**Socio-economic Implications of Human-Elephant Conflict: A Case Study in the Dharamjaigarh Forest Division**

Aman Kumar

Department of Forestry, Wildlife & Environmental Sciences

Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya

Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

amn.wildlife@gmail.com

This study investigated the socio-economic profiles of villagers, the extent of crop depredation by elephants, villagers' changing perspectives towards elephants, suggested mitigation measures, and the response of the forest department to human-elephant conflict (HEC). Surveys and interviews were conducted with 240 respondents to gather data. The socio-economic profiles of the villagers showed a diverse distribution across different age groups. The largest percentage of respondents fell within the 41-50 years age range (27.1%), followed by 31-40 years (23.8%) and 21-30 years (17.5%). The majority of villagers possessed small landholdings, with 61% owning between 1-5 bighas of agricultural land. Agriculture was the primary occupation, engaging 85% of the villagers, while 9.6% worked as daily waged laborers and 4.6% were involved in small businesses. Crop depredation by elephants was a significant issue in the study area, with the majority of respondents (58.8%) reporting over 50% crop damage. The highest percentage of respondents (28.3%) experienced crop damage ranging from 61-70%, followed by 17.9% with 51-60% damage. Moreover, 93.3% of farmers cultivated crops for subsistence purposes, suggesting minimal contribution to the economic well-being of the villagers. The study revealed that most villagers (94.6%) relied solely on crop cultivation for income and lacked alternative livelihood sources. This heavy reliance on agriculture made them highly vulnerable to crop damage caused by elephants. Despite the economic losses incurred, 45% of respondents still considered elephants as a form of Lord Ganesha, while 41.7% expressed annoyance and 24.2% even considered elephants as enemies. Concerning the response of the forest department, 42.9% of the villagers reported not receiving any response during emergency calls, while 37.1% experienced occasional responses, and only 20% received a rapid response. This inadequate response from the forest department further frustrated the affected villagers. The study also captured the villagers' suggestions for mitigating HEC. Approximately 26.3% of respondents supported the installation of electric fences, 20.4% suggested constructing trenches, and 42.9% favored a combination of both measures, depending on the landscape features. Additionally, 10.4% of respondents emphasized the construction of rubble walls to prevent elephants from entering agricultural fields and human habitation areas. The findings highlight the significant economic impact of HEC on the local population's livelihoods and emphasize the need for effective conservation strategies. The study's results can provide valuable insights to policymakers and conservationists in formulating targeted measures to address HEC and improve response mechanisms, ultimately fostering the coexistence of humans and elephants in the study area.

Keywords: Elephant, HEC (Human Elephant Conflict), Crop Damage, livelihood, Socio-economic