



Technology, Education, Research and Rehabilitation for the Environment
Leading platform for development through Alternate Path

Community Dialogue-2015

KAAS Plateau-Report Card

WESTERN GHATS



WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE

Table of Contents

Preface..... •

- 1) Introduction**
 - 2) Experience-based dialogue with Locals: Progress and Challenges.**
 - 3) Evidence-based guidance by experts**
 - 4) Revenue and Distribution of revenue from tourism-2013 and 2014**
 - 5) Total expenditure in Kaas & other villages: 2011 to 2014**
 - 6) Number of tourists & vehicles visited the plateau during: 2011 to 2015**
 - 7) Next Steps**
 - 8) Summary of Recommendations**
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Preface

*Exemplary progress has been made by the community at **Kaas Plateau**, thanks to the efforts of the local communities, the forest department and the NGOs working around the Kaas Plateau - one of the 39 sites in the Western Ghats of India inscribed by UNESCO as 'World Natural Heritage' in 2012. The progress and development of the surrounding communities of Kaas support the doctrine that Heritage sites can be leveraged for the sustainable development of local communities.*

TERRE Policy Centre along with the Forest Department at Satara, in Maharashtra State of India and the local communities there undertook a challenge to make a small and humble beginning three years back that has led to incremental progress in conservation and community development efforts and has started to bear fruits.

A one-day event was organized at the Kaasai temple in Kaas village on the 16th of October 2015. This day-long event mainly involved a review and the discussions on the progress of the activities undertaken in the year 2014, the successes and the failures, key barriers faced, key achievements, what could be done more effectively moving forward, how engagement of locals could be enhanced and how new partnerships could be forged.

The overall objective of this event was to review the progress of conservation efforts undertaken for the Kaas Plateau –a world natural heritage site and plan for future activities with active involvement of organizations working at the grass-root, state, national and international level.

This report presents a 2014-report card based on interaction with locals and forest department, NGOs . It contains information regarding the discussions held during the community dialogue held at Kaas on the 16th of October 2015.



1. Introduction

The Western Ghats constitute a mountain range along the western coast of India, also called Sahyadri. The range runs from the North to South along the western edge of the Deccan plateau and separates the plateau from a narrow coastal plain along the Arabian Sea. In the year 2012, the UNESCO inscribed the plateau as a World Heritage site and is one of the eight “hottest hotspots” of biodiversity in world. The concept of biodiversity hotspot was originated by Norman Myers in two articles in “ The Environmentalist “ (1998) and (1990) revised after thorough analysis by Myers and other in “Hotspots , Earth’s Biological Richest and Most Endangered Terrestrial Eco regions”. To qualify as a biodiversity hotspot as per Myers, region must meet two strict criteria. First, it must contain at least 0.5% or 1,500 species of vascular plants as endemics, and Second, it has to have lost at least 70% of its primary vegetation around the world.

A cluster of 39 sites spread over, 7,953.15 sq. km in the Western Ghats is now inscribed by UNESCO as the World Natural Heritage . In the state of Maharashtra, the Kaas plateau, the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary, the Chandoli National Park and the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary have been given the world Heritage site tag. Western Ghats are the treasure trove of biodiversity. In fact they are recognized as one of the 8 global hotspots harboring a wealth of flora and fauna. The Ghats have more than 5,000 plant and 140 mammal species, 16 of which are endemic, i.e. species found in area alone. Out of the 179 species of amphibians found in the Western Ghats, 138 are endemic to the region. It has 508 bird species, 16 of which are endemic, including the Nilgiri Flycatcher and the Malabar Parakeet.

This area has been under threat not only because of insensitive tourism but also because of the indiscriminate development activities undertaken without proper environmental impact assessment. Poaching and biotic invasion due to excessive traffic especially during the flowering season has endangered the natural habitat of the plateau. Unfortunately, the villagers surrounding this plateau are quite poor and their literacy levels are also quite low. They are aware of their neighboring natural heritage, but are only recently acquiring more awareness regarding the future threats to their environmental wealth which directly or indirectly contributes to their own livelihood.

Conservation and true development of Kaas needs to complement each other. The process of satisfying present needs should not compromise availability of natural resources for the future generations of the residents.

Community dialogues between the years 2012 to 2014 were held at a local level to review the progress and plan for the various activities related to conservation and community development. The 2015 Community dialogue was a continuation of this participatory process and bottom up approach.

The community dialogue held in the year 2012 by the TERRE Policy Centre and UNESCO in association with Ranwata Nature and Environment Society, Satara addressed the recommendations made by the World Heritage Committee for recognizing 39 sites of the Western Ghats as UNESCO World Heritage. This community dialogue addressed how the intervening period until inscription (as World Heritage site) could be utilized to kick-start actions on capacity building and awareness of the local community. Subsequent to the declaration of the WNH, such efforts conducted in advance greatly helped with conservation management, enhanced community participation and self sustained activities for the local community development.

The 2013 event was focused on encouraging active participation between the villages and the Forest Department. As a result of this dialogue the Forest Department installed Solar Lamps, LED street lights, water heaters, LPG gases, Halogen bulbs and Computers in the Villages surrounding the plateau.

In 2014, the dialogue focused on using tourism for development. With active participation of MTDC, the concept of Home-stays was outlined to the locals. They were given guidelines and professional training on how to manage home-stays. Developments in education and concepts on sustainable living were discussed.

Similarly on the 16th of October, 2015, TERRE along with representatives from the Forest Department, other NGO's, MTDC and the local community met to review the progress of the discussions that took place in 2014.

The overall objective of this event was to analyse the progress of efforts undertaken for the conservation of the Kaas natural heritage site and plan for future activities with active involvement of organizations working at the grass-root, state, national and international levels. Setting up of an Information Centre, a medical centre and basic transport infrastructure were some of the civil issues discussed while biodiversity conservation, maintenance of the natural beauty of the area, continued agricultural productivity in the area through enhanced pollination, nutrient cycle and biodiversity and development of the communities around the Kaas plateau remained at the heart of the discussions.

The local community, youth, researchers, academics, entrepreneurs, eco-tour operators, transport operators, guides, trainers, government representatives (forest, environment, development), NGOs and Media were present at this event.



Dr. Vinita Apte felicitating a senior citizen



Mr. Rajendra Shende addressing the audience

2. Experience-based dialogue with locals : Progress and Challenges

Various points were highlighted by the residents of Kaas and the surrounding villages.

Mr. Panditrao Forest officer, Koyna wildlife sanctuary was of the opinion that tourist inflow is limited mainly to Kaas Plateau, however surrounding villages are rich in lush landscapes and sceneries and can also be developed as tourist centres. He suggested that all the four surrounding villages namely Koyna, Chandoli and Radhanagri can work together to increase educational and employment opportunities for their inhabitants. He spoke of the need to be exposed to developed mechanisms for farming and that if the local community from all four villages worked together they would be able to successfully boost their economic development.



Mr. Panditrao addressing the audience

Mr. Vishnu Kirdat Sarpanch and representative of Kaas Village, after having patiently listened to all the expert opinions assured them that the people of Kaas would take these discussions forward and manifest them into action. He suggested that more and more people know about Kaas plateau as a heritage structure, and that with proposed fieldwork and increased study they would maintain the quality of Kaas.

Progress:

1. All the locals were happy about the progress and development of the Kaas Plateau.
2. New gas stoves and solar lamps were provided to the locals which is being greatly appreciated.
3. The locals mentioned that earlier they would try to keep away from the forest department, but now things have changed. They are now learning from the forest department, which is a result of greater partnership development.
4. The people of Kaas now feel like they have a lot of support from different agencies including the forest department, various NGOs, MTDC etc. and hence are not scared of approaching anyone for redressing their problems. Due to this, problems such as forest fires, traffic, tourism related complex issues are getting under control.
5. Villagers are overall very positive and enthusiastic about the future of the plateau and the surrounding community.

Challenges:

1. There are some portions of land that get flooded every year. The locals demand that they should get land in return of land instead of money.
2. Villagers seek permanent employment on the Kaas plateau.
3. Funds are necessary for commissioning of mobile toilets.
4. There is a persistent electricity shortage. The Kaas village has not had a steady electricity supply for the past 3-4 months. This could also act as a hindrance to home stay concept development as it will affect tourism.
5. Existing toilets need to be made functional.

3. Evidence-based guidance by experts

The Community Dialogue 2015 at Kaas was kicked-off by Mr. Anil Anjankar, Chief Conservator of Forests, Forest Department Satara division. **Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Mr. Prakash Jawadekar**, through a video message was able to strike a chord with the local community. He spoke in their own language and was successful in leaving the locals in absolute awe of him. He was to attend the event however due to time constraints was unable to. He expressed his willingness to make the Kaas Plateau as a world tourist place and assured the Government support in all possible ways. He motivated people by describing the Kaas as the asset of Maharashtra, and congratulated TERRE and the Forest Department for taking up such a challenge. Additionally he spoke about the importance and advantages of sustainable living. He stressed on the need to come up with guidelines for tourists as well as inhabitants of Kaas, while promising his presence for the dialogue in 2016.

After the inauguration and welcome, the event took a surprising turn with the representatives of the Forest Department asking the locals to take the podium first and after having listened to their perspective the experts would make their comments. The event thus began with a few people from Kaas stressing on the importance and need for an information centre based in Kaas. They wanted to seek guidance in alternative means of social innovation so as to facilitate economic development even after the blossoming season has come to an end. One of the locals stressed on the need to set up a medical centre in close proximity to the village, ensuring efficient health management.

After having patiently listened to all the issues addressed by the locals, it was then time for the experts to comment on the same. Some of the excerpts of their speeches can be seen below:

Mr. Anjankar Chief Conservator of the Forest Department Satara Division spoke about the role of the Forest Department in the revival of Kaas village. He stressed on the concept of Eco-tourism by pointing out the pollutants emitted as a result of insensitive tourism. He suggested an increased number of battery operated vehicles to be used within the vicinity, he also encouraged the people of kaas to adopt means of sustainable living and assured that the Forest Department will give them all the necessary aid that would be required. He also informed the audience that in order to remain inscribed by the UNESCO as a world heritage site, it is important that the quality of the plateau should remain intact. Changes occurring due to Climate Change may hamper the biodiversity as a result the heritage of Kaas would be at threat.



Mr. Anjankar addressing the audience

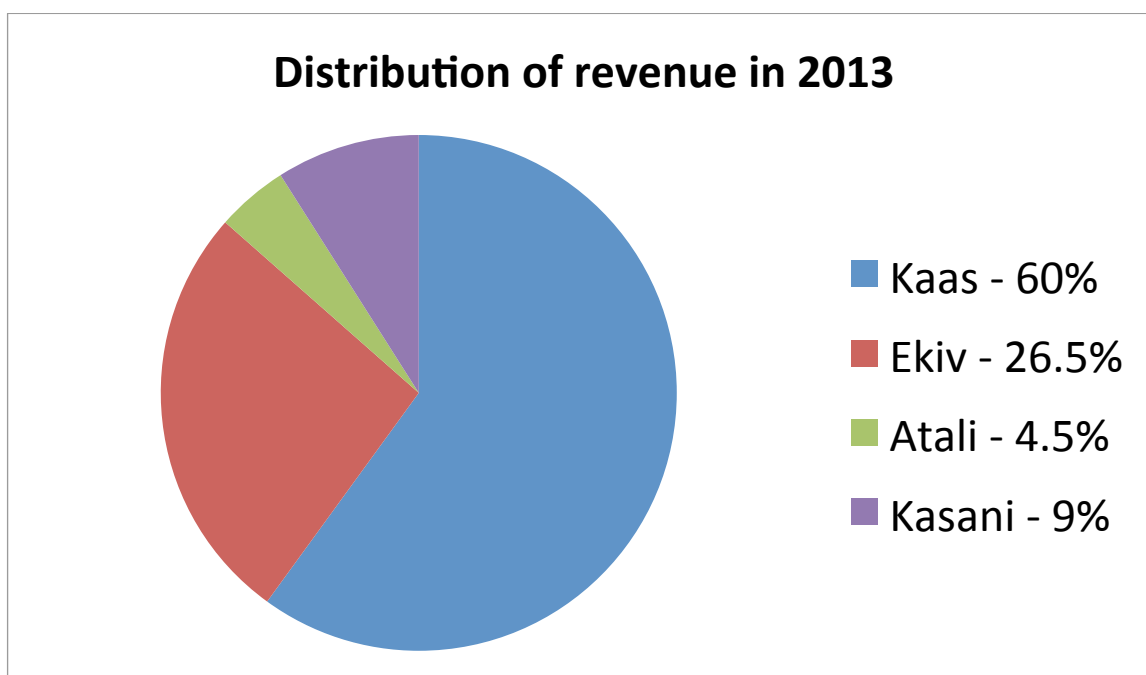
Mr. Pandurang Taware, an innovative farmer and the pioneer of the Agri -Tourism Concept in India, and a great visionary with several awards to his acclaim, enlightened the audience with his recently implemented concepts on Agri-tourism in Morgaon a village few kms from Pune. His experience working on innovative farming and irrigation methods in a drought prone region was rather inspiring and motivated the audience. He presented his ideas on innovation in Entrepreneurship. He gave the example that Morgaon is naturally a barren terrain and contains many naturally occurring stones. He collected all these stones and gave it a creative touch by shaping and painting them. These he then sold to tourists visiting the village. This and various other means of social innovation has now made this particular village a popular tourist attraction throughout the year nationally and internationally. He encouraged people of Kaas by making them realise that they were so blessed to be living in such an area filled with natural beauty and fertile soil. They should identify their strengths and work at it. The audience certainly looked encouraged and motivated by this speech. <http://www.agritourism.in/>

Mr. Atul Joshi of EnviroFit addressed the audience by talking about the disadvantages of using traditional chulhas for cooking. Apart from being a great environmental hazard the smoke emitted from the chulhas are harmful for those inhaling it. In an attempt to address all these disadvantages, EnviroFit has introduced Cooking stoves that require a smaller amount of wood and also emit a lesser amount of smoke. The Cook stoves are priced at INR 2,500, however there were some talks on the forest department offering some schemes.

4. Distribution of Revenue from Tourism

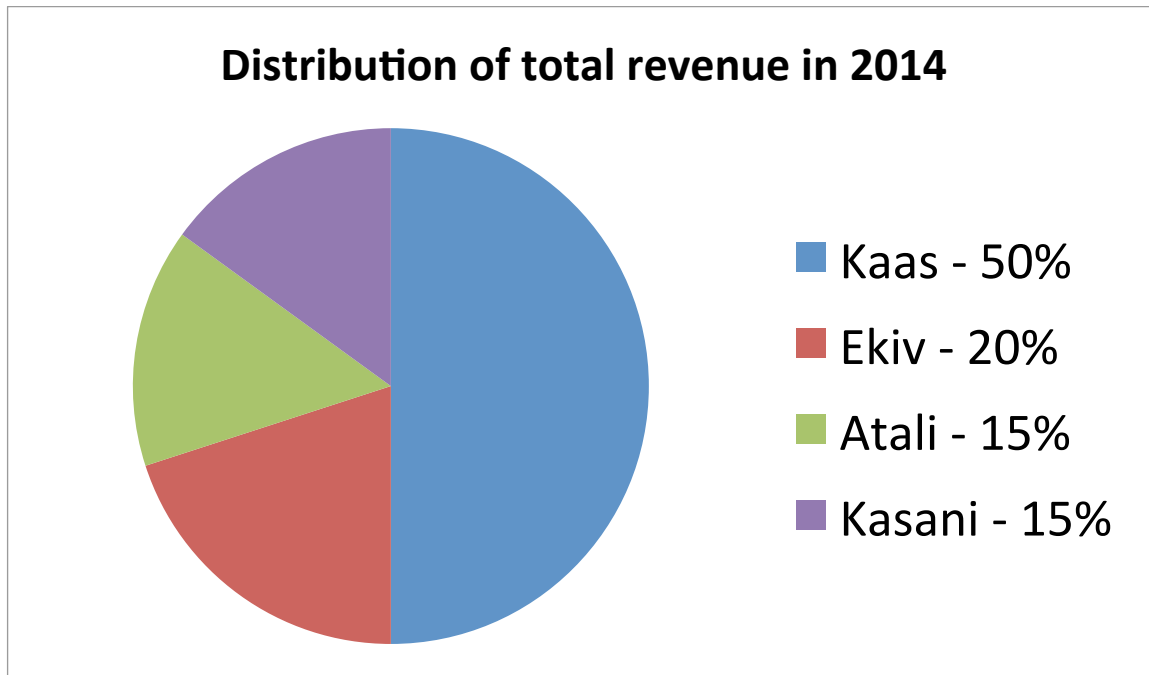
The total revenue earned from tourism is distributed amongst the 4 villages surrounding Kaas. Below is the percentage of distribution of total revenue in the years 2013 & 2014.

Total amount earned in 2013 was INR 18,53,010 : Below is the distribution chart



Total amount earned in 2014 was **INR 14,36,960** :

Below is the village wise distribution chart as agreed by local communities :



5.Total expenditure on basics facilities in Kaas & other villages from tourist’s revenue received from tourists during 2011 to 2014

Sr. No.	Village	Facilities provided by revenue generation
1	Kaas	Solar lamps – 14
		LPG cooking gas – 40
		Water heaters – 21
		LED street lights – 13
		Halogen bulbs – 03
		Computers – 01

2	Ekiv	LPG cooking gas – 75 School's expenditures – INR 20,000/- Pipe lines – INR 1,40,000/- Tiles & work – INR 50,000/-	
3	Atali	Bore well – INR 19410/- Fuel stoves – 82	
4	Kasani	LPG cooking gas - 46 Farm ponds - INR 18600/-	

6. Number of tourists & vehicles visited the plateau during 2011 to 2015

Year 2011		Year 2012		Year 2013		Year 2014		Year 2015	
Vehicles	Tourists	Vehicles	Tourists	Vehicles	Tourists	Vehicles	Tourists	Vehicles	Tourists
56660	333619	3327	91167	4560	128414	6763	99280	15831	125923

7. Recommendations and Next Steps

Mr. Rajendra Shende of the TERRE Policy Centre outlined the following future direction for the progress, conservation and community development efforts at Kaas:

1. A world class first of its kind interpretation centre should be set up at Kaas.
2. A research institute should be developed which could slowly develop into a full grown research facility with tie-ups with other national and international research and development institutions.
3. Efforts should be directed towards the beautification of the homestays/hotels in-order to attract international tourists.
4. Training activities should be continued as per requirement.
5. Some beautification measures should be undertaken in-order to blend the fence that currently exists on the plateau with its surroundings.

6. TERRE Policy Centre will provide necessary help with advertising targeting tourism development and the homestay concept.
7. A yearly scholarship was announced for girls who stood first in class. The eligibility requirements are yet to be completed by the students. This year as a model and encouragement, he distributed the scholarship to 5 girls.
8. To increase the exposure levels of the community, a study tour should be organized for the representatives of the four villages to other similar World Heritage sites which have implemented some unique features for successful conservation and community development.
9. Efforts should be made to communicate the success of Kaas as an example to other heritage sites in Maharashtra state. This will also facilitate networking and dialogue between the four heritage sites in the state.



Mr. Rajendra Shende awarding TERRE scholarships to girl students of Kaas village.

Concluding Remarks

Dr, Vinita Apte President TERRE encouraged and motivated the local community to develop means of earning revenue throughout the year. "one must feel proud in what they have. KAAS villagers are living in such a beautiful atmosphere where people from all over the world come to see that." and we have to pigie bank on their needs. Give the best treatment with clean rooms and indigenous food and they will enjoy staying here. But don't compromise on quality, she added.

She stressed on the importance of year round gainful employment for the development of Kaas and encouraged the locals to use innovative farming techniques to their benefit.

Summary

The event was considered by locals as useful and turned out to be a inspiring success. This dialogue brought forward the thoughts and concerns of the residents of Kaas and the surrounding villages. Ways and means of redressing problems currently being faced by the villagers were discussed on the same forum and platform and innovative solutions were discussed.

Mr. Rajendra Shende of the TERRE Policy Centre provided future direction for moving forward with the development efforts at Kaas after considering various inputs from the experts present, making this another key event in the development of the Kaas plateau.

The key outcome were:

The dialogue identified following:

- 1) **Realisation of the responsibility** and pride by locals that they inhabit such a beautiful region rich in biodiversity.
 - 2) **Sustainable Tourism** including assessment of carrying **capacity of the site**.
 - 3) **Effective control of vehicular traffic and providing car** parking services.
 - 4) Setting up of **an information centre** in Kaas that will be responsible for giving accurate information.
 - 5) **Enhanced infrastructure** including roads, improved fencing. (During the monsoons many areas get flooded and this requires well constructed roads to avoid blocking of pathways and traffic jams)
 - 6) **Necessity Increased co-operation** between the Forest Department and the local authorities of the Kaas village.
 - 7) Need for Invention/creation of **alternate means of earning revenue after the blossoming season** has come to an end.
 - 8) Need to Create opportunities for permanent **employment for the people of Kaas**.
 - 9) **Importance to encourage students in primary schools** by providing a yearly scholarship
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END
