



# Interdisciplinary Action Research: Conversations with Emerging Leaders

## A collaborative initiative of Centre for Financial Accountability (Delhi) and Environment Support Group (Bangalore)

In this climate of despair induced by COVID-19, various young researchers and activists have been working on emerging trends in Interdisciplinary Action Research which address some of the most pressing issues of our times, and that from various sectors: urban planning, public health, sociology, ecology and environment, digital commons, public education, migration studies, entrepreneurship, informal economy, and more. CFA and ESG collaborate to bring to focus various exciting explorations by such young researchers, who conscientiously draw attention to some of society's biggest challenges through their interdisciplinary efforts.

### ***Webinar 2: Enabling Human-Elephant Coexistence Through Mobile Technology***

#### **Introduction**

Expansion of human settlements across the country has resulted in widespread loss of elephant habitat, degraded forage, reduced landscape connectivity, and a significant decline in elephant populations relative to their historical numbers and their overall distribution. With shrinking habitats, elephants are being gradually forced to move into closer contact with people, resulting in very frequent and severe conflict over space, resources, safety with severe impacts on lives and livelihoods. Such human-elephant conflict has resulted in contestations over protection of biodiversity as well, and dealing with such conflict has become increasingly difficult for forest departments, ecologists, geographers, sociologists and local village governments.

The process of monetary compensation for losses has been in practice. However, this approach merely addresses the symptoms, rather than the underlying drivers of human-elephant conflict associated with cultural values, local available resources, and the increasing fragmentation and isolation of elephant populations.

Dr. Ananda Kumar and Vinod Krishnan share with us their efforts that have begun to show some good results and what is unique is that it involves local communities, local governments and the forest department.

## Discussants



**Vinod Krishnan** had a keen interest in wildlife since his college days. He changed his career from accounts to hospitality and finally wildlife conservation. Joined Dr. Ananda Kumar's team at NCF in 2015 and has been studying human-elephant interaction in the Hassan region. He has helped in implementing early warning systems like the Valparai model and is currently working as a project coordinator with Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF).

**Dr. M Ananda Kumar** used to study Lion Tailed Macaques in the Anamalai landscape. He later did his PhD on elephant behaviour and has been studying elephants in Valparai for the past two decades. He's been instrumental in implementing the early warning systems to mitigate human elephants conflicts in Valparai. Currently, he heads the elephant program at the Nature Conservation Foundation and is a member of the Asian Elephants Specialist Group (AESG).



Opening the webinar, the moderator **Ms. Bhargavi Rao**, pointed out that rapidly shrinking habitats are a major reason for increasing human-elephant conflict. Mr. Vinod Krishnan, Project Coordinator at NCF, agreed with her, noting that in India only 5% of land is protected forest area in which wildlife can live in peace. Due to this shrinking habitat, conflicts are mounting.

Unfortunately, most of the solutions to address these human-elephant conflicts were merely symptomatic and did little to solve the root causes of the problem. As Mr. Krishnan pointed out, "Several measures have been used to keep elephants away from human settlements: electric fences, elephant-proof trenches and firecrackers. Not only does this increase the stress levels of elephants, it also only serves to move them to another area where they may need to be driven out again."

Mr. Krishnan shared that the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), in collaboration with the Forest Department and local communities in Hassan and Valparai, has developed an Early Warning System that alerts people about the presence of elephants in an area to minimise incidences of conflict. As a part of this system, mass SMS's are sent out with the relevant details whenever an elephant is spotted near a human settlement. For people who cannot read, voice messages are sent. In addition to this, there are digital display boards at several junctions which also serve to inform people about the presence of elephants.

These efforts have been a huge success. As Mr. Krishnan shared, "In Valparai and Hassan developing the Early Warning Systems has not only served to greatly reduce the number of human deaths, it has also brought down the property damage."

Dr. Ananda Kumar, Head of the Elephant Program, NCF, was a key influence behind setting up these Early Warning Systems, particularly in Valparai. He mentioned that support from the local community is key in setting up these systems and ensuring they function effectively.

Although these Early Warning Systems have made great strides in reducing human-elephant conflict, Mr. Krishnan pointed out that the rate at which forests are being lost is still alarming, with much forest land being taken up by developmental projects. In agreement with him Dr. Kumar said, “There is so much support for people but very little for animals. We need more voices to speak up and protect the interests of wildlife and forests.”

**To know more about the efforts of Dr. M Ananda Kumar, Vinod Krishnan and NCF in setting up Early Warning Systems please watch the film *Elephants in My Backyard*:**

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKAU8bmu9el>

ESG and CFA continue the **“Interdisciplinary Action Research: Conversations with Emerging Leaders”** series next Thursday, 10th September 2020 (5:00 - 6:30 pm on Zoom and Facebook) addressing the theme: **“Reclaiming our Digital Commons”** with **Nandini Chami** and **Deepthi** from **IT for Change**. **More details on this webinar series can be accessed on [www.esgindia.org](http://www.esgindia.org) and [www.cenfa.org](http://www.cenfa.org).**

[This report has been prepared by Ashwin Lobo, Research Associate at ESG, Karthik Anjanappa, Research Associate at ESG and Sneha and Ayush, Interns at ESG. Bhargavi Rao, Trustee, ESG provided inputs.]

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