

Save Western
Ghats
Movement



The Swallows
India Bangladesh

On the move to Another development in Western Ghats

A programme to support Save Western Ghats Movement
to advocate for the rights and livelihoods of people in Western Ghats



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Content

- 1. Introduction 3
 - 1.1. A movement – a programme 3
- 2. Context analysis – Western Ghats under threat 4
 - 2.1. The people of Western Ghats and their environment 4
 - 2.2. Threats against Western Ghats 4
 - 2.3. Opportunities 5
- 3. Save Western Ghats Movement..... 6
 - 3.1. Background..... 6
 - 3.2. Structure..... 6
 - 3.3. Annual meetings..... 7
 - 3.4. Involving youth..... 7
- 4. Target group 8
- 5. Goals 8
- 6. Activities 8
- 7. Programme management..... 10
- 8. Risk analysis..... 10
- 9. Map of Western Ghats 12
- References..... 13

1. Introduction

The mountain chain Western Ghats, comprising of 51 districts in six states, run along the western border of India across 1600 kilometres. It is the source of water regimes for the entire Deccan plateau and home to 300 million people (Bawa et al, 2010).

Today Western Ghats are under severe threats of mining, dam building, urbanisation, thermal power plants, drying of rivers, illegal logging, wildlife trade and business that is highly polluting. Many of the inhabitants in Western Ghats live intertwined with nature and depend on it for their livelihood. Still, their voices are seldom heard when decisions affecting the environment of Western Ghats are made. Instead of addressing poverty, projects such as mining and dam building are rather creating fewer livelihood possibilities and more displacement, making the poor even more vulnerable. The projects threaten the ecology of the area and hence, the people depending upon it for their livelihood – and for their identity and existence.

The environment movement in India has been accused of being against development when protesting against projects like mining and construction of big dams. This is a matter of how one defines development. In India, as in many parts of the world, these kinds of projects are considered to be of national interest viewed upon as a way to generate economic growth. As a consequence environment is put against development. Ecological diversity and poor people's livelihood are put against power generation and employment.

In this context a people's movement called Save Western Ghats started to put forward an alternative model of development and lobby for sustainable outcomes. The people constituting Save Western Ghats Movement are not against development – they ask crucial questions about what kind of development that is desirable and development for whom? For example, it might not be a good idea to generate employment for poor people by destroying their existing livelihoods.

1.1. A movement – a programme

From 2008 The Swallows have been working to change focus from projects to programmes. In this process The Swallows have had discussions with different stakeholders and partners in India. From this process, the Swallows have come to realise that one way to make sure that the ownership of the programme lies with the partners and that the impacts will be sustainable, is to support already existing networks. In that way the initiatives of cooperating come from the local organisations themselves and not from a foreign donor.

In this programme, The Swallows and their partners are taking this even one step further – by supporting a movement. A movement is by its nature dynamic and changing and that is of course challenging. A movement, however, has great possibilities of bringing about change since its existence and its activities are the outcomes of people joining together for a common goal.

Keystone Foundation, a partner of The Swallows since many years, is one of the organisations represented in the core group of Save Western Ghats Movement, and is also constituting the

secretariat of the movement. For this reason, The Swallows decided to channel the financial support through Keystone in order to maintain a simple and clear structure of responsibilities.

2. Context analysis – Western Ghats under threat

During the last years the general public as well as decision makers have come to realise the importance of rescuing and protecting the Himalayas. Several steps have been taken, for example by the Indian government, to protect the mountains. Save Western Ghats Movement now asks for similar attention to Western Ghats, declared as the first biosphere reserve by UNESCO and home to millions of people.

2.1. The people of Western Ghats and their environment

Diversity is a word describing Western Ghats, or Sahyadris (the local name), both when it comes to nature and humans. More than 40 indigenous groups (adivasis) inhabit the region. The cultural, spiritual and linguistic traditions of these groups are very much intertwined with their environment. The communities living in Western Ghats have different ethnic and religious backgrounds and some of them, like the *Todas* are among the most ancient peoples of South Asia. (Bawa et al, 2010) In the beginning of the nineteenth century the slopes of the Nilgiri Mountains were bought by the colonialists from the *Todas* for 1 Rs per acre. Today the very same community is fighting for their existence due to the so called development projects. (Sudhirendar, 2006:18)

Many of the plants species in Western Ghats are critical for the people living in the mountains. Many of the groups have used local wild plants to develop food crops for generations. These include grains such as rice, barley and finger millet; fruits like mango, garcinia, banana, and jackfruit and a variety of spices such as black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom and nutmeg. (Bawa et al, 2010) Western Ghats is home to 4050 plant species, almost a third of the amount in the country. (Sudhirendar, 2006:27,32)

Additionally, Western Ghats form a barrier between the Arabian Sea and the Indian subcontinent and therefore play a crucial role in determining rainfall patterns across peninsular India. 40 percent of India's rivers originate from Western Ghats, making millions of people to depend on it. (Vijayan 2007)

The knowledge possessed by the indigenous people of how to preserve the environment is a key to save Western Ghats. The Forest Rights Act passed in 2006 is a first step. This act gives people of the forests the possibility to claim legal rights to the forests they have lived in for generations. If appropriately implemented, this act safeguards the livelihoods, existence and identity of these people. Unfortunately the process of implementation has been delayed in many areas of the country.

2.2. Threats against Western Ghats

There are a number of threats facing the people and nature of Western Ghats, as described below.

Mining

According to participants at Save Western Ghats meeting in Kotagiri in February 2010, there are 8000 legal and 14 000 illegal mines in Western Ghats. One of the worst affected regions is the small state of Goa. The demand for steel all over the world makes Goa export iron, earning significant amounts of money, but at the cost of the watersheds, forests and people depending on them. During the last

five decades the mining industry has been more or less unrestricted in Goa. As a result, most watersheds are destroyed and the rivers are so silted that there are no fish left. Since it damages water sources and agriculture, mining also negatively affects the livelihoods of the people living in those areas.

However, in February 2010, just after the Save the Western Ghats meeting in Kotagiri, the Central Government's Environment and Forests Ministry imposed a moratorium on environment clearance of mining proposals in Goa and ordered an environment impact assessment on all mining activities in the state.

Large dams and thermal power plants

The construction of big dams and thermal power plants in India has been debated for years. The Narmada movement is famous for its resistance against the dam building in the Narmada valley. The dams lead to huge displacement of people and also to severe environmental destruction. In Western Ghats 90 % of the rivers are dammed for power generation and still, new dams are being built in the most biologically diverse areas. When a dam is being built, an engineered landscape is replacing the natural one and the knowledge about for example existing flood basin irrigation, is overlooked. Despite cost benefit analyses and environmental impact assessments being done by the government and companies, dam projects have often ended up failing socially and ecologically.

Biodiversity loss

Western Ghats is one of the eighteen biodiversity hotspots in the world, indicating the significant reservoir of biodiversity found here, but also the threats against it. Changes in agriculture and land use pattern have led to landslides and other catastrophes affecting biodiversity. Another reason for biodiversity loss is tourism, spreading to even the most pristine areas of the forests. Even though there is a ban on cutting trees in some areas in Western Ghats, rules are overlooked in favour of big projects. Thus, one fourth of the original forests have already been cut down. In some parts of the mountains, like in Karnataka, 70-80% of the population depends upon forests and non-timber forest produce. Cutting down trees means that these people lose their livelihoods. In other parts of the mountains, like in Nilgiris, trees have been planted to make up for the loss. However, the species planted do not suit the ecology of the area. Eucalyptus and tea bushes are such examples. (Sudhiredar, 2006: 16-32)

Climate change

As the Amazon of South America, Western Ghats form "girdles" of the earth, crucial to maintain global ecological balance. The changes in land use and tree cutting have led to big variations in the duration and intensity of rainfalls. Climate change has caused severe floods in many regions, the latest one in November 2009 in the Nilgiri Mountains. Landslides and trees falling in the storm caused many deaths and thousands were left homeless.

2.3. Opportunities

Save Western Ghats Movement is now in a phase of developing strategies and action plans. Already now the movement has a quite clear picture of where they are heading and their good contacts with the government will lead them forward.

The Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Government of India, visited the meeting in Kotagiri in February 2010, which in itself was a huge success. He addressed the audience providing details of the various programmes where the Ministry works when it comes to ecological aspects of the region. He stressed the importance of Western Ghats as a highly important carbon sequestration zone in the country, due to the quality of its forest cover. In response to the various presentations on the issues and challenges facing Western Ghats today the Minister announced the setting up of a Sahyadri Ecological/Ecology Authority. The authority will work towards demarcating all ecologically sensitive areas across 51 districts in the six states with the aim of identifying areas where no further development activities would be undertaken, and areas where permission would be based on strict criteria. This announcement is a remarkable achievement of the Save Western Ghats Movement.

Another prospect is to bring Western Ghats into The National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC). This plan has eight missions at the moment, and the Western Ghats should be included as the ninth. As temperatures are shooting in the area, water supply could also be affected and this would in turn affect soil, agriculture and hence lives and livelihoods.

3. Save Western Ghats Movement

People have struggled to save the Western Ghats for years and there are numerous examples of local battles, some successful and others not. Save Western Ghats Movement is a civil society initiative aiming to unite people with different backgrounds in order to achieve a large impact. The movement includes researchers, NGOs, environmental activists, community-based organisations, concerned citizens, legal resource people, artists, etc.

3.1. Background

The movement started 25 years ago, with a march to challenge the destruction of the Western Ghats in both its natural and human environment. This march put the conservation of Western Ghats on the national agenda, much thanks to the massive media coverage. During the one hundred days march, the participants focused on public interaction and campaigns. There were two groups of marchers – one marching in the north-south direction and the other marching on the south-north direction of Western Ghats. Marching through the pristine woods, settlements of indigenous people, clear streams and degraded forests constituted a lesson on the complex web of life of this ecosystem.

After this march, the movement went through a dormant period. However, since 2008 a few organisations worked hard to reignite the movement as destruction started taking place at an unprecedented scale. The need to learn from previous experiences and up-scale the work for Western Ghats were the driving forces. In Goa the movement was reborn in February 2009 – with more than 200 people eager to reverse the dominant trends.

3.2. Structure

Save Western Ghats Movement consists of NGO's groups, scientist, journalists etc. At the end of the Goa meeting a core group was naturally formed to take the movement forward and also plan for the next meeting in Kotagiri. The members in the core group come from different organisations (see Appendix 2 – Core group members).

After the Kotagiri meeting, the movement realised the need to handle issues at various levels and in diverse sectors. Thus the core group reflects different age groups, geographical spreads, expertise and experience, cross-cutting sectors, etc. and has 14 members. Within the core, “mini cores” of two or more members were formed around a specific issues or goal, with the other members having a supportive role. Although no guidelines have been produced, there are unwritten norms guiding the functioning of the core group. Each member has specific interests and strong leadership skills. Most importantly, the inputs and involvement are voluntary.

The Swallows and Keystone Foundation have been cooperation for many years. Additionally, Keystone is part of the core group and forms the secretariat of Save Western Ghats Movement. Thus, the financial support to the movement will be allocated through Keystone, meaning that Keystone is responsible to The Swallows for monitoring and reporting.

3.3. Annual meetings

Goa 2009

200 people got together to relive the past in order to rebuild a future to protect Western Ghats. The campus of the Kundai-based Peaceful Society played host to the national consultation drawing participants from seven states and three countries. The idea was to *Celebrate Western Ghats* for its colours, diversity, ethnicity, culture, music and food. Consequently, the event had done away with formal format of presentations – chairpersons, speakers and powerpoint presentations – in favour of evolving program, extempore presentations and spontaneous responses. The idea was to make the consultation evolving but intense, and amusing but engaging.

Kotagiri 2010

Save Western Ghats 2010 meeting held at the Keystone campus in Kotagiri from the 18th to the 20th February 2010 started off with the Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, as the guest of honour. After the welcome note, Mr.B.J.Krishnan one of the founder members of the movement, gave the background and the need for the continuity and purpose of the meet. The purpose was to highlight the issues and challenges being faced by Western Ghats over decades in the light of its importance as an ecologically sensitive and biodiversity hotspot area. The focus was to formulate action plans within key areas.

Future meetings

During the meeting in Kotagiri it was decided that in 2011 regional meetings will take place, while the bigger meeting commemorating the 25th anniversary of the first Save Western Ghats meeting will be held in Pune in 2012.

3.4. Involving youth

During the 2010 meeting in Kotagiri a discussion was initiated about the involvement of young people in the movement. It was agreed that the movement needs to take an active position in order to welcome and involve youths. Directly after this discussion more young people were giving presentations and several were also included in the core group.

4. Target group

This programme is not focusing on one specific area with one specific target group. Instead the idea is that Save Western Ghats Movement will bring about change at a national political level as well as for the people living in the mountains. Much of the activities will be focusing on strengthening the network and advocacy towards politicians and the public. Thus, the programme has three different target groups at three different levels:

- The people living in Western Ghats and depend upon it for their livelihoods, many of them Adivasis
- Politicians, officials and representatives from the private sector who have the power to make decisions which will help saving Western Ghats
- People/organisations who might be willing to join Save Western Ghats movement

In total, the programme will reach 1000 persons, who will take active part in the work for Western Ghats. We will also target around 35 politicians.

5. Goals

Development goal:	A just, fair, environment-conscious, and livelihood-sensitive society in the Western Ghats.
Programme goal:	To challenge the current concepts of development in the Western Ghats and evolve a new strategy of development that is pro-poor, inclusive and environmentally sustainable.
Outputs:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Save Western Ghats Movement is inclusive and strong.2. Politicians, officials and the private sector take initiatives to improve livelihood possibilities in the Western Ghats.3. Increased awareness on the importance of protecting the Western Ghats among the public.

6. Activities

During the coming years numerous activities will be carried out within the movement. The core group is about to draw a plan of action for the coming three years, looking at different sectors – water, conservation, education, mining, legalisation of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve with a distinct strategy for each sector. Therefore the activities within this programme – the cooperation between Save Western Ghats Movement and The Swallows – is just one small part of what will be going on within the movement.

The following activities will take place in order to fulfil the outputs.

Output 1: A strong and inclusive movement

1.1. Annual meeting for the movement

As the movement consists of many different actors, it is important to gather once in a while to sum up what has been done, plan for the future and inspire for new actions. The idea is to have a big collective gathering which will foster the "fellowship" and nourish the movement - bringing in new people and perspectives. In 2012 a three days meeting will be held in Pune. To this meeting all active actors will be invited. The hosts will be the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF). Several preparatory committees will be formed before this event to involve several stakeholders, including youths and children and focus on critical issues such as mining, water, livelihoods, tourism and power.

1.2. Local meeting at field sites

In order to decentralise the movement and reach out to more actors, several meetings at local levels will be held. Local NGOs will host the meetings and plan it together with the core group. There will be a local meeting on 8th to 10th of May in Shimoga on "Feel the Western Ghats". Local meetings will be held in several zones. The 53 districts of the Western Ghats have been divided into four zones - the Northern Western Ghats, Central Western Ghats, South Central Western Ghats and Southern Western Ghats. The core group will look at each of these regions and the working groups that we had during the SWGM 2010 at Kotagiri will be the basis for expanding the themes and action points for the local meetings.

1.3. Activities to include community governance/Adivasi empowerment

The communities most affected by the destruction of Western Ghats are the adivasi communities living in the mountains and depending upon it for their livelihood. Hence, it is crucial that their voices are being heard and that the movement encourages them to participate.

Several policies have been formed which can empower the adivasis. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a powerful tool. But few know this law and its processes, both in the government and in the communities. We believe that Western Ghats as a region should come out with an alternative development model and practice. For that local governance is crucial and local economy and local ecology are necessary. Then large companies with huge investments and infrastructure cannot come and own the place and start the mining, the dams, the power, the tourism, etc. It has to be a natural process where local livelihoods and culture are central.

Output 2: Initiatives taken by politicians, officials and the private sector to improve livelihood possibilities in Western Ghats

2.1. Advocacy campaign - national level meetings with politicians

Many of the decisions affecting Western Ghats are taken at a national level. Therefore it is important to advocate at that level. The movement has already good contacts with the Union Minister for Environment and Forests and will continue to advocate at this level. Two to three national level meetings are planned for meeting politicians at the Central Government in Delhi. At least five members of the Save the Westerns Ghats Movement who are knowledgeable on the

issues will participate. The purpose will be to highlight the issues that are central in their constituencies, what needs to be promoted and why.

2.2. Advocacy campaign - local level meeting with other stakeholders (plantations, energy sector, industries, business, etc)

The movement believes that in order to change the destructive path for Western Ghats it is necessary to advocate also within the private sector. Actors in the private sector are involved in the exploitation of Western Ghats and the movement aims at initiating contacts with them in order to have a constructive dialogue. There will be three to four local stakeholders meeting per year. They will be decentralised and depending on the groups of that region. The local coordinators in that region will call resource persons. Local stakeholders will bring about local issues that affect the region, both positive and negative. Issues of capacity building and training will be a priority. Examples of issues are environmental journalism, mapping of a forest tract and monitoring pollution in drinking water.

3. Improved awareness of importance of Western Ghats among public

3.1. Documenting the activities of the movement

In order to have an impact on all levels it is of great importance to document the movement and their activities. The material will be used in the advocacy campaigns as well as to raise awareness among the public.

3.2. Documenting the activities by the people dependent of the mountains (such as adivasis)

One way to help people understand the importance of saving Western Ghats is to tell them about the lives of the people who are dependent of the mountains. Many of those communities have lived here for generations and have the knowledge of how to protect the forests and mountains. Their knowledge needs to be valued, documented and disseminated.

3.3. Dissemination of material – posters, notices, pamphlets

The documentation and material produced under 3.2. and 3.3. will be disseminated through different actors in the movement.

7. Programme management

Western Ghats, which contains 53 districts across 6 states, is being divided into four zones: North Western Ghats, Central Western Ghats, South Central Western Ghats and South Western Ghats. Each of these four zones will have a local coordinator and an organisation who will make a plan of activities for the year. Keystone Foundation will be responsible for monitoring and reporting back to The Swallows.

8. Risk analysis

There are some internal and external risks when conducting this programme. The following risks have been identified:

Risk 1: Government change/ Minister of Environment is transferred

Minister of Environment, Jairam Ramesh, has taken a personal interest in the development of Western Ghats. If he gets transferred Save Western Ghats Movement will have to change its strategies. We realise that we should not depend on one person, but in India often individuals matter even if there is a system and institution in place.

Probability of risk: medium

Action: Save Western Ghats Movement will work to get good contacts with different governmental officials at different levels, in order not to be dependent of one or a few contacts.

Risk 2: Disagreements within the movement

When working in a movement there are always risks of disagreements and conflicts. This could be due to different opinions when it comes to strategies or perspectives.

Probability of risk: low

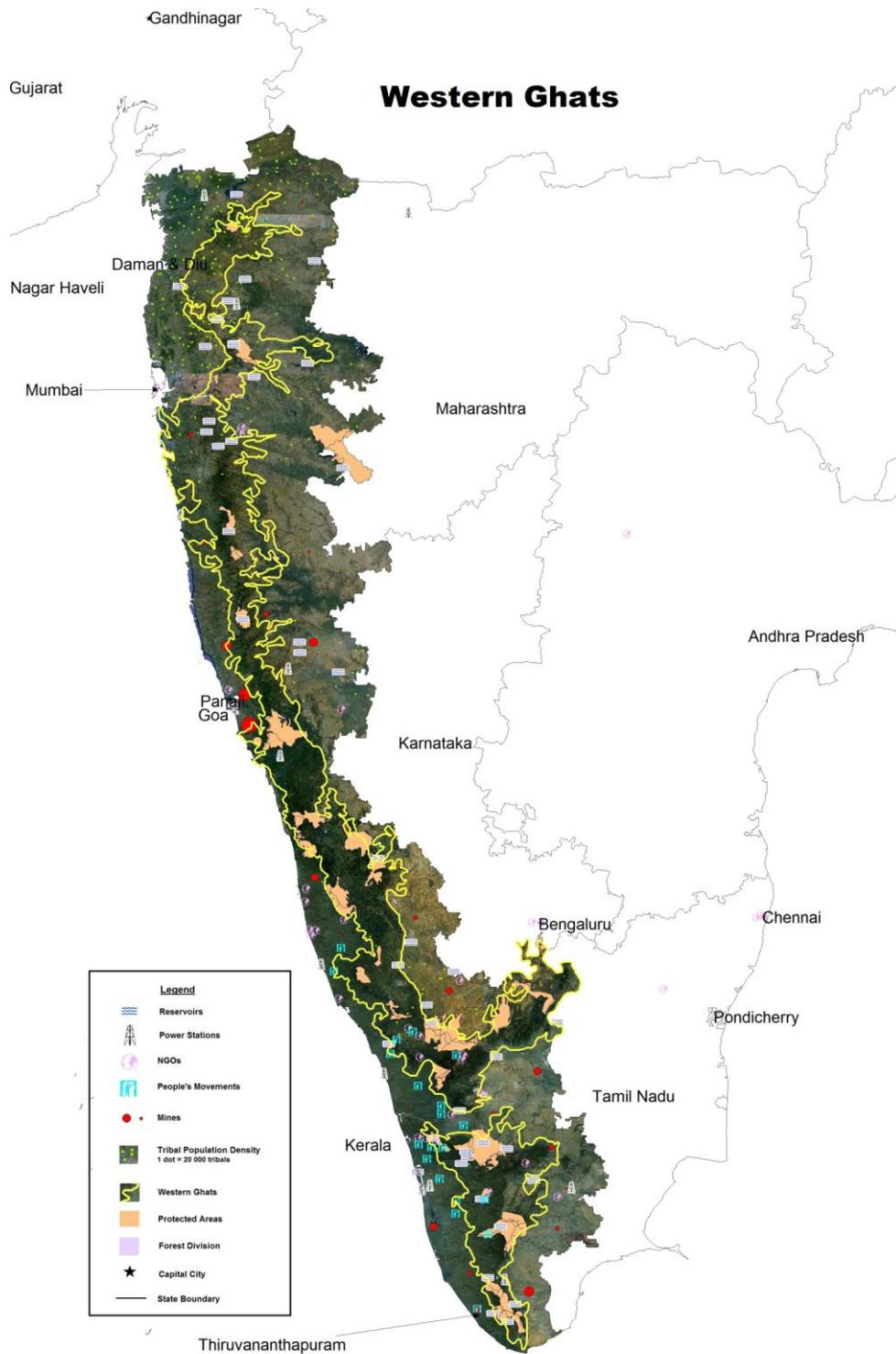
Action: Within the movement all actors are free to conduct their activities according to their strategies and perspectives and the diversity is the strength of the movement. Common activities will be inclusive so that different actors can participate and contribute.

Risk 3: Difficulties in coordinating the activities

Probability of risk: low to medium

Action: The activities within this programme will be coordinated and to a big extent carried out by core group members. This makes it easier to follow up and report on. Also, the core group will be very clear about different responsibilities already from the beginning of conducting the activities.

9. Map of Western Ghats



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