



Support the Education of Children in Forest Buffer Zones



Partner: Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT)

The Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT) currently works in over 110 national parks and sanctuaries of India across 19 states, covering 72% of 47 tiger reserves and 15.5% of 668 nature reserves. WCT lays equal emphasis on wildlife conservation and community development. The communities living in and around India's forests depend heavily on forest produce for their livelihoods, and consequently erode some of the natural wildlife habitats.

In an effort to reduce human dependence on the forests, WCT has been working to impart vocational training to, and find gainful employment for the youth in the buffer zones around the forests. The first step in this journey is to ensure that the schools in these zones are robust enough to impart basic education.

About the Program:

The project, implemented by WCT and Aide et Action (India), an international NGO working in school education, aims to reach 2,000 students in 25 schools and supplement the teaching activities in grades 1 through 8. Sonata's engagement with WCT (India) that commenced in April 2016 is targeted at the primary public school system in the buffer zones around the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Karnataka and combines a financial grant and technology solutions.

Project implementation was preceded by a Technical Feasibility survey covering 21 out of the 25 targeted schools. The survey revealed that smartphone usage was prevalent amongst the school teachers - in 68% of schools at least one teacher uses a smartphone. Mobile internet connectivity was widespread, with 91% of the schools covered by a major telecom service provider.

In Parallel, a select group of teachers in the target schools was trained in key subjects including Mathematics, Science and English. This helped identify weak spots and find solutions for them. Teacher Resource Groups (TRG) were created and Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs) were identified to provide mentoring, solutions and support during the implementation period.



In the first phase of the engagement, Sonata offered WCT a grant to equip each of the 25 target schools with a tablet preloaded with lesson plans, audio and video material and class management modules. Teachers can create customized lesson plans and class management strategies, as well as track the progress of their students. The tablets are being used by teachers and children, making classrooms interactions more engaging, enjoyable and educational.

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About the Program (Contd.):

The implementation team has also created extensive lesson plans especially in Math, Environmental Studies (EVS), Science and language subjects for primary and middle school grades. The content, which has been created in conjunction with district school administrators and is aligned to state-specific curriculum, is being reviewed by a team of experts identified by WCT.

The current phase leverages our technology expertise to create a digital learning platform to hold the lesson repository and provide collaboration tools between all the stakeholders of the project. Teachers would be able to access information and communicate with the platform from any Wi-Fi enabled environment using their tablets or smartphones, instead of only at a nodal Centre as is currently the practice. The District Education Officer would also be able to view MIS reports on a smartphone or web-app. The technology application is currently being designed and is expected to be piloted towards the end of 2017.

We have also offered WCT a grant to gamify lessons and create puzzles to enrich the content and make it more interesting. The content is being currently created by the teachers, and localized for the specific environments.

Expected Outcome:

Learning Assessment carried out with children studying in grades 5 and 8 in the 25 targeted schools justifies the need for an innovative intervention impacting teaching and learning practices in public schools situated in buffer zone area. As a corollary, WCT's survey revealed that students in 7 of the 25 targeted schools have benefited from the use of tablet based education applications in accessing locally created lessons and other open source material. Academically enriched students are more likely to complete their education and seek employment outside of traditional vocations. In addition, digital technology helps schools located in remote areas to receive academic support.

"Wildlife Conservation Trust is striving to bring good education to the children living near tiger reserves in five large States. Teachers and our field teams in these remote areas face the challenge of poor communication facilities. We are trying to address the double challenge of poor communication slowing down quality of education in schools by creating Information Technology based support to teachers and students. The partnership with Sonata Software is going to ensure help to teachers from remote forest areas in the form of good lesson plans, pictorial explanations of abstract concepts, digital games for enhancing mental skills, scientific tools of child friendly nature for evaluation, and efficient methods of online reporting. We congratulate Sonata Software for treading an unconventional path of Corporate Social Responsibility by partnering with us." *Hemendra Kothari, Chairman Wildlife Conservation Trust*