Tata Steel Zoological Park is dedicated towards raising awareness and conservation of wildlife and biodiversity in and around Jamshedpur. We conducted a four-day awareness campaign from 24-27 April, against *Vishu Sendra*, an annual ritual hunting festival held in Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary from 24-27 April. The team was led by the author along with Sandeep Raj Singh, Roma Samanta, Rahul Tiwary and Sumansa NGO members visited the villages in and around the Sanctuary. The team spoke to villagers especially women and children to gauge their awareness on the detrimental effects of depletion of animal species within the sanctuary and the adverse effects this would have on their livelihoods and future existence.

On 24 April 2015 the team met with the RCCF - Mr. S. Nandkeolyar (I.F.S.), C.C.F – Mr. Rajiv Ranjan (I.F.S.), C.F. – Mr. Satyajit Singh (I.F.S), D.C.F. & Field Director – Elephant Project, Jamshedpur – Mr. Kamlesh Pandey, D.F.O Jamshedpur – Mr. Sabah Alam Ansari (I.F.S.), A.C.F. – Mr. Sushil Oraon, Officer in Charge (Dalma). – Mr. Mangal Kachchap and others from the Forest Department, Govt of Jharkhand and updated them about the three-day awareness campaign to be undertaken. The team also participated in an awareness programme organised on that day by the Forest Department against *Vishu Sendra*. Representatives from all concerned villages, members of various village and *Mahila Samitis* from in and around the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary were invited for the programme where brochures and pamphlets were distributed to them and senior officials from the Department of Forest, Government of Jharkhand addressed them. Some *Mahila Samitis* were given cash awards for exemplary work done by them in highlighting conservation and awareness in their villages.

On April 25, the team visited Haludbani and spoke to villagers on their source of livelihood and concerns. The villagers mentioned that their participation in the *Vishu Sendra* has stopped for the past few years and their main concern now is the impending declaration of Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary as an Eco-Sensitive Zone and the adverse effect that decision may have on their livelihood and the existence of their village in the Sanctuary. The *Mukhiya* of the village Ms. Sukanti Kisku mentioned that the ever since the news of the declaration of the Eco Sensitive Zone has been made, the villagers live in constant fear about their future. With regards to *Vishu Sendra*, the villagers agreed with the team that hunting animals in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary should be done away with because there has been a sharp decline in the number of animals in the Sanctuary over the years. They believe that the jungle will be in peril if the animals in the jungle perish and this will have an adverse effect on their survival in the years to come. They want the delicate balance in nature to be restored so that the treasure of the forest exists for their future generations.

On April 26, the team visited two villages – Pagda and Bonghoda along with volunteers from Graduate College, Jamshedpur who got first-hand experience of the challenges faced by the ecosystem people and their dependence on the forests for their livelihood. The volunteers in turn explained to the villagers the importance of protecting and preserving wildlife in and around their villages so that forest resources are available for their future generations. On April 27, the team split into two groups and covered more villages Asanbani, Kanderbeda, Saharbeda, Makulakocha, Pindrabeda Mirzadih, Bhadudih, Haludbani and Patipani to keep a watch on Sendra Birs (hunters). Sumansa Team encountered a group of 23 hunters had come from Jadugoda for the ritual
The team spoke to the hunters and they said that they had not managed to encounter any animal and had nothing to show for the hunt. A Forest Department patrolling vehicle also reached the place and along with the team, engaged the hunters in casual conversation for about an hour so that there is an intentional delay in their hunting activities.

Thereafter, the team came across another group of 17 hunters near Nichla Bandh. The hunters were from Seraikela and they too had not encountered any wild animal ever since they ascended the hills in the morning. Similar to the experience near Snanghati, the Sumansa Team engaged the hunters in casual conversations and organised an impromptu archery display where the hunters showed their archery skills by aiming arrows at tree trunks. This was all done with intent to delay the hunter’s motive to proceed with their hunt.

While returning to Makulakocha from Nichla Bandh, the team sighted a Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) being pursued by two groups of hunters. The information was immediately shared with the Forest Department officials.

The effects of the awareness campaigns are visible as the number of hunters over the years has reduced and villagers in and around Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary have now started understanding the need to protect flora and fauna around their villages and how protecting wildlife increases the biodiversity of the region and this ultimately has positive forbearing on their livelihood. The observation from this year’s awareness campaign against hunting was that there has been a marked reduction in the number of tribals participating in *Vishu Sendra*. Further, during our discussion with villagers in and around Dalma Wild Life Sanctuary, there was unanimity amongst them that hunting was not beneficial for their surrounding ecosystem and that they no longer endorse or participate in ritual hunting these days as the number of wild animals in the hills is reducing. They added that animals too have a right to live which is why villagers will celebrate their festival but not hunt wild animals.

**Conclusion**

The author has been part of the awareness campaigns against *Vishu Sendra* for the past five years at the request of Forest Department. The endeavour should be that such initiatives should run all year round instead of organising them an *ad-hoc* event. More campaigns should be organised for the villages in and around Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary involving education, entertainment, livelihood subjects after an in-depth study of the relevant needs of the villagers vis-à-vis their ecosystem so that they feel inclusive with the community development efforts of the Forest Department. Without any tangible investments in community development it will be difficult for the villagers to believe our point of view that development efforts in these areas by the Forest Department are inclusive and for their benefit. It will also be extremely beneficial for the villages if certain genuine demands of the villagers are met – such as setting up and refurbishment of schools, opportunities for sustainable livelihood, more involvement of women in village development efforts etc.

We are extremely grateful and would like to thank the following, without whose support the campaigns would not have been possible: Mr. Kamlesh Pandey, D.C.F & Field Director – Elephant Project; Mr. Mangal Kachchap – Officer in Charge (Dalma); Mr. Pradeep Kumar, IFS, P.C.C.F. (Wildlife); Mr Shashi Nandkeolyar, IFS, R.C.C.F. (Jamshedpur Circle); Mr. Rajeev Ranjan, IFS, C.C.F; Mr Satyajit Singh, IFS, C.F. Jamshedpur Circle; Mr. Sabah Alam Ansari. IFS, D.F.O (Jamshedpur) and Curator – Tata Steel Zoological Park Mr. Sanjay Kumar Mahato.