tension in the beginning.

430   **5. DISCUSSION**

431   Although the three sites differ economically, socially, culturally and politically, the

432   common element in all these conservation projects is the active engagement of the local

433   community. Each conservation project was context specific and the level and degree of

434   participation differed according to various stages and activities. Keeping the ladder of

435   participation in mind we found that communities participated by gaining material incentives,

436   providing labour, getting involved in workshops. In Goalpara, the participation between the

437   local people and project managers was more interactive during maintenance of solar fencing.

438   In Singchung, it was interactive in the beginning and later it became consultative. In Pangti,

439   coercion was used to encourage people to participate at the initial stages. However,

440   transformation within the community was not observed, probably due to the major project

441   decisions that were pre–decided by the proponents.

442   Our findings corroborate barriers and catalytic elements affecting local community

443   participation as process identified by Botes and Rensberg (2000), Seixas and Davy (2008)

444   and Rodrigues–Izquerdo et al. (2010): role played by external actors, selective participation,

445   conflicting interest, important individuals and leaders, funding and immediate results.

446   Crisis narratives are important to trigger certain intervention. When multiple actors

447   are involved, often the dominant actors' narratives get precedence. In our sites, domination of

448   one narrative from one actor is missing, rather, the ultimate narratives driving the

449   conservation projects and participation are combinations of narratives of different actors. All

450   these actors found convergence with other actors' narratives within their own and a co–

451   operative environment was created. Divergence of narratives caused conflict which we found

452   in case of Pangti and Goalpara. No actor completely discarded their own narratives, but

453   certainly refined it based on interaction with other actors and the deliverables of the

454   conservation projects.

455   The conservation at the three sites was initiated by external actors. In such obscure

456   less–developed places, where a perceived Government apathy exists, NGOs and other

457   external actors fill the void and facilitate the community to get connected to the outside

458   world. They create the big picture where a community can develop through conservation and

459   instill pride in them. These external actors are shaping the nature and outcome of

460   conservation action by strategic engagement, tacit involvement and 'boundary interaction

461   from conflict and contestation to co–operation' (Larsen and Brockington 2018: 4). These

462   external actors brought particular technical and managerial skills as well as resources to the

463   project and invested in building capabilities of local community.

464   Entry–stage activities and additional/alternate income opportunities are crucial part of

465   any conservation project. Linkage between development and conservation should be coherent

466   and project proponents should not strive for isolated goals (Salafsky 2011). India's eco–

467   development projects were often criticised to have fuzzy linkages between development and

468   conservation. These projects initially provided conservation benefits (Mishra et al. 2009) but

469   did little to change perceptions of the local people and legacy of these projects was found to

470   be left with the community (Arjunan et al. 2006; Macura et al. 2011; Gubbi et al. 2008). The

471   disconnect between conservation and development goals can lead to a situation like Pangti

472   and Singchung where ecotourism is often put forward as a middle path. But ecotourism

473   enterprises have also been criticised due to marginal local employment, elite capture of

474   resources, limited participation by vulnerable groups, poor management and negative

475   environmental impacts (Bookbinder et al. 1998; Karanth and DeFries 2011). So the project

476   proponents in Singchung and Pangti need to establish benefit sharing mechanism before up–

477   scaling ecotourism.

478   The mediating actors are local committed individuals and leaders, who are often seen

479   as agents of change and as per Timmer (2004) they are often innovator, communicator,

480   learner, bridge–builder and systems thinker. Seixas and Davy (2008) found that these

481   individuals are often better educated than average people of the community. In our case, the

482   level of education coupled with social status (headmen, teachers, Govt. employee) played the

483   critical role in producing social legitimacy of these people as local proponents of the

484   conservation projects. Although institutions in natural resource governance in South Asia

485   have been studied deeply (see Agrawal & Gupta 2005; Agrawal 2007), but specific roles of

486   individuals need to be captured.

487   At the three study sites, capacity building of the community was often seen as

488   educating them with necessary skills through workshops that would help in achieving pre–

489   decided conservation goals. But this method seemed to be hindering fulfilment of full

490   potential of effective community participation. Rather than a one–way provision of

491   knowledge, capacity building should be a shared learning space for both the local community

492   and the project proponents (Berkes and Seixas 2004; Seixas and Davy 2008). The project

493   staffs also need to learn participatory methodologies, for which specific funding is necessary

494   (Rodriguez–Izqueirdo et al. 2010).

495   In the neo–liberal paradigm the conservation projects are dependent on and shaped by

496   funding agencies (Larsen 2018). Seixas and Davy (2008) while analysing seven community–

497   based conservation projects found that funding may not be necessary initially when the

498   community independently initiates conservation process perceiving a crisis in hand. But for

499   long term improvement of the process, funding and involvement of external actors becmoes

500   necessary. Most of the funds in our field sites were used to create infrastructure and capacity

501   building of the community. In the absence of funding, project in Goalpara experienced abrupt

502   halt and the other two were facing periodical hiccups. So in order to sustain the projects,

503   securing long term funding is necessary.

504   Intra–community dynamics has often been found to limit long term success of

505   conservation projects as different interest groups often do not share common vision and

506   objectives (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Botes and Rensberg 2000). All of our project sites

507   have suffered from narrow understanding of community and the project proponents invested

508   their funds, time and energy to overcome it. The project should incorporate these fissures

509   within the community into initial design stage. Stakeholder analysis seems to be an effective

510   tool (Reed 2008).

511   We argued that available and accessible information is absolutely critical for

512   effective participation of community. Similar arguments were presented in other disciplines

513   such as development studies, public health and natural resource management (Madon and

514   Sahay 2002; Gupta 2008). Evaluations of communication modes between community and

515   external actors should be done. Key information should be identified and disseminated

516   clearly and periodically with the majority of the community. Improved and innovative mode

517   of two way communication should be tried out. This will help the community to take

518   informed decisions.

519   **6. CONCLUSIONS**

520   In this paper, we analysed three conservation projects from Northeast India, each

521   distinctly situated in their own socio–cultural reality but linked to the common thread of local

522   community participation. Community participation in conservation projects is advocated and

523   practiced but the nature of participation remains understudied. We found various external as

524   well as internal factors, often compounding with each other influencing participation of local

525   community at various stages of the project. The factors included: a crisis narrative,

526   involvement of external actors, effective entry stage activities, commitment from local

527   individuals and leaders, alternate/additional income opportunity, tangible/intangible results,

528   capability enhancement of locals, funding, intra–community dynamics and availability of

529   information.

530   We recommend that development and conservation goals should have clear linkage

531   and apart from investing time and funds on 'hard' issues like technical interventions,

532   sufficient attention should be given on 'soft' issues of participation and capacity

533   development. Stakeholder mapping is absolutely necessary to understand different interest

534   groups and different strategies should be developed to engage with such groups. While

535   commitment and motivation from individuals should be encouraged but care is to be taken

536   that they should not become local elite power centres. Periodic feedback sessions should be

537   organized for two–way learning of community and project proponents. This will help both

538   the groups to take informed decisions for selection of activities and to participate in them.

539   Since these projects are invariably fund–driven, securing long term funding is necessary till

540   community becomes self–mobilized. Training of project staffs in participatory methodologies

541   is necessary. To understand conservation as a process, long term ethnographic research on

542   conservation projects should be undertaken.

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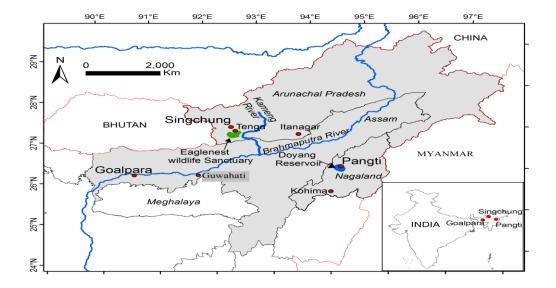| Table no.	Table caption
1	Study sites in Northeast India
2	Factors affecting community participation in selected conservation projects

654

655

656 **Figure**

657

658 **Fig. 1**: Study Sites (Goalpara, Singchung and Pangti)

659   **Tables**

660

No	State	District	Villages	Project	Intervention
1	Assam	Goalpara	Nichinta, Kalyanpur and Bengkanada	Elephant conservation project (Assam Hathi Project)	To reduce human–elephant conflicts through community–based interventions and to monitor elephant movements.
2	Arunachal Pradesh	West Kameng	Singchung	Bird–based ecotourism and Community Reserve	To inculcate conservation ethos among the locals and also provide livelihood options to the local people using bird–based tourism
3	Nagaland	Wokha	Pangti	Amur Falcon Conservation Project	To reduce hunting of Amur Falcons

661

662   Table 1: Study sites in Northeast India

No.	Factors	Description
1	Trigger	Crisis narrative Facilitation by external actors
2	Negotiation	Effective entry stage activities Mediating actors from the local community Alternate/additional income opportunities Intra–community dynamics
3	Sustenance	Tangible/intangible results Capability enhancement of local community Funding Role of information

663

664   Table 2: Factors affecting community participation in selected conservation projects