

Institutional Framework for Implementing REDD+ in India

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2012



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Ministry of Environment and Forests
Government of India



The Energy and Resources Institute



NORWEGIAN EMBASSY

Acknowledgement

This paper was written as part of the project **Developing country participation in addressing climate change: Analyzing issues and options for implementing NAMAs and REDD** under the Program of Activities, Framework Agreement between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), referred to in short as the Norwegian Framework Agreement (NFA). We would like to thank the Norwegian MFA for their support.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTING REDD+ IN INDIA

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Introduction

Forests in India have always held a special place in the socio-economic, cultural, and religious facets of Indian society. Though blessed with diverse forest resources that support a rich diversity of flora and fauna, the geographical distribution and quality of forests is not uniform in India. India has 78.29 million hectare (Mha) under forest and tree cover (Forest Survey of India, 2011) which is 23.81 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. Of this total, forest cover constitutes 69.20 Mha (21.05 per cent), whereas tree cover is 9.84 Mha (2.76 per cent). However, improving the quality of forest cover is a major concern today in terms of density classes, since very dense forests, having canopy density more than 0.7, constitutes only 8.347 Mha (2.54 per cent), and medium-density forests with canopy density of 0.4–0.7, constitute 32.07 Mha (9.76 per cent). The remaining forest cover is open forest or scrub which requires to be rehabilitated. India's forests are facing immense pressure due to unsustainable use of forest produce. Poverty and forest degradation are inextricably linked and curbing forest degradation requires convergence of various poverty alleviation policies and schemes. The role of local communities is vital in not only addressing the drivers of forest degradation but also enhancing carbon stock through conservation, protection, and reforestation. The carbon stock of Indian forests in 2004 has been estimated by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) to be 6,663 metric tonnes (FSI, 2011). Carbon stock in India's Forests has increased by 592 metric tonnes between 1994 and 2004, but it can be increased significantly through the involvement of local communities. The institutional mechanism for REDD+ will leverage

on the strengths of the existing forest management system in the country while also ensuring sectoral integration and inter-departmental coordination to address some of the key drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in the country.

Forest Management

The scientific management of forests in the modern era that dates back to 1864 started with the appointment of a German forester, DE Brandis, as the first Inspector General of Forests of the country, which subsequently led to the setting up of Forest Departments (FDs) across India. Thereafter, the process of large-scale survey of forests, preparation of working plans, and development of essential infrastructure started. Under the then prevailing socio-economic and technical situation, forests were viewed pre-dominantly as a revenue-generating resource for meeting the growing demand of timber for expansion of railways, shipping, and building other infrastructure. As a result, more emphasis was laid on harvesting of timber from forests on a commercial basis. However, the 1988 National Forest Policy brought in a major shift and enunciated that the principle aim of forest policy was to ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which is vital for the sustenance of all life forms – human, animal, and plant. The derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinated to this principal aim. However, removals from forests continued to occur in order to meet the increasing demand for forest goods and services. Inadequate investment in managing this unique and renewable resource, contributed to deforestation and degradation pressures.

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Policy and Regulatory Framework

Since the 1860s, Indian forests have been managed on the principle of sustained yield of timber. A number of policies, legal and administrative measures were introduced over the years keeping pace with changing socio-economic conditions. India adopted its first National Forest Policy in 1894, which was subsequently revised in 1952 and again in 1988. Similarly, forest legislation in India dates back to 1865, when the first Indian Forest Act (IFA) was passed. Since then, the Act has been amended several times and has led to the IFA of 1927, which is still applicable with state-specific amendments in some states, wherein some states have enacted their own Acts based primarily on the IFA, 1927. Later on, several other legislations including the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980; the Environment Protection Act, 1986; and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, were promulgated which, along with the Indian Forest Act, 1927, or the State Forest Acts, constitute the basic legislative framework for forestry, wildlife, and biodiversity. India has a multi-tier forest administration system comprising the Indian Forest Service constituted in 1966 under the All India Services Act, 1951, by the Government of India supported by State Forest Services and Forest Rangers, and frontline forestry personnels – the foresters and the forest guards – who have a reach in to the remotest and most interior parts of the country. The main mandate of these forest services is to protect, conserve, and manage forest and wildlife resources of the country by ensuring scientific and Sustainable Management of Forest (SMF) for various products and services under the policy and legal framework.

Local Communities and Participatory Forest Management

The intricate relationship between local communities and forests, based on the principle of co-existence, is integral to the conservation and sustainability of ecological systems. The people living in and around forests have been dependent on forests for their

sustenance and livelihoods and have traditionally played a significant role in the conservation of forests. The National Forest Policy, 1988, has recognized this symbiotic relationship between the tribal people and forests and advocated association of communities living in and around forests, including tribals, towards the protection, regeneration, and development of forest as well providing gainful employment to local people. Considering the fact that life of tribal and other people living within and near forests revolve around forests, the policy stressed that the domestic requirements of fuel wood, fodder, Minor Forest Produce, and construction timber should be the first charge on forest produce. Joint Forest Management (JFM) was started formally in 1990, as a participatory forestry programme based on the principle of care and share, and has taken roots in the country with over 1,00,000 Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) covering more than 20 Mha of forests. This has formalized and strengthened the partnership between local communities and the FD in forest management. Based on the experience gained during the last 20 years, the JFM is to be evolved into JFM+ by adding the livelihood concerns of the local communities (Planning Commission, 2012).

Institutionalizing REDD+ in India

India has a long history of scientific forest management, spanning over a century. This resulted in the formulation of a robust legal and regulatory framework and a formalized system of forest governance. Over the years, India has also built the technical capability for assessing its forest and tree cover; the Forest Survey of India (FSI), along with its zonal offices, has been carrying out national forest carbon stocks accounting for the country. The FSI has also been publishing a series of biennial assessment reports on the state of the forest cover in India since 1987. India is one of the few tropical countries where forest cover has stabilized over the years. A strong policy and legal framework with due recognition of the rights of local forest-dependent and tribal communities

over forest resources under the umbrella of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) has been a significant contributing factor. Policy and legal instruments in the form of JFM programmes, provisions under the Forest Rights Act 2006, Biological Diversity Act 2002, etc., aim at safeguarding and ensuring the rights of the tribals and forest dwellers while enabling the local communities to be key players in local-level governance of the natural resources. JFM has successfully involved communities in protection and management of forests and has recently been integrated into more democratic organizations of local governance like the Gram Sabha. Today, JFM is gradually evolving into JFM+ by incorporating the livelihood concerns of the forest-dependent communities along with protection and management of forests.

The broad institutional framework for implementing REDD+ is already in place. However, to be eligible for REDD+, a system needs to be place for Forest Carbon Accounting (FCA), Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV), social and environment safeguards among other specifications. The institutional mechanism and the governance structure needs to be strengthened by enhancing capacity for operationalizing REDD+.

REDD+ will not only help addressing capacity gaps under the current forest management system but most importantly would benefit the local forest-dependent communities. The financial incentives generated through carbon added or carbon saved will supplement the incentives already derived by JFMCs through the harvesting of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) and would help support livelihoods of communities and contribute to overall socio-economic development besides. The incentives received from REDD+ are to be passed on to the local communities involved in protection and management of the forests to ensure sustained protection of India's forests. India's submission to the FCCC/AWGLCA (2011) states its commitment to transfer the REDD+ benefits to the local, forest-

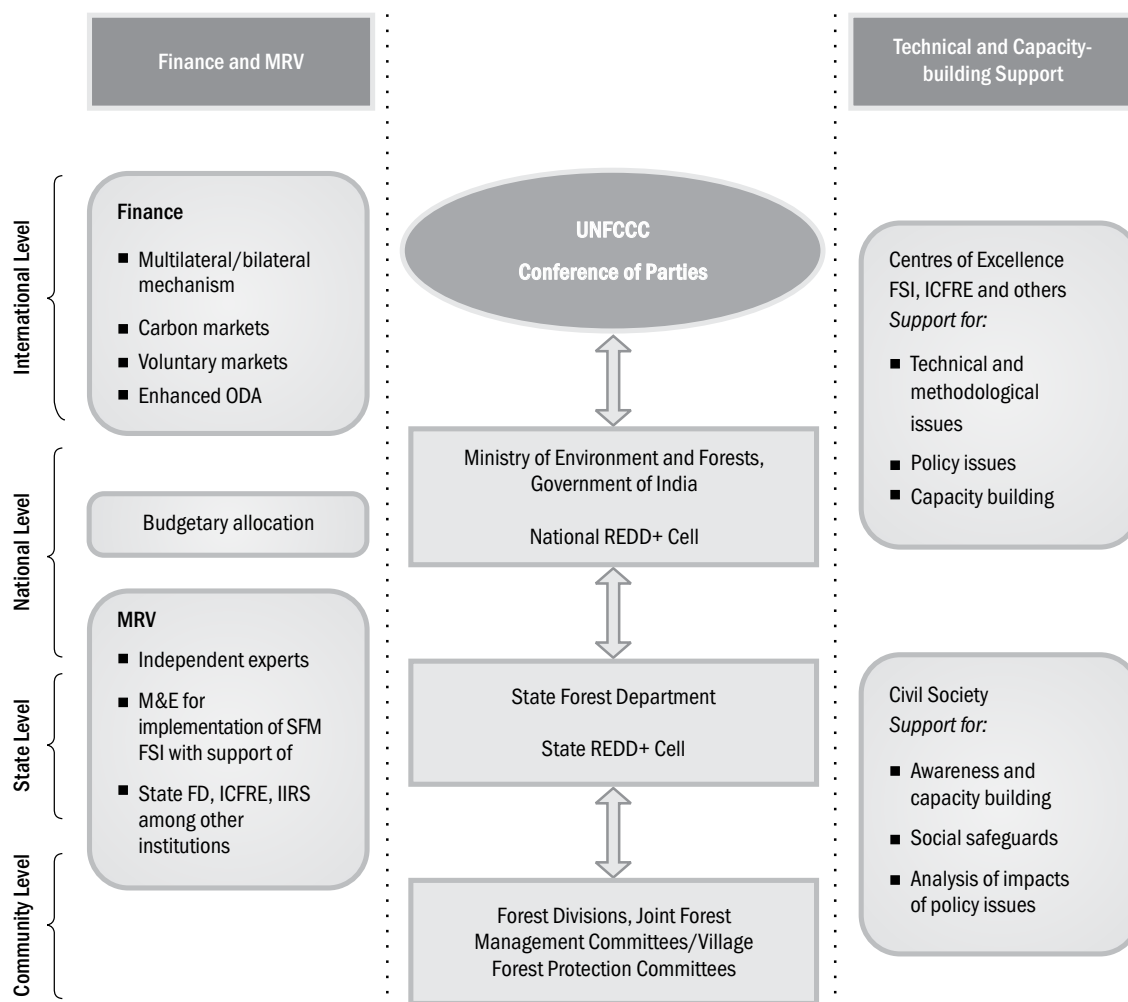
dependent, forest-dwelling, and tribal communities that are contributing to forest conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks

Institutional Arrangement

In accordance with the Forest Principles that were agreed upon during the Earth Summit in 1992, the REDD+ architecture that is being discussed at the international level, takes cognizance of the sovereign rights of the nations to design and implement nationally appropriate policies and measures. The institutional mechanism at the international level, while providing overall oversight for REDD+ mechanism, will incentivize measurable actions on REDD+ that are in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Therefore, the Conference of Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC needs to have provisions for balanced representation from both developed and developing country parties to ensure transparency, equity, and accountability in the decision-making process.

At the national level, a planned and coordinated approach with active stakeholder engagement will help develop technically sound and locally relevant strategies. The National REDD+ Cell set up at the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) will play a key role in the design and implementation of REDD+ strategies at the national and sub-national level which are in consonance with the international framework. The National REDD+ Cell will coordinate and guide REDD+ related actions at the national level, and engage with the State FDs to collect, process, and manage all relevant information and data relating to FCA. It would also help identify REDD+ opportunities in different regions and work with State FDs for REDD+ project development. The Cell would also assist MoEF and its affiliated agencies in developing and implementing appropriate policies relating to REDD+ implementation in the country, mobilizing and disbursement of resources, and will engage with centres of excellence to provide technical guidance

Proposed Institutional Arrangement for operationalizing REDD+ in India



Notes : M&E : Monitoring and Evaluation
 FD : Forest Department
 ICFRE : Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education
 IIRS : Indian Institute of Remote Sensing

and support to the states, as required. The Cell would also actively participate in the deliberations of the UNFCCC on REDD+.

A State REDD+ Cell could be set up in the State FD for overseeing the project preparation and

implementation by the Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) or Village Forest Protection Committees (VFPCs). It shall also be responsible for ensuring that projects are designed in compliance with the national guidelines and are eligible for financing. In addition, the State REDD+ Cell shall

organize training and capacity-building seminars and workshops for officials of the SFD and village-level institutions through Forest Divisions which will be the main implementing agency for REDD+ programmes on the ground.

The village-level forest governance unit shall be responsible for REDD+ project formulation. The JFMCs and VFPCs could directly be involved in the implementation of REDD+ projects under the technical guidance of the Divisional Forest Officer concerned or his representatives. The Gram Sabha will be the central body to constitute the JFMC for conservation, protection, and management of forests, with benefit sharing from forests on the principle of sustainable harvests as laid down in the management plan of the respective area within their jurisdiction. The FD shall provide technical guidance to the Gram Sabha, and also monitor implementation of the management plan.

MRV of the REDD+ projects shall be carried out by independent experts not involved in any of the processes of preparing the forest carbon stocks inventory. For conducting the evaluation, they will be supported by the National and State REDD+ Cell. The data on changes in forest carbon stocks for estimating forest degradation can be collected using Remote Sensing (RS)/Geographic Information system (GIS) techniques along with required ground truthing (actual measurements on the project site). To ensure transparency, provisions will be made to involve and engage local communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, who will be trained by the FSI and FD on technological, methodological, policy, and financial aspects of MRV processes and procedures. For measuring the forest carbon stock, the FSI can empanel organizations for carrying out monitoring activities at the state level and validation of this information can be done by the FSI. For other ecosystem services, a set of indicators can be developed that can be monitored to adequately address the issue of safeguards. The MoEF may

designate centres of excellence to support both national as well as state REDD+ Cells. These centres of excellence will provide capacity-building support and perform other facilitating functions as may be required. Involvement of grass roots or civil society organizations will also help raise awareness on the issue among forest-dependent communities.

Strengthening Local Institutions

Local institutions play an enormously significant role in forest conservation and its sustainable utilization of forest resources. They also have the local acceptance that is essential for policy uptake. The institutions dealing with forests at the local level are JFMCs (known by different names in different States), Van Panchayats (Uttarakhand), traditional village-level institutions or Village Councils (Schedule VI area); and Biodiversity Management Committees, Forest Committees set up under Rule 4 of the Forest Rights Act, etc. In addition, Self Help Groups (SHGs) or Common Interest Groups (CIGs) have also been set up at the village level to promote forest-based livelihood activities. Since JFMCs have certain limitations such as tenurial insecurity, inadequate silvicultural development, restricted harvesting, lack of legal back up and market access, therefore they need to work in coordination with the Gram Sabhas or Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, empowers Gram Sabhas with the ownership of Minor Forest Produce and the responsibility to set up institutions to see that the individual and community forest rights are strengthened.

Village-level institutions for protection and management of forests with technical guidance from the FD need to be set up by the Gram Sabhas. This would not only help in strengthening the Gram Sabha, but would also help in necessary convergence of resources and integrated planning for implementing REDD+ at the village level that would surely benefit all stakeholders. Leadership

provided by the committees of the Gram Sabha and the SHGs would contribute to strengthening of the Gram Sabha.

REDD+ has to be implemented without undermining the needs of the local forest-dependent communities, however, this has to be based on the principles of sustainability. Livelihood activities and enterprises as well as protection of forests have often been effectively addressed at the cluster/sub-landscape level, led by product-based federations of SHGs and CIGs working as livelihood promotion groups, which need to be encouraged and facilitated along with village-level committees including JFMCs/Van Panchayats/Biodiversity Management Committees for forest protection, conservation, and livelihood activities in forest fringe areas. Therefore, the JFMC,¹ as a committee of the Gram Sabha, needs to be strengthened and appropriately empowered to protect and manage forests as well as act as the primary agency for implementing REDD+. This will necessitate a review of the structure and role of the Forest Development Agencies (FDA) to make them Forest Division level institutions, contribute to decentralized forest governance, and provide valuable services for forest conservation and improving livelihoods of people living in and around the forests. This would further help achieve poverty eradication objectives while enhancing carbon sequestration potential. The function of the FDA will be to facilitate demand-based and inclusive (participatory) planning and implementation of forest conservation and community development activities by the local bodies mandated by Gram Sabha. It will need to create partnerships with local NGOs/CBOs, academia, PRIs, research and training organizations, people's representatives, media, and government line agencies to carry out its function and to strengthen forest governance.

In order to carry out the above functions on ground, the FDA, as an institution would need to be strengthened with appropriate capacity building through a well thought out institutional arrangement, and adequate infrastructural support.

The FD in collaboration with other line departments like Tribal Welfare, Panchayati Raj, Social Welfare, Rural Development, Education, Electricity Departments should take up programmes for capacity building of the local community institutions as a long-term measure to help them effectively implement REDD+ and commence forest-based livelihood enterprises. SMF will require good skills and knowledge in inventorization, adaptive silvicultural practices, and sustainable NTFP harvesting and monitoring of impacts. Traditional knowledge, forestry science, and Information and Communication Technology will promote capacity-building initiatives.

The State FDs would act as an 'enabler' in addition to its statutory role in protection and management of forests and to ensure compliance with technical prescriptions of REDD+ with the active role of local communities. The State FDs have to prepare themselves for a new role which is more inclusive, facilitative, development centric, educative and supportive to local communities in enhancing forest resources, with a proactive role of the MoEF, Government of India. The engagement of community institutions in facilitating field actions will require sensitization of the FD officials and frontline staff. Capacity building of frontline staff, on a regular basis, to carry out the emerging role will have to be given high priority. Teams of subject-matter specialists at the level of revamped FDAs could bring in new knowledge and skills.

¹ The JFMC will be set up by the Gram Sabha. Its constitution and processes need to be harmonized with the provisions as laid out in the State Panchayat and PESA 1996 legislation.

In Summary

In addition to the institutional mechanism being negotiated at the international level, implementing REDD+ at the ground level needs to be backed by strong institutional support at the national, state, and local level. The entities that will be implementing REDD+ activities at different levels need to function in a well-coordinated manner in order to take decisions and incentivize actions that are in alignment with the national policies and internationally agreed objectives. Achieving the desired results requires adequate capacity support in terms of dedicated professional staff, technical base as well as provision of adequate financial resources.

Frequent and focused trainings can be organized for local institutions on cross-cutting issues and resource management highlighting their role as facilitating agencies. Orientation programmes on REDD+ could be made mandatory for in-service candidates, officials from various sectors and community foresters. A mechanism by means of which regular technical guidance can be provided to officials of the FD and local-level institutions needs to be established by MoEF.

National-level institutions that have been working in the forestry sector and which can support REDD+ activities need to be identified and strengthened. These can play an important role in providing the required technical inputs and undertaking capacity-building exercises on issues such as MRV, safeguards, assessment of carbon stock among others.

An inter-departmental coordinated approach is required to address the various drivers of deforestation and forest degradation that lie outside the forestry sector as well as cater to the concerns of different stakeholder groups. This demands coordinated efforts by all sectors to

align their policies and activities by means of mandates, procedures and capacity to meet such accountabilities. This will also ensure that the actions under existing policies and programmes of various departments that have linkages and overlaps are suitably modified/strengthened for realization of goals under SMF.

The local forest dependent communities would be central to the implementation of REDD+. It is a statutory requirement under the FRA to have Gram Sabha based forest governance. Also, the The Green India Mission states that committees set up by the Gram Sabha under FRA will be centrally engaged for implementation of Mission. Similarly, the Gram Sabha will be the overarching village-level institution to oversee and implement REDD+. The FD along with the local-level forest governance units will play a key role in sensitization and capacity building of the local people so they can reap maximum benefits from forest conservation activities in their area. The Gram Sabha and JFMCs with technical support from the FD are principal agencies in decentralized management of forests. These institutions need to be strengthened for effective decision making and planning to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of the local communities for the design of the REDD+ architecture.

The FD at the district level will provide the Gram Sabha with technical, monitoring, and legal support. The State REDD+ Cell will function as a link between the district-level authority and the National REDD+ Cell to incentivize measurable action at the field level. The National REDD+ Cell will engage at the international level to ensure that the REDD+ activities undertaken at the national level are in accordance with the principles agreed under the Framework Convention on Climate Change and are eligible for international support.

While in the REDD+ readiness phase, fund-based mechanism for REDD+ projects is recommended for supporting REDD+ activities, but later possibilities of a market-based mechanism could also be explored. The Green India Mission may present an opportunity to have a fund-based mechanism for financing REDD+ projects. Financial assistance may be provided to communities for preparing the baseline and later their efforts in forest conservation can be compensated on the basis of assessment of carbon stock and implementation of SMF.

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