

From Inscription to Action

Towards Sustainable Community Development

Report Card on Progress in Kaas Plateau, Western Ghats.

World Natural Heritage

TERRE Policy Centre

June 2013





Preface

Within a space of less than one year, a small and symbolic progress made by the local community around Kaas Plateau –one of the 39 sites in the Western Ghats of India that is inscribed by UNESCO as World Natural Heritage- goes on to support the doctrine that Heritage sites can be leveraged for the sustainable development of the local communities.

UNESCO during the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention in 2012 targeted communication campaign, with a focus on World Heritage linked to the Sustainable Development and the Role of Local Communities.

TERRE Policy Centre along with RANWATA and the local community took the challenge in association with the local forest officers to make a small beginning towards leveraging the Heritage site for sustainable development. We strongly believe that sustainably developed community can conserve the nature in sustainable way.

What follows in this brief report is glimpse of these hopes.



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Content

- **Executive Summary**
- **Building Blocks**
- **Report Card**
- **Specific Actions**
- **Future Plans**



Executive Summary

The journey to inscribe Kaas Plateau in the Western Ghats of India as World Heritage site began nearly seven years back. It took significant impetus with a major workshop aimed at community dialogue. The workshop, held in April 2012, engaged the community in villages around Kaas plateau in the Western Ghats of India.

Within three months of the workshop, the local community was bloomed with surprise and jubilation as the news of inscription in July 2012 broke in. The time was ripe for local communities to swirl into action, thanks to the community dialogue that already took place and the extremely useful recommendations agreed therein by the community.

The series of activities followed over last 11 months under the guidance of the TERRE and RANWATA (both NGOs) as well as the Forest officers.

But it was local forest committees that played the key role in decision-making and implementation. Without their understanding and enthusiasm the innovative schemes they envisaged would not have resulted into benefitting the local communities and most importantly into giving the hopes that the sustainable development of local communities and nature conservation are certainly possible by leveraging World Heritage.



Building Blocks to success: Milestones

- **2005:** Efforts began for inscription of the sites in the Western Ghats as World natural heritage sites.
- **2005-2010:** Evaluation and assessment by UNESCO World Heritage Committee, IUCN.
- **2010 -2011:** The proposal was returned with number of recommendations the major was related to inadequate community dialogue. RANWATA and TERRE initiated direct dialogues with locals
- **April 2012:** The workshop on Community Dialogue organized by TERRE and RANWATA in Safara, not far from Kaas Plateau. It included Local village heads, forest officers, government representatives, experts from UNESCO, Bombay Natural history society and number of NGOs and media.



Community Dialogue with Village head, local NGO, Commission of Biodiversity Government of Maharashtra

- **April 2012 to July 2012:** Series of meetings of the forest committees of the local communities to develop the action plans for the Kaas Plateau, particularly on monitoring the tourists.

- **July 2012:** UNESCO inscribes the Kaas plateau as World Natural Heritage along with 39 sites in the Western Ghats.
- **July 2012 to Jan 2013:** Implementation of the plans made by the local forest committees and village Panchayats.
- **12 May 2013:** ‘ A year after Inscription’ village meeting in Kaasai Temple with villagers in surrounding area, forest officer, experts, TERRE and RANWATA to review the progress and chart out next year’s plan.



Community dialogue with Kaas villages after inscription- in full rain



Meeting with Forest Guards



Dialogue with local Memembr of leagislative assembly and community

Report Card: Progress

- Immediately after the workshop on community dialogue (see the workshop report and recommendation www.terrepolicycentre.org) the local forest committee held the meeting on 22nd April 2012 and decided to make a governance-plan to control the excessive ingress of the tourists and traffic of the vehicles to protect the Kaas Plateau. They agreed to develop a plan for facilitating the visits of the limited tourists based on the carrying capacity of the site and charge the entrance and parking fees
- The local community of Kaas and surrounding villages received the news about the inscription of the World Heritage site on 2nd July 2012 with jubilations. The
- Web site was launched by the State Government to inform the tourists of the plans for the initial management of the site.
- TERRE and Ranwata visited four villages around Kaas and held discussions with Sarpanch (elected head of village) of Kaas late July 2012, Forest guards and local communities took part in discussion for early actions. The discussion focused on the next steps on effective implementation of the management of the World Heritage. Though it was the time of heavy monsoon rains and people in the plateau were busy in sowing operations, there was huge enthusiasm to learn more about what can be done to benefit the local community from this new transformation of the Plateau to the global platform of World Heritage.
- A Meeting with elected Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) along with heads of the local villages held at the Kaas Plateau to discuss with TERRE and RANEWATA the plans for post-inscription activity. It was proved to be the key event to take the issue of management of the Plateau at the policy level. It was the opportunity to emphasize the role of local governance and effective implementation various Indian Acts related to Forest and Bio-diversity.
- An interactive session was organized at Pune (city about 100 kms from Kaas), between Dr.Vinod Mathur, Dean, Wild Life Institute of India (WII), who was leading proponent of the World Heritage sites in Western Ghats, the Forest Officers, village heads, Media, NGOs and

Heritage.

- In August 2012, during the flowering and tourist season, Minister for Forest inaugurated the plan to monitor and control the tourists.
- TERRE and Ranwata launched a web site (www.westernghatworldheritage.org) to promote the understanding of the World Heritage management among other NGOs, interested publics and nature lovers
- The Doctors held medical camps in the surrounding villages from Satara belonging to RANWATA, during which importance of the conservation of the World Heritage was explained.
- Six Meetings with local people of villages Kaas, Kusumbi, Atali, Ekiv were held to provide suggestions on the developmental issues.
- Two meetings with forest guards and forest officers at Kaas, Bamnoli to raise awareness and to discuss on forest management.
- 25 -30 meetings and slide-shows were done in schools and colleges in the villages and town in the buffer zones
- Meeting with Japanese Wild life expert and botany professor who visited Kaas to present Japanese experience.
- Meeting with Chief Forest officer, Kolhapur division to make suggestions on eco-friendly tourism.
- RANWATA participated in four meetings with Joint Forest Management committee at Satara and Kolhapur to make recommendations.



Specific Action: Agreement and Implementation

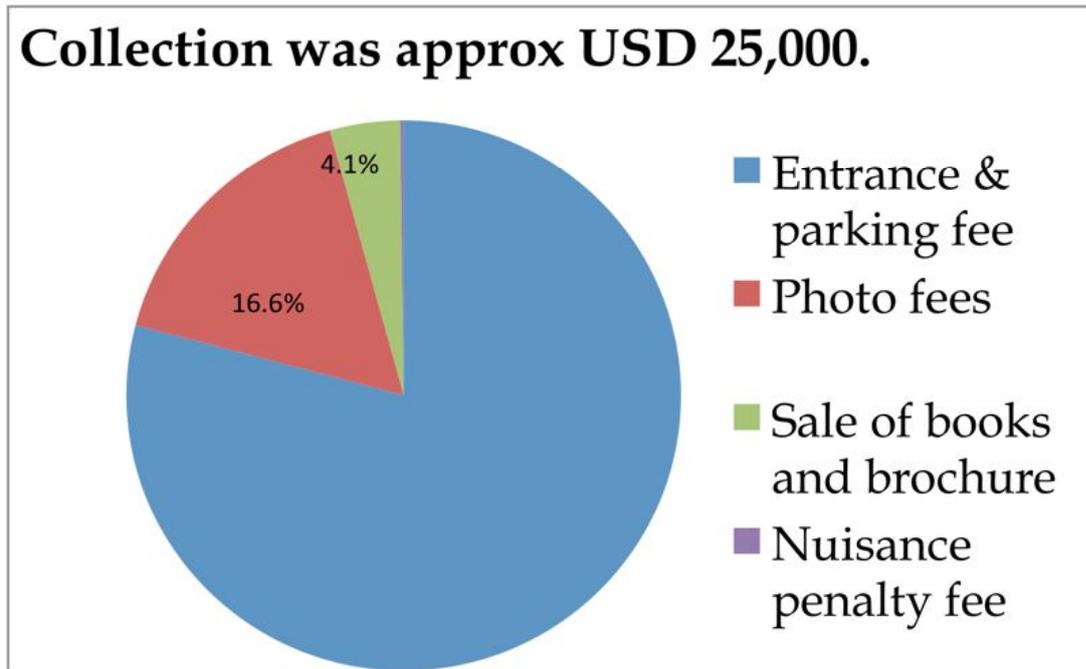
The village governing bodies that had formed the forest committee decided to monitor the tourist flow commensurate with the carrying capacity of the plateau and control their visits so as not to disturb the fragile nature. They also agreed to provide guidance to tourists for responsible behavior to protect the biodiversity.

Charging fees to protect the nature

Local Village level Forest Committee decided to charge the tourists for:

- The entree and parking fees for the tourists
- Fees to take photos-commercial, personal and even on mobile
- Penalty fee for creating nuisance, throwing plastics, and rubbish
- Sale of booklet and brochure about Kaas Plateau and guide

Collection over season of wild flowers in three months as follows:



Utilization of collected money

The collected fees were used for:

- Maintenance of plateau
- For printing books and brochures
- For maintaining parking space
- **Rest of the funds were distributed to four villages around Kaas proportionately to their area under World Heritage to undertake community development activities as under:**

Community development from collected Fund

I. Cooking gas to poor families to prevent cutting of trees:

All the families in the Kaas village used to cut the trees and stack the logs in their house for cooking. Now all families have started getting LPG cylinders for cooking purposes so that cutting of trees and valuable shrubs is avoided. It also helped to save time taken by women and children to fetch the biomass from forest. This has freed their time so that they can now focus on education and more productive activities like farming and craft making. 25% of the cost of the LPG cylinders is born by the families. (*136 families provided with LPG cooking gas connections as of June 2013*)

II. Helping the neighbors in natural calamities

The villages decided to help the other villages in the Satara district that were suffering from the shortage of water and famine. The villagers from Kaas, through voluntary efforts have cut the grass and kept ready to provide the fodder (grass) from the Kaas Plateau to the cattle in the region facing shortage of water. The state government is running a camp for the cattle that are not getting sufficient fodder. The villagers with the permission of the District authority would supply the fodder of nearly two truckloads to these camps. This action demonstrated the brotherhood gesture from those who have (Kaas as World Heritage) to other villages that were going through difficult time. (*8 trucks of fodder donated to famine affected cattles*)

III. Solar Street lights for the security of the protected area

Kaas is connected with electricity lights. The street lampposts have the provision of the electrical lights. But Kaas village does not afford to pay the bill of the electricity. Also due to shortage of the electricity, Kaas roads are almost always without lights. This also affects the security on the main roads leading to the forests around the Kaas.

To tide over this situation Solar Lamps were installed on priority on the roads and in the temple just outside the village. This has brought light to the temple enhanced the security for the World Heritage sites to certain extent connected with the electricity. *(18 Solar Street lamps as of June 2013)*



Local community using LPG cooking gas and slowly shifting away from cutting the trees.

Local Community have started getting the benefits from the inscription of the World Heritage . They know that if governed well, they could avail resources and means to conserve their own heritage.TERRE and RANWATA will work with them to help them to achive their goal.

Future plans

- Above activities are done in Kaas village. Similar activities are planned in other villages i.e. Ekiv, Kasani and Atali.
- Parking place will be improved and maintained.
- TERRE and Ranwata would continue to work with the local communities and the Forest officers to encourage the development of and implementation of the plans decided by the local forest committees
- Extensive plans and project for the sustainable development of local Communities and conservation of the World Heritage is under preparation by TERRE and Ranwata
- Help Resource mobilization and providing opportunities for the locals to learn from other heritage sites



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