



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

UNEP/CMS/Concerted Action 13.2

Original: English

**CONCERTED ACTION FOR
THE ASIAN ELEPHANT (*Elephas maximus indicus*)¹**

Adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 13th Meeting (Gandhinagar, February 2020)

(i). Proponent:

The proponent is the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of India. The Ministry is entrusted by the Government of India to deal with all issues relating to “Conservation of endangered species of wildlife, including Indian Elephants, in India and beyond and other associated subjects”.

(ii). Target species, lower taxon or population, or group of taxa with needs in common:

Species: *Elephas maximus indicus* (Linnaeus 1758)

Only *E. m. indicus* is proposed for inclusion in Appendix I of CMS Convention. The proposed Concerted Action is therefore foreseen to focus on this subspecies. However, considering the long-term aim of the Concerted Action is the development of an agreement between Asian Elephant Range States, it is anticipated that individual activities might concern and support the conservation of other subspecies.

(iii). Geographical range:

Current wild distribution of Asian Elephants is in 13 countries across South and South-East Asia, the range countries of Asian Elephants, and their population, being India (29,864), Nepal (109-142), Bangladesh (289-437), Bhutan (605-760), Myanmar (2,000-4,000), Cambodia (400-600), Indonesia (Kalimantan) (60-80), Lao People’s Democratic Republic (500-600), Malaysia (3,263-3,717), Thailand (3,126-3,341) and Vietnam (104-132).

(iv). Summary of Activities:

It is proposed to initiate a process for developing an agreement between Asian Elephant range countries and other stakeholders to achieve following goals/ objectives.

- (i) Tackle obstacles/ barriers to natural migration of elephants,
- (ii) Prohibit deliberate killing or capturing of elephants
- (iii) Conserve and restore their habitats,
- (iv) Regulate human elephant conflicts,
- (v) Regulate control of illegal trade in live elephants and their body parts, and
- (vi) Promote international cooperation in exchange of data/ information, capacity building, studies and research, etc.

¹ The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CMS Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

(v). Activities and expected outcomes:

Activities	Expected Outcomes
Tackle barriers/obstacles to natural migration	Migration facilitated, effective habitat area increased, genetic diversity promoted
Prohibit killing/capture of elephants	Elephants protected, social harmony stabilized
Conserve and improve elephant habitat	Elephants and associated species conserved, ecosystem improved
Regulate human/elephant conflicts	Retaliatory killing/ injuries to elephants, and human hardship reduced
Control of illegal trade of elephants	Rampant poaching/ hunting of elephants reduced, nexus between terrorism, drugs and illicit wildlife trade broken or reduced
Promote international cooperation	Better coordination, cooperation and effectiveness of elephant conservation facilitated, database relating to various aspects of Asian Elephants strengthened

(vi). Associated benefits:

Development of an agreement among Asian Elephant range countries and its successful implementation are also expected to lead to improved cooperation and experience sharing among them for conservation of other endangered species of animals and plants and their habitat. Improvement of living conditions of communities, living in less developed and border areas, through reduced human/elephant conflicts, will also be an important benefit.

(vii). Timeframe:

The process of development of an agreement on this subject with Bangladesh is in advance stages of development. It is expected that the agreement among Asian Elephant range countries, based largely on India-Bangladesh experience, may be completed within a year.

(viii). Relationship to other CMS actions:

In addition to cooperation on migration of elephants between India and Bangladesh, India has also signed following instruments with Bangladesh on trans-boundary conservation of Tigers, in 2011.

- (i) Protocol on Conservation of Bengal Tigers in Sundarbans
- (ii) MoU on Conservation of Biodiversity in Sundarbans
- (iii) Jakarta Declaration (AsERSM, 2017)

All these activities are expected to lead to better cooperation for conservation of endangered species of animals and plants not only between India and Bangladesh, but also among countries of South Asian and South-East Asian countries.

(ix). Conservation priority:

Asian Elephants have been categorized as “Endangered” by IUCN. Unfortunately, many elephants are killed and/or captured for international and local trade in live elephants and their body parts, in many range countries. Many elephants are also killed due to increasing frequency and intensity of human/elephant conflicts. Hence timely action is required to conserve Asian Elephants, before it is too late.

(x). Relevance:

Elephants are migratory by nature, although there are few resident populations as well. Unfortunately, there is high demand for live elephants and also for their body parts, particularly ivory. It has led to emergence of many illegal gangs of poachers and traders, which thrive on illegal international trade in ivory, its products and other elephant body parts. There is a great demand for live elephants as well by zoos, circuses and other agencies.

It is essential to dismantle this illegal trade by conserving Asian Elephants in their all range countries and curb such demand through systematic global campaign and public education.

(xi). Absence of better remedies:

Asian Elephants are spread across 13 range countries and it is regularly moving from one country to another based on many factors. It is not practical to enter into agreement with so many countries one to one. As Asian Elephants are proposed to be listed under Appendix I of the Convention, Concerted Action mechanism, leading to multilateral legally binding treaty between all Asian Elephant range countries, within CMS framework is the only practical and feasible remedy for effective conservation of elephants.

(xii). Readiness and feasibility:

India supports more than 60 per cent of the global Asian Elephant population and is totally committed to conservation of elephants and other wildlife of the country. It has very strong legislation for conservation of wildlife and a rich history and tradition for the conservation of wildlife, particularly its 'Heritage Animal', namely the Indian Elephant. India has taken several initiatives and set standards for conservation of Asian elephants and mitigation of human elephant conflicts. Hence India is a natural leader, when it comes to conservation of elephants.

Funding for elephant conservation is likely to come from Asian Elephant range countries, international donor agencies and other stakeholders.

(xiii). Likelihood of success:

India and other countries of South and South/East Asia have a very rich biodiversity. They also have an old and rich tradition of conservation of forests and wildlife. Elephants in the region are important, not only as a mega attraction for wildlife tourists but also a symbol of cultural heritage of the people. Common concerns and similar traditions relating to conservation of elephants and related aspects, such as human wildlife conflicts will ensure success of the initiative. Although there may be certain problems such as remoteness and underdevelopment of many areas, disturbed law and order situation. These will not be major obstacle and can be overcome easily. Concerted Actions for Asian Elephants are likely to be successful.

(xiv). Magnitude of likely impact:

All Asian Elephant range countries are likely benefit due to this proposal. Asian Elephants, associated species and all megafauna, particularly those on the radar of international poachers and smugglers, will feel the impact of this proposal. Since human/elephant conflicts are a serious problem in South Asian and South-East Asian countries, poor people, particularly those residing in less developed border areas will benefit through reduce human/elephant conflicts.

(xv). Cost-effectiveness:

It is difficult to work out exact requirements for funds or even sources and quantum of funds at this stage. However, arrangements for conservation of Asian Elephants in South Asia and South-East Asia are likely to be cost-effective.

(xvi). Consultations-Planned/Undertaken:

Countries of this region are connected through many multilateral international networks such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SARC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN). These frameworks can be used for consultation regarding the conservation of elephants. India has almost concluded an agreement with Bangladesh for the conservation of elephants. Efforts are continuing to start similar arrangements with Nepal and Bhutan. We also have bilateral agreements with China, Bangladesh and Nepal for the conservation of Tigers and other wildlife.