

# Jumbo success for peace plan

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**Guwahati:** A project on managing man-elephant conflict in Apeejay tea gardens in central Assam's Sonitpur district has helped reduce damage to property and crops by 74 per cent in 2017 as compared to 2015.

Apeejay Tea and WWF-India in 2015 had joined hands to find lasting solutions to prevent man-elephant conflict in Assam. The project was implemented in four Apeejay gardens.

The state government informed the Assembly in March that wild elephants have trampled 149 people to death and damaged 1,880 hectares of crops across the state in the past two years.

Altogether 92 people died and 56 were injured in 2016-17 while 57 died and 19 injured in 2017-18 in man-elephant conflict in Assam.

In Sonitpur district, because of rampant forest loss and unplanned developmental activities, wild elephants were using the tea estates and surrounding landscape as their secondary habitat for nearly half the year leading to conflicts between local residents and elephants.

A Sonitpur-based WWF official said the most visible impact of this initiative so far is 74 per cent drop in damages to property and crops in Apeejay tea gardens in 2017 compared to those in 2015 (from Rs 29 lakh to Rs 7 lakh).

He said strategies such as forming anti-depredation squads, installing solar-powered electric fence, creating awareness among the garden people and getting support from local forest officials were used to manage man-elephant conflict.

A 12.5km low solar fence,



Members of anti-depredation squad attend an orientation programme.

Picture courtesy: Apeejay Tea

covering workers' colonies, office structure, staff residential colonies, hospital, schools in gardens, was installed and maintained.

The official said 20 volunteer groups of the anti-depredation squads were formed in the gardens which were trained on the dos and don'ts that they needed to follow with wild elephants.

"Elephant movement

routes and crossing points inside Apeejay tea gardens were identified and demarcated on maps as well as on grounds," the official said, adding that the man-elephant conflict management capacity of garden residents was strengthened.

"Apeejay Tea brought into action a sustainable plan to minimise and resolve man-elephant conflict in Sonitpur. Four of our gardens are in the conflict zone. Our work has led us to a better, stronger and sustainable coexistence strategy with elephants and we have seen some very positive results. We have been mapping losses according to the loss matrix created under the project and can see the drop in depredation," said Binod Rajbonshi, manager-in-charge of Apeejay Tea's Dhulapadung, Ghoirallie, Borjuli and Sessa tea estates.