

**Study on issues relating to Sustainable Livelihood of
Tribals and Marginalised Sections in Sunabeda
Wildlife Sanctuary**

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Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary

Introduction:

The adoption of National Policy for wild life conservation in 1970 and subsequent enactment of 1972 wild life conservation act has led to significant growth in number of protected areas network within last three decades in India. From a mere 5 National Park and 60 Sanctuaries by the end of 1970s, the number of National park and Sanctuaries had grown up to 69 and 410 respectively by 1990(Bio-Diversity conservation report). In Orissa, 80% of the protected areas have been notified within last two decades. While expansion in number of wild life sanctuaries and national parks have helped to create a niche for the endangered species of flora and fauna to some extent, lack of regard for the life and livelihood of people inhabiting these areas since decades has led to many conflicting situations between man and Institutions responsible for conservation and management of protected areas. The wisdom gained from years of co-existence between the local Tribal groups and forest dwellers along with their immediate environment has not been explored properly and incorporated into the management plan of fragile Bio-Diverse areas. This has given rise to constant struggle between the wild life authorities and local forest dwellers staying in and around the protected areas to gain control over primary source of livelihood like NTFP and forest land in many wild life sanctuaries like Sunabeda, Karlapat, Chandaka etc. Instead of benefiting from the symbiotic relationship of people with their flora and fauna, the prevailing trend of governance of protected areas have emphasized on alienating the local people from their environment through stringent regulations. Though there has been gradual shift in the laws governing the management of protected areas from complete isolation of local people to their gradual inclusion through community reserve management committee (U/S 36D, The Wild life protection Amendment Act, 2002) lately, the policies pursued by the sanctuary authorities are yet to respond to such changes in all places with a positive spirit. Sunabeda wild life Sanctuary happens to be one of the most important wild life sanctuaries in Orissa as it has been in news for various reasons ranging from organized fight of the Tribal against restrictions over NTFP trading to its suitability for 2nd Tiger Reserve in the state.

Overview of the Sunabeda Sanctuary:

Sunabeda Sanctuary is located on the western side of the Nuapara District bordering Chattisgarh State within 82° 20' to 82° 34' 42" longitude and 20° 24' to 24° 44' latitude. It is at height of 2150 feet from mean sea level (A brief note on Sunabeda Wild Life Division, Mr.H.K.Bist, D.F.O, Sunabeda Division, 2001). The Sanctuary seem to be holding a unique appearance as the sunabeda plateau is placed on the hill top and contains flat land with plenty of edible grass. There are series of hill ranges running through Gatibeda and Patadhra forest blocks amidst which the sunabeda Plateau is located. Geographical area of the sanctuary embraces forests range of Nuapada and Komna blocks and comprises of around 600 Square Kilometer. The wildlife sanctuary harbors a great diversity of floral and faunal habitats with vast plateau and canyon like valleys. Dry deciduous forests along with eleven waterfalls adorn the length and breadth of the Sanctuary. The demarcated core and buffer Zone of the sanctuary contain 243.60 Square Kilometer and 356.40 Square Kilometer respectively (Brochure on Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary, Forest Department, Government of Orissa). Plans are afoot to increase the core area by 100 Square Kilometer and buffer zone by around 200 Square Kilometer for the proposed Tiger Reserve. However, the controversy surrounding the revenue villages within the sanctuary area has restrained the wild life authorities to go

ahead with their plans. There are 64 villages within the Sanctuary area; out of which 30 villages are revenue villages and rest of the villages are identified as encroached villages. Around 20000 people most of whom are Tribal inhabit these areas and depend mostly on forest produces and cultivation on forestlands for their subsistence. Like many other sanctuaries of the state, settlement of land and rehabilitation of villagers dwelling within the core area has become a big bone of contention for villagers of sunabeda too.

Area and Management:

The Sunabeda wild life Division was created during January 1985 vide Notification No. 16045-FFAH dated 26th July 1983 and Final Notification No. 10772-FFAH dated 10th may 1988(A Brief Note on Sunabeda Wildlife Division, Mr.H.K Bisht. D.F.O, Sunabeda Wild life Division).

The Sanctuary comprises of 6 forest Blocks having a series of hill ranges running through them.

Sl.No	Name of the Forest Block	Area in Hecters
1	Patidongar Block (Full)	3999.36
2	Patdhara Block (Part)	11814.40
3	Gatibeda Block (Full)	28068.40
4	Manikgarh Block (Full)	3904.20
5	Lodra Block (Part)	540.00
6	Ranimal Block (Full)	2628.76

(Source: A Brief Note on Sunabeda Wild life Division: DFO, Sunabeda Division, 2001)

Earlier the whole area was under the control of Divisional Forest Office, Khariar (Territorial Division) which was transferred to the wild life division on 20.11.1990. The Sanctuary is divided into two ranges namely Nuapada and Komna. There is one section namely Katingpani with headquarters at Dharambandha in Nupada wild life range namely Cherchuan and Sunabeda.

Hill Ranges:

The hill ranges of Gatibera and Patadhara forest Blocks in the West form a long chain of Mountains. Some of the main hills of this area are Solhadongar , Deota Dongar(717 meter), Supkondongar(882 Meter) , Rasdongar(871 meter) , Maradongar(827 Meter) and Budharaja Dongar(731 Meter) and they are all arranged as long impenetrable blocks(Life in Sunabeda Plateue, N.Pattanaik. P.K.Mohanty and T.Sahoo, Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute). The Sunabeda Plateau is located in the Gotibera forest blocks and most of the Bhunjia Tribal families are dwelling in this area.

The second series of hill ranges of Patidongar(632 Meter) run parallel to the hill ranges running through the Gotibera and Patadhara forest Blocks . In the south it is intercepted by Udanti River.

Manikgarh hill range extends in a semicircular direction and meets the common boundary of Patidongar , Patadhara, and Gotibera Blocks near Chereichuan village .

The hill range of Lodra originates near the village of Lodra and runs through the village limits of Jhalap, Tikrapara and Golabandh in a semicircular way and meets the origin of Patidongar.

Water Sources:

The major sources of water are some important rivers like Jonk, Sundar, Indra, Udanti and number of water falls present in the first three rivers at Gatibera, Patadhara, Manikgarh and Pati Dongar forest blocks.

Some of the important water falls are Kharaldhas(50 meter) and Seniadhas (25 meter) on the Jonk river, Gaidhas(25 meter) , Parewadarha fall(22 meter) on the Indra river .

The jonk river is the main river which originates from the Patadhara Forest blocks and flows in the heart of Sonabera Plateau and drains out the major areas of Gotibera forest Block, Manikgarh, Ranimal , Lodra and Patidongara .

All the rivers are narrow in the upland hill regions, but in the lower regions they are shallow with wider banks. The sundar and Jonk Rivers have very constricted watercourse. During summer the water gets confined to few places in some pools.

Rainfall:

The average annual rainfall varies from 1100 mm -1300mm.

Floral and Faunal Diversity:

Important flora of this dry deciduous forest include Piasal, Bija, Sisoo, Teak, Harida, Amala, Mahul, Bahada, Kendu, Karada, Dhaura, Sidha, Salai, Char, Mai, Kumbhi, Jamun, Salia Bamboo, Many varieties of succulent shrubs and palatable grasses .About 70% of the forests are located on the western and south-western portion of the area(Life in Sunabeda Platue, Pattaniak, Mohanty and Sahoo) . The forests are mainly of northern tropical dry mixed deciduous type. Sal forests of poor type are present in Sunabera and Patadhar Block along with other some other species like Bija, Sahaj, Dhaura, Sisoo and Harida. Teak predominates in most of the areas of Ranimal Block. The Natural Teak forests generally associated with the area contain important species like *Ternalius*, *Pterocerpus marsupiam*, *Adina cardifolia*, *Anogeissus latifolia* and *Dendrocalamus Strictus*. **It is important to note here that Khariar Range of forests is the only area in Orissa that form a natural Teak belt with the adjoining areas of Chattisgarh (Klahandi District Gazetteer, pp 150).** Salia Baunsa is found extensively in areas of Ranimal, Gatibera, Manikgarh and portions of Patadhara block. The bamboo forests have been degraded in many places due to illicit felling and removal of young shoots. The Paharia Tribe is found near the long patches of bamboo and depends heavily on bamboo product selling for their livelihood. Other local Tribal people also use bamboo shoots (Karadi) and Hanclua(Dried bamboo shoots)for their food stuffs. Increasing pressure on bamboo has started thinning once rich bamboo patches in the valley. The dense vegetation cover of this area has been degraded a lot due to intrusion of Timber mafia and contractors from outside. The practice of Podu cultivation among the Bhunjia had also added to the process of deforestation in many interior dense areas. However, presently the practice has been contained to a large extent.

The faunal diversity of the Sunabeda sanctuary include varieties of endangered species of animals like Royal Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Wild buffalo, Barasingha, Sambar, Gaur, Barking Deer, Chital, Porcupine, Hyena Wild boar, Langur, Rhesus Monkey etc. Apart from the above-mentioned species of animals there are varieties of birds like Hill Myna, Peafowl, Red Jungle fowl, Partridge, Green-pigeon, Coots, Snakebird, and Open billed stork, fishing eagles etc. are also seen to be occupying different areas of the sanctuary.

Some of the species like wild buffalo and swamp deer are on a wane as the habitats have been severely affected. It is reported in many Travelogue and literature on the wild life Sanctuary that the area had wild buffalos around 70 years back. However, these buffalos seem to have moved to Udanti Wild life Sanctuary in Chattisgarh, which is around 20 Kms from the Patadhra Forest Block of Sunabeda wild life Sanctuary. The narrow gap and advantageous location of these two sanctuaries have led many experts to suggest that buffer zones of these two sanctuaries need to be extended up to state borders for better conservation (P.C, Kotawal, Hornbill Travelogue, 1997, Page 24-27).

SI No	Animal Species	Total Nos
1	Royal Bengal Tiger	32
2	Leopard	40
3	Wolves	271
4	Wild Dog	163
5	Bear	282
6	Elephant	
7	Bison	45
8	Sambar	168
9	Spotted Deer	152
10	Barking Deer	336
11	Chowsingha	23
12	Nilgai	86
13	RH.Macaque	595
14	H.langur	510
15	Mongoose	270
16	G.Hornbill	118
17	P.Hornbill	160
18	Hyena	392
19	Wild Boar	926

History of destruction of forest Resources:

The forest area of ex-Zamindari of Khariar was once rich in Teak and other major species like Sal,Bija ,Sisoo , Harida, Amala etc. The forests of Khariar are the only area in the state, which forms a part of the Natural Teak belt of Chattisgarh. It once boasted of the best Teak quality in the whole area. But leasing out of forests during ex-Zamindari period of Khariar to the contractors, led to reckless felling of valuable Timber species (District Gazetteer, Kalahandi, page 150). The process of destruction continued unabated after the abolition of estate as the lease to contractors continued through the OFDC. As Rameswar Majhi of

Bharuamunda , tried to recollect the past memories, his voice was filled with nostalgia .He said, “Amar mane nibe eka Ramji contractor bagir bada bada contractor lagi katha katu thilu . Gaon thanu bohot loke ke majuri hemane lagau thile . Rata rat kete kath enu truck te load hai kari jau thila tar hisab nai naa. Forester bale bhi jani kari sabu jibar lagi deu thile . Khariar batu kath par kari deu thile “. Even some of the species like Valuable teaks from the natural Teak belt of Ranimal and Gotibera forest blocks got destroyed by the this leasing process to private contractors right from the ex-Zamindari period to management of OFDC through coop system. As this belt of Khariar was adjacent to the border state of Madhyapradesh, Timbers used to be smuggled through this area by organized Timber mafia. Villagers in Kermeli too narrated the exploits of some of the famous contractors like Ramji Patel of Khariar and other forest contractors from the area. Some of the tree species like Sal, Piasal, Kalmi, Haldo and Teak seem to have been affected more than other species.

There also seemed to be plenty of wild animals that used to roam around the forests of Sunabeda around 30 years back. In fact people claim to have witnessed more Animals earlier like Deer's, Tigers, Wild boars, wild buffalos etc then. But they attribute the reduction of such wild variety of animals to the illegal poaching by the forest contractors. According to locals, the forest contractors used to kill animal with the full knowledge of some forest officials during their visit to coops as it provided them plenty of opportunity to disguise their shikars.

History of Protected Area Status and Contradictions:

The process of final notification of Sunabeda wild life Sanctuary and inclusion of Revenue villages within the boundary of the sanctuary is fraught with inherent contradictions. Declaration of first notification for wild life Sanctuary as per official notification dates back to 26th July 1983 vide letter no.16045/FFAH and the final notification was issued on 10th May 1988 vide letter no. 10772/FFAH. The prevailing law for governance of protected areas says that the collector should proceed to determine, proclaim the boundaries of Sanctuary and settle rights of people (Within the purview of u/s19 to 25 of Wild life protection Act, 1972) before acquisition of revenue land or their inclusion within the boundary of Sanctuary. But in Sunabeda, the demarcated boundary of the wild life sanctuary area was first declared vide office order no. 5023 dated 15.11.97 by the collector of Nuapada, which is around nine years after the final notification of the area as Wild life sanctuary. If the area had been falling completely within reserve forest then only the wild life authorities could have skipped the legal procedure of settling rights of people living within. This provision applies in case of reserve forests and determination of rights u/s19-25 is not required as no private right is expected to exist there and can be automatically declared as sanctuary u/s 26 A. But in case of Sunabeda wild life sanctuary, the initiation of settlement of rights should not have been delayed, as the area doesn't come under any reserve forest or territorial water (Letter of the collector dated 17th December, 2000, Bearing letter no. 5440). Presently there are four Gram Panchayats namely Sunabeda, Soseng, Bharuamunda and Kermeli consisting of 30 Revenue villages, which are coming under sanctuary area. Apart from these procedural contradictions with respect to settlement of rights of people staying within the boundary of the sanctuary, there are many differences between the Revenue department and the wild life department regarding the demarcated boundary of the sanctuary and the Revenue villages contained within it.

The letter issued by the District collector of Nuapada to the Chief of wild life warden on 17th December 2000(Letter addressed to Chief of wild life warden by the collector, letter no.

5440, courtesy: Viswas) clearly states that the procedures adopted for declaration of wild life sanctuary were not in accordance with certain provisions of the wild life protection Act. He also strongly refuted the suggestions of the wild life D.F.O to stall small development works undertaken by the Panchayat Samiti under the drought relief measures. His letter further revealed that the District Forest Officer was opposed to the settlement of land in favour of Tribal living in the area prior to 1980 on the grounds of wild life sanctuary. The major contention was that the collector had been directed to settle such forest lands used by Tribal prior to 1980(Through various Govt. orders) while the wild life authorities were opposed to any further settlement of land within the sanctuary area (u/s 20 Bar of accrual of rights) after the declaration of intention. Other major fact, which is hard to ignore, is that most of the Tribal living within sanctuary boundary have been cultivating on forestlands since several decades. In the absence of Reserve status of the forests in past, the claims of Tribal cultivating on forestlands prior to 1980 also makes a strong case for settlement of lands in their name. The inhabitants of Sunabeda (Studied village in Katingpani, Bhawsil, Bharuamunda, Kermali) claimed that the Revenue department in 1988 had initiated a detail survey and settlement of encroached forestland, which was later abandoned due to mounting pressure from wildlife department.

Human Habitation:

The Sanctuary contains around 22000 human population and 5660 families within the sanctuary boundary. The majorities of the population are Scheduled Tribes (Around 87%) and comprise of Gond, Bhunjia and Paharia Tribes. Though the Paharias have not been included within the Scheduled Tribes list in Orissa, they have been included in the list of Scheduled Tribes status in the neighboring Chattisgarh state since long.

Four Gram Panchayats namely Sunabeda, Soseng, Bharuamunda and Kermali comprising of 23 revenue villages are located completely within the demarcated Sanctuary boundary. While some of the villages of 2 more Panchayats from the Nuapada Block namely Dharambandha and Chulabhat and 3 Panchayats namely Siharlati, Michapali, and Pendarban are coming partially within the boundary of the sanctuary area.

Five Revenue villages and ten encroached villages are in the core area of the sanctuary. The details of total population and households are given below.

Revenue villages in the Core area

Sl No.	Name of the villages	Total house holds (No)	Scheduled Caste (No.)	Scheduled Tribes (population)	Total population
1	Rupiam	50	Nil	205	205
2	Talabela	20	Nil	94	94
3	Kokar	10		37	37
4	Sibanarainpur	6		27	27
5	Jalmurai	12		78	78

Encroached villages in the core area:

Sl No.	Name of the villages	Total No of House holds	Scheduled caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total population
1	Datunama	30	Nil	103	103
2	Khadanga	Uninhibited			
3	Theripali	12	Nil	70	70
4	Gambharipani	17	Nil	73	73
5	Chandrasil	2	Nil	11	11
6	Chakola	13	Nil	80	80
7	Bora	Uninhibited			
8	Badajhola	12	Nil	51	51
9	Gdagoda	20	Nil	87	87
10	Bimbata	1	Nil	5	5

(Source: Wild life department of Orissa, PCCF office)

The opinion of the people regarding the core area however differs from that of the area and villages demarcated by the wild life department. The whole of Sunabeda Panchayat which was later divided into two Panchayats namely Sunabeda and Soseng are located in the core area of the Sanctuary. Though majority of the villages of these Panchayats have not yet been included in the core area, they are likely to be added when the much publicized 2nd Tiger reserve of the state gets sanctioned. The wild life department has proposed some changes in the area of core and buffer zone for the forthcoming Tiger Reserve. As the issue is quite contentious at the backdrop of many organized demonstrations by the local level people's organizations, these plans have not yet been implemented.

There are 34 villages, which are being recognized as encroached villages by the wild life department. Most of these villages have substantial human population and almost 90% of them are included in the voters list. The revenue department recognizes 12 unsurveyed villages to have existed since centuries and proposals for survey of two villages namely Dhekunpani and Jharlong is pending before the board of Revenue Orissa, Cuttack for long (Letter of the collector). This clearly hints that the Revenue Department recognizes the existence of such villages since long within the Sanctuary area and doesn't entirely support the claim of the wild life department of terming them as encroached villages.

Major Tribes of the Plateau and their cultural Traditions

Bhunjia Tribe:

Bhunjia is a small Tribe, which is found in the Nawapara District and the neighboring Raipur District of newly formed Chattisgarh State. Around 76% of the Bhunjia Tribes of the state are located in the Nawapara District (District gazetteer, Kalahandi, page 93). According to the tribe, the term Bhunjia means growing out of land, and the bhunjias believe that they were the forerunners of those who were born on the land. The bhunjias belong to the Dravidian group and are divided into two sections namely Chakutia and Chinda Bhunjia. The Chakutia bhunjias mainly inhabit the Sonabera plateau and are regarded as the original section of the bhunjia population. Chinda bhunjias are scattered in plains and continuously come in contact with other Tribal and non-Tribal population. The dialect is a mixture of Oriya and Chattisgarh. Influence of Chattisgarh culture is also apparent from their dress pattern. Child

marriage is very much prevalent among the Chakutias as they prefer pre-puberty marriage. Son is preferred over girls. Marriage from the same lineage is not allowed and most of the marriages are arranged marriages. After the marriage the girl is not allowed to return to her parent's house. Chakutia Bhunjia used to practice shifting cultivation earlier in some of the hill ranges of Gotibera and Patadhara Blocks.

The Chakutia Bhunjias accord high sacred status to the Kitchen sheds and usually fence it so that the outsiders cannot touch it. In case any outsider touches even by mistake then it is set on fire. The use of tile roof or Khapar is also a taboo among the Chakutias and no such roof is seen among the tribes in the valley. When the Inspection Bungalow built by the Forest department used the Tile roofs during its construction it had been strongly objected by the Chakutias. However, their weakness for tea was later used by the department to persuade them.

Gond:

The Gonds are the other major Tribes of the area who are able to speak Oriya apart from their own language Gondi. Gonds have been dwelling in most part of the Sunabeda along with the Bhunjias. The marriages between relatives of different clans are encouraged among the gonds. Some of the Traditions like Bhuasuni provide women the choice of choosing their mates where she is sent on a trial basis to her future in-laws. Her convenience in her future in-laws house determine the prospect of the marriage. Apart from this, either the bride or the groom party can visit each other's village for conducting the marriage as per the convenience. Gonds are mostly settled cultivators and depend on agriculture and forest produces for their livelihood.

Pharias:

Pharias have been accorded the Scheduled Tribes status in the neighboring Chattisgarh State where as in Orissa they are not in the Scheduled Tribes category. They mainly prefer to stay in the place of bamboos stretches, as they are very skilled bamboo weavers and basket builders. They depend heavily on bamboo products selling for their livelihood.

Natural Resources and related livelihood options:

The major livelihood options for the Tribal people of the Sunabeda sanctuary are consumption and selling of forest produces and cultivation on forestland. Lack of other livelihood sources and poor connectivity with the outside world has prompted people to coexist with their nature and draw their source of living from them. Collection and selling of NTFP like Mahul, Kendu leaves, Char, Amala, Harida, Bahada, Sal leaves etc provided them the opportunity to supplement their income significantly. On an average the selling of NTFP ensured 4-5 months of livelihood security for each family in the area. Abundance of varieties of NTFP and their proper processing at the household level had helped to grow a traditionally well developed market over the years in some of the important villages like Kermeli, Bharuamunda, etc. Traders from far off places frequented the place to collect the NTFPs from the doorsteps of people and bartered them with paddy and other food grains. The volume of trading can be gauged from the fact that traders visited the place with truck loads of grain to collect invaluable NTFPs. This kind of traditional informal network also provided ample opportunity for Pharia Tribes to sell their bamboo products to the outside traders during their visit. It is estimated that NTFPs (Like Mahul, Chahar, Harada, Kendu leave etc) worth

35 Lakhs rupees used to be traded before the imposition of restriction in 2000(Oriya Daily, Prajatantra, Dated 17th July 2002). Apart from other items of NTFP, availability of large quantity of Kendu leaves had prompted the Government to set up 22 Phadis for collection of Kendu leaf within the sanctuary area. Dhaniram majhi, who previously worked as a phadi in one of phadis at Katingpani revealed that each person involved in Kendu leaf plucking earned around 5000 Rs on an average each year .It appeared to be a dynamic process that involved interactions at various levels for economic transactions. The Tribal people of the area use timbers for construction of their houses, firewood for cooking, bamboos for fencing, roofing and making small handicraft items and grasses for thatching their roof.

Apart from the heavy dependence of people on forest produces, majority of people in four panchayats have been cultivating on forestlands since last five-six decades. Cultivation on these encroached lands has been supplementing the livelihood of the people, as the magnitude of revenue land possessed by people is very less. Sample data collection in some of the selected villages of four panchayats namely Sunabeda, Kermeli, Bharuamunda and Soseng depicts magnitude of forestlands since last four decades.

SI No.	Gram Panchayat	Name of the village	Total No. Of House holds	No. of house holds encroached forest lands	Total land encroached
1	Bharuamunda	Bharuamunda	154	37	74.96
2		Chitidora	36	35	69.9
3		Katingpani	102	77	181.54
4	Kermeli	Golabandha	92	39	63.73
5		Kankermanji	108	77	223.56
6		Pethiapali	79	60	196.78
7	Sunabeda	Shibanarayanpur	16	16	40
8		Jamgaon	83	67	187.33
9		Tlabela	20	3	11
10		Jhallarama	34	34	155.26
11	Soseng	Rupiam	54	53	318.15
12		Deosil	53	48	222.5
13		Adar	66	57	306.24
14		Soseng	127	74	210.31
		Bhawsil	45	30	137.67

(Source: Survey Conducted by Local NGO, VISWAS)

Even during erstwhile Zamindari system of Khariar, the Tribal had access to some un prohibited species like Dha, Amala, Karda, Salai, Arjun etc of two feet girth. There were provisions of royalty for accessing Tree species of some prohibited species like Saguana, Bija, Sisoo, Sal, Bandhan, and Achu of more than two feet girth. Details of these rights and concessions enjoyed by the local Tribal over forests and forest produces are mentioned in the “Wazib-ul-urz” of the Ex-Zamindari system (Life in Sunabera Plateau by N.Pattanaik,

P.K.Mohanty and T.Sahoo, Page 29). Analysis of these rights and concessions also reveal that people had the access to fruit bearing trees despite the ultimate right of Zamindar over the trees. Only while selling fruits derived from such trees they were supposed to sell fruits to contractors appointed by Zamindar. Tribal staying there also had the right to use small and miscellaneous trees of girth up to 2 feet. It is quite obvious that the erstwhile Zamindari system was aware of people's dependence on their natural resources and had made provisions that suited the administration without encroaching upon the customary rights of people much. Even after the abolition of the Zamindari system people had access over the NTFP, fuel wood, and forestlands for cultivation, which together provided them major share of their livelihood.

Village Bhawsil:

Bhawsil is a Revenue village, which earlier came under Sunabeda Panchayat and Komna Block. But after the division of Sunabeda Panchyat, it now comes under the Soseng panchayat. The village comprises of 45 households and the major Tribe of the village is Bhunjia.

The major livelihood source of the village is collection and selling of NTFP. The major NTFPs available in the area are Mahula, Char, Amala, Harida, Kendu leaf etc. Collection and selling of NTFP provided them around 5-6 months of their income and livelihood source. Selling of Kendu leaf and Mahula used to be the main source of their income before the imposition of restrictions by the Sanctuary Authorities. Abundance of Large quantity of NTFP in the area had turned this village into one of the major markets for the traders from outside. Mahula used to be bartered with food grains like paddy, Dal etc. As Gopal Bhunjia revealed the scale of trading, his deep moorings for the weekly market and its lost glory was quite evident " Agru amake kensithane jibar lagi nai padu thai, bepari mane nije asuthile, 10 Kg Mahul ke 15 Kg dhan bepari mankar thanu miluthila. Amar gaon ne bahut lok henta mahul deikari dhan pau thile. Tulsi ram 10-12 quintal dhan pai thila. Ehade sabu band kari deichan. ame aru mahul , Kendu patar kichi biki nai parbar . Chalbar lagi bahut asubidha heuche ". The restrictions on NTFP trading have brought down the rates of all products. Closure of Kendu leaf phadis has also affected their income significantly as around 60% of the families were involved in Kendu leaf plucking.

All together 11 families have land Pattas for agricultural land and 14 families have homestead land in the village from the previous land settlement during. The last land settlement process had been initiated during 1988 in the village and the Revenue department had carried out a detail survey. 12 Tribal families had been identified for disbursement of land pattas. However, the process was letter abandoned due to pressure from Sanctuary authorities. The Sanctuary authorities were opposed to any new settlement of land.

Some development programmes like construction of Water Harvesting Structures have also been initiated in the village through a local development agency namely Chakutia Bhunjia Development Agency with support from WORLP. Though the major supporting agency for the project happened to be another government department, Sanctuary authorities tried to prevent to access the naturally available building materials within the sanctuary like stone, sand etc.

Village: Katingpani

Katingpani came under Bharuamunda Panchayat, which is in buffer Zone. It consists of 102 households, out of which 20 households belong to Gond Tribes, 40 households belong to Bhunjia Tribes, 40 households to Pahadia Tribe, 1 household to Mali caste and 1 household to general caste. The Gond Tribes had migrated to this area from Bolangir around 200 years back.

The majority of Gonds depended on forestland cultivation, while the Bhunjias Primary occupation remained collection and selling of NTFP. The practice of forestland cultivation was followed by most of the families in the village since many decades. Around 77 families in the village cultivated an estimated land up to 181 Acres of forestland (Survey conducted by Viswas, A local NGO). Detail survey of encroached forestland had also been completed in this village by the Revenue Department for settlement of land in the name of claimants during 1988. However, this process was letter stopped after final notification of Sanctuary.

The Bhunjias and the Pahadias are highly dependent on forest produces for their livelihood security. The regulation on collection and trading of NTFP within the sanctuary area forced people to carry their collected items to the outside. But while carrying the NTFP items outside, they were either forced to pay bribe or face the humiliation caused by guards and other officials.

Impact of regulations on livelihood options and rights over Natural Resources:

The first major decision that affected the Tribal profoundly was the restrictions imposed by the then D.F.O, Mr. H.K. Bist, on collection and selling of NTFP within the sanctuary from March 2000 (Oriya Daily, Samaja, Dated 17th July, 2000). Restrictions kept on growing and orders for immediately stopping collection of NTFP within the sanctuary area from Wild life department in the month of August 2000, further increased the drive of forest officials to restrict collection and trading of such items. These restrictions stifled the major source of livelihood of the people staying within the sanctuary area and disrupted the customary trading practices in the village market. Traders were prevented to get inside the sanctuary and people carrying even food grains were harassed. All the 22 Kendu leaf Phadis were also closed down forcing Kenduleaf pluckers of Sunabeda and Soseng Panchayat to travel as far as Barkot (The kendu leaf hadi of Barkot is around 30-35 Kms from these two Pnchayats). The pluckers of Kermali and Bharuamunda Panchayat also had to travel to Phadis at Kholsa and Juria, which are around 10 Kms from these areas. Further, the restrictions within the sanctuary area for trading of NTFP also brought down the rates of forest produce, as there were few byres for the unsold materials. These changes led to lot of hardship on the part of the inhabitants of the Sunabeda sanctuary, as they had to grapple with the scarce livelihood resources and constant anxiety resulting out of conflicts with forest officials.

Difference in the rate of selected NTFP items before and after the regulation on Trading

Sl No.	Name of the NTFP Item	Previous Rates per Kg in Rs	Present Rtes per Kg in Rs
1	Harida	2.50-3	1.50
2	Bahada	1-1.5	0.50
3	Amala	10	6-7
4	Chhar	20-25	10-12
5	Mahul	7.00	3-3.5

(Source: Interaction with the community members from Bhuasil Village)

The Incidence of Conflicts:

The history of management and governance of Sunabeda Wild life Sanctuary is replete with events of simmering conflict between the wild life officials and the Tribal of Sunabeda. While some of the conflicting events have been reported due to efforts of the media and voluntary organizations, there are many that missed the attention of either the media or any civil society organizations. Sometimes the extent of regulation and restrictive measures applied by the wild life department seem to have crossed the boundary of fundamental rights of one of the most marginalized section of the society. Further, the attempt of the wild life division to stifle the access of people to major source of livelihood in the region has flared up the conflicts. Since the wild life department has not been able to evict people without settling their rights from so many revenue villages, it has tried several times to exert pressure by squeezing their livelihood options and containing their free movements. The officials of Wild life division had earlier tried to stall the developmental programmes like Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana and many other small earthworks taken as drought relief measures through Gram Panchayat in the year 2000. First they tried to request the collector to stifle the power of Gram panchayats to regulate the collection and trading of NTFP and stall all development works executed through Panchayat (As is evident from the letter written by collector to PCCF, Dated 17th December 2000). But when the revenue department expressed its inability to scuttle the powers of Gram Panchyat, the officials of the wild life department resorted to other measures of intimidation. Any form of land development undertaken by people living within the sanctuary area was prevented and false cases were also registered against woodcutters and grazers for possessing arms. On 25th July 2002, two forest guards and fourteen hired goons beat up eight Tribal grazers severely in Sunabeda Panchayat and destroyed large quantity of Milk products (The Oriya Daily, Samaj, Dated 7th August, 2002). There are instances where the grazers were severely harassed and beaten up for grazing their herd inside the sanctuary. In an effort to prevent Collection and selling of NTFP, the primary gatherers were also periodically harassed. Two months before the destruction of the forest check gates by agitating Tribal on 2 April 2001, a basket containing Harida from one old women namely Chamren Harijan of Kermeli Village was snatched away by wild life officials (The Oriya daily, Samaj, dated 4th April, 2001). The old women had gone to fetch some medicines for her terribly sick son. Similarly another women namely Marin Majhi and aged around 60 years was beaten up severely by Wildlife officials while taking some NTFP over her head. These incidents of excesses by wild life officials had set the stage for a major conflict, which later broke out in the form of destruction of check gates in April 2001. The restriction on mobility of people through the check gates has also witnessed many conflicts. Nal Singh Majhi of Bhaumunda had a major scuffle with the guards on 1st March 2004, while bringing the emergency feeding material for one Anganwadi center located inside the Sanctuary. Many times the Tribal have complained that the manner of searches conducted by the guards at the check gates make them feel vulnerable.

Organized Response of the Tribal people for ensuring their right to livelihood:

The notice for declaring the intention of Sanctuary had prompted people of Bharuamunda and Kermali Panchayat to visit the District collector (The District then came under Kalahandi District) in a group to inquire about the whole issue during 1983-84. Though people couldn't meet the collector then, they were able to meet the then Additional District Magistrate. The ADM sent them back after convincing about the benefits of the proposed sanctuary for their area. One local NGO namely Viswas (Ekta Parishad also provided issue based support from

time to time) operating in the area , had also played an active role in facilitating their interaction with people from other sanctuaries like Satkosia, Bhitara Kanika, Karlapat etc by conducting a meeting at Kuchiejor of Khandi District during 1987-88. Interaction with people from other Sanctuaries helped people of Sunabeda to understand the issues prevailing in other areas and helped them to foresee the kind of problem they were likely to face if their villages were included within the proposed Sanctuary. However, the process of organization of the Tribal inhabiting the Sunabeda plateau had not assumed any shape until 2000, when the customary rights enjoyed by them over NTFP for centuries was suddenly restricted by the wildlife authorities. The stringent regulations applied by the wild life department on selling of NTFP in 2000 and their subsequent effect on their livelihood induced people of four panchayats to organize themselves. Thus, *Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini*, a local level peoples organization came in to being to signify the struggle of people for ensuring their livelihood rights. Panchayat level committees consisting of representatives from each village and Block Level committees were formed and regular meetings were held to decide the strategy for dealing with the NTFP, regularization of forestland and other issues. Apart from taking up major issues, the people's organization also played a vital role in bringing harassment cases by forest guards to the notice of the wildlife department. These organized efforts enabled the voiceless Tribal of Sunabeda to catch the attention of the District Administration, Media, Politicians, Civil Society organizations and Wildlife department. Endeavors of the wild life department to apply the wildlife protection Act through restrictions, fears and harassments without understanding the customary rights enjoyed by Tribal over forests, were met with stiff resistance. These demonstrations might not have helped the poor Tribal of Sunabeda to secure their previous rights enjoyed by them over forests entirely but they have definitely helped to assert their rights to some extent. For instance, Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini along with the elected representatives of Kermali Gram Panchayat, have managed to open a weekly hat at Kermali for Trading of NTFP within the Sanctuary boundary from January 28th, 2004 (This has not been opposed by the wild life authorities despite the fact that trading of NTFP is prohibited u/s 29 of The Amended Wild life protection Act, 2003 and the department had taken stringent measures earlier).

The order of major events organized in response to the regulations of Wild life department:

- The Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini organized a massive rally on 28th February 2001, in the District Headquarter of Nuapada to protest against the regulations imposed by wild life department on NTFP collection and Trading.
- One written complaint containing the signatures of all primary gatherers to lift the ban on NTFP collection and gathering was also submitted to the then D.F.O in charge of Wildlife Division.
- Then again on 17th March 2001, another rally consisting of around 3000 Tribal from four Panchayats was organized by the Sunabeda Sangharsha Bahini to protest against the regulation on NTFP collection and selling (The Oriya daily, Samaj, Dated 31st March 2001, Prajatantra, Dated 28th March 2001, 25th March 2001, Samay). Apart from the Tribal men, Women and children, elected representatives like Sarpanches (From Kermali, Bharuamunda and Sunabeda panchayat) and most of the ward members had participated in the rally. A memorandum was submitted to the District collector reflecting the demands of the Tribals like lifting of regulations on NTFP collection and trading, regularization of forestlands, continuation of all regular development works executed through

Panchayat, initiation of joint effort between the wildlife department and community members for conservation etc, and 15 days time was given to the administration to address their problems. A Separate draft depicting the problems faced by the Tribal of Sunabeda Sanctuary due to regulation on NTFP collection was also sent to the Chief Minister through the sub collector on 7th March 2001(The Oriya Daily, Sambad, Dated 14th July). It was cited in the memorandum presented to the collector that they were facing severe constraints due to the draught of previous years and would be forced to break the wild life protection law if steps were not taken to ensure their livelihood rights.

- As the wildlife department or the District administration within next fifteen days took no step, thousands of Tribal broke the check gates at Kermeli, Chereichuan and Bharuamunda on 2nd April 2001 and sold their collected NTFPs in the presence of forest and police officials. Though the forest or police officials avoided getting into direct confrontation seeing the mood of people at that moment, letter non-bailable warrants were issued in the name of 19 Tribal leaders of Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini and representatives of Viswas.
- After issuance of non-bailable warrants, representatives of Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini along with representatives of Viswas met the chief minister and the forest secretary and apprised them of the ground situation prevailing there and constraints faced by the Tribal of Sunabeda there. The Chief Minister had assured the Tribal representatives that their problems would be looked in to and proper steps would be taken to address their problems.
- The meeting of representatives of Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini with the forest secretary and the Chief Minister had its affect as the District Administration on the insistence of the then Chief of Wild Life Warden, Mr. Saroj Pattnaik, organized another meeting at Sunabeda. The meeting was held on 19th April 2001 and was attended by Sarpanches, local leaders, Mr. Basant Panda (M.LA), CWW, District Collector, Local NGOs, Block Chairman and representatives of Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini. The CWW had then promised that joint wild life committees involving the community members and wildlife officials would be formed and the committee would sit every three months to review the situation. He had also promised that vehicles ferrying through the check gate would be spared from paying tax during the festivals and social function of residents of Sunabeda (The Oriya Daily, April 22, 2001). People were also assured that the cases registered against them would be withdrawn after consultation with the S.P. However, neither the promises of the CWW nor some positive efforts of the then District Collector, Mr.Bishnupada Sethi, could help to resolve the issue. The change of the District Collector pulled back the efforts initiated to resolve the issue and hence proved that there was no plan at the institutional level to address the problem in its proper context.
- The Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini organized series of protest rallies and meetings against the regulations imposed by the wildlife authorities after the talks failed to resolve their problems. Even a press conference was organized on 7th June to warn the Government that if cases were not withdrawn against 19 people, all Tribal would through the jail and get arrested.

- Selling of Kendu leaf used to be one of the major sources of livelihood of the area and closure of 22 Kendu leaf Phadis had caused lot of hardships for Kendu leaf pluckers. The organized effort of the Tribal in the area helped to raise the Kendu leaf issue to the fore. Massive support of the people and Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini helped the Kendu leaf pluckers to sell Kendu leaf worth 3 lakh rupees at Khoksa and Juria Phadi in 2002, which are located just outside the sanctuary boundary.
- The destruction of Kendu leaf worth one lakh thirty five thousand due to imposition of sudden restriction by the D.F.O in 2003, prompted all the kendu leaf pluckers and members of Sunabeda Sangharsa Bahini to take out a protest rally on 18th may 2003. A charter of demand for easing the restriction from Kendu leaf pluckers was produced before the District Collector. The District collector assured the community leaders and the Kenduleaf pluckers that adequate measures would be taken during the Kendu leaf-plucking season in 2004.
- A weekly hat for trading of NTFP was started from January, 28th 2004 at Kermeli, which falls within the Sanctuary boundary and is just few yards away from one of main entrance check post erected by the wild life department.

Conflicting trend of Governance by Revenue and Wild life Division over the area:

The major bone of contention for Sunabeda Wild Life Sanctuary is presence of four Gram Panchyats within its demarcated boundary, over which both Revenue and Wildlife department seem to be claiming its right for their administration. There are number of news paper articles as well as official correspondence between the Revenue and Wild life department that reflect the differences of opinion between two departments over the status of Sunabeda(The Indian Express, Dated 26th March, 2001, Prajatantra 17th July,2002, The Samaj, 27th March 2001 etc) . According to Revenue department, since the revenue villages existing within the sanctuary came under the jurisdiction of the revenue department it was the competent authority to settle Govt. land in favor of applicants from Revenue and un-surveyed (Termed as encroached villages by the Wildlife Department) villages. It is cited that around 197 applications were received for homestead land and 63 applications were received for settlement of Agricultural land from four villages namely Rupiam, Katingpani, Gatibeda and Deosil . But the wild life department was opposed to any further settlement of land within the sanctuary boundary on the ground that no further settlement of land could be taken up (u/s 19 of Wild life protection Act for bar of accrual of rights after declaration of intention of Sanctuary). Even the regulation on NTFP collection imposed by the wild life division was considered as going against the policy of Government to empower the Panchyat for registration of Minor forest produces (NTFP policy of the state government 2000) by the Revenue department. It is clear that existence of four Garm panchayats within the sanctuary boundary has led the policies and laws enacted by the government related to governance of Panchayat and Wild life sanctuary contradict each other at every instance.

These contradictions have also affected the people and development of the area adversely. Many development programmes executed through the Gram panchayat have been obstructed by the sanctuary authorities. Even some of the earthwork, panchayat roads, land development works have been prevented. During the construction of Water Harvesting Structure undertaken by CBDA through the Western Orissa Rural Livelihood Project at Soseng Panchayat, the Sanctuary authorities delayed the process by not allowing the stones to be

picked up from within the Sanctuary. Some of the minor construction works undertaken by the Panchayat are obstructed by not allowing the building materials to pass through the check gates deliberately. The land survey and settlement camp initiated by the Revenue department during 1988 was later stopped on the insistence of the wild life department in the area. The Tribal claimants have also not been provided any new patta due to the consistent pressure by Sanctuary authorities. The power of the gram Panchayats to issue license for trading of NTFP has also been robbed due to regulation of NTFP trading within the Sanctuary boundary. Despite having the power to allot the Indira Awas Yojana to beneficiaries from marginalized section, the Gram Panchayat is unable to carry out the programme due to restriction on release of funds.

The Development initiatives of the Wildlife Department:

The wild life department has also initiated some development work in the area with a view to mobilize public support, mitigate the problem of water scarcity during summer and spread the plantation programme. Many check dams; Nursery and road repairing work have been taken up in different places within the Sanctuary. The Check dam at Katingpani and nursery at Maraguda are the evidences of recent initiatives undertaken by the wild life department. But the main complain of people regarding such development initiative is that these programme lack transparency and proper participation of community members. Apart from these initiatives, the wild life department also undertakes the immunization of livestock staying in and around the sanctuary periodically.

The forest department has also taken up large-scale cultivation on wastelands. These measures have helped to strengthen the conservation efforts of the wild life department.

Insistence of Podu cultivation:

The Bhunjia Tribes of Sunabeda Sanctuary used to practice shifting cultivation traditionally since long. Some of the patches in forest adjacent to Deosil, Bhuasil, Gundrupani villages used to be cultivated by the shifting cultivators. However, the practice has been stopped since last 15-20 years partly due to restrictions on shifting cultivation and partly due to settled cultivation on forestland. The people are of the view that the practice has been stopped more due to gradual shifting towards settled cultivation on forestlands than the restrictions imposed by wild life department.

Joint effort of wildlife department and community in forest conservation:

Around two years back two Jungle Surkhya Committees had been set up at Pethiapali and Golabandh village of Kermeli panchayat. Initially the effort bore fruit as large patch of forest could be protected and saved from intrusion with the active participation of community members. However, the experience turned sour later when the wild life authorities let off the Timber mafias caught by people. The general perception was that lower level forest officials had some nexus with the smugglers. Gradually the support base among the community members for joint conservation effort within the panchayat lessened after these experiences and they were dissolved in 2003.

Ganja Cultivation:

Some traditional beliefs seem to have shaped the practices and the worldview of people of Sunabeda. Ganja cultivation also happens to be one such practice, which is guided by some

interesting tales. According to people, the area of the valley used to be called as Virata Desha, and all animal and plants were supposed to enjoy life to the fullest without any restraint there. Personal freedom of people and animal mattered most. The dhuan or the Ganja was used to quench this spirit of invincibility and cultivated since long.

Presently the cultivation is done in some selected patches like Salepada, junapani, Magada, Gadgoda of Sunabeda Panchayat and Deosil, Talabela, Bhausil of Soseng Panchayat. Though there are restrictions on cultivation within the Sanctuary, the practice has continued unabated. Local officials are also believed to be aware of the places and scale of cultivation. It is a well-coordinated trade involving Farmers, Traders, and Middlemen and has helped to raise the standard of living of farmers involved in the cultivation. The standard of living of farmers can be judged from the fact that all most all of them have TV, Transistor and other fancy electronic gadgets while the rest of the areas grapple with abject poverty and subsistence economy. Usually the Jhola lands are most suitable lands for Rabi crop of Ganja. The Kharif crop is raised in inaccessible Dongara lands.

The contentious issue of Tiger Reserve project:

The wild life department has been actively pursuing for the status of second Tiger Reserve for Sunabeda in the state. Two years back forest department had sent a proposal to Project Tiger seeking notification of Sunabeda as another Tiger Reserve in the state. The proposal goes through the scrutiny of various state as well as centrally empowered committees before the steering committee accords its sanction for the status of Tiger Reserve. Since there is a minimum prescribed area for buffer zone of protected areas to be declared as Project Tiger, the project authorities have suggested inclusion of around 400 square Kilometers from Khariar range of forests in the Sanctuary (The Indian Express, 1st March, 2004). This could again pose problem in future as inclusion of 4 Gram Panchayats without proper survey and settlement of rights has already raked up the issue among locals. There are also conflicting views between the claims of wild life department regarding the numbers of RBT based on census figures and locals inhabiting the area. The number of R.B.T has grown from 12 (1995 Census, Brief note on Sunabeada, H.K. Bist) in 1995 to 32 in 2004 (2004 Census, Sunabeada Tiger Conservation Programme, Wild Orissa). This is an amazing rate of growth of Tigers within a very short span of time. The statements of villagers in buffer as well as core areas however contradict these claims of wild life officials. They claim that these are exaggerated numbers put by wild life department and the frequencies of visibility of the Tigers are very rare in the area. Rather they claim that more tigers and wild animals used to frequent the area around thirty years back when the forest was dense.