

India

Views on implementing COP decisions on ‘Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries’ (REDD-plus)

1. REDD-plus activities

This submission from India provides a framework of approach to develop and implement a national REDD-plus strategy and actions pursuant to relevant COP decisions for assessment and monitoring of forest carbon stocks, and also for their enhancement.

In paragraphs 68 to 79 the decision relating to the ‘Outcome of the AWG-LCA under the Convention’, the 16th Conference of Parties to the Convention decided on the policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. Paragraph 70 identifies and lists the REDD-plus activities as follows:

“70. Encourages developing country Parties to contribute to mitigation actions in the forest sector by undertaking the following activities, as deemed appropriate by each Party and in accordance with their respective capabilities and national circumstances:

- (a) Reducing emissions from deforestation;
- (b) Reducing emissions from forest degradation;
- (c) Conservation of forest carbon stocks;
- (d) Sustainable management of forest;
- (e) Enhancement of forest carbon stocks;”

In above paragraph, the “plus” part of REDD-plus is included in (c), (d) and (e). Paragraph 70 also encourages the developing countries to undertake any of the above activities or a

combination thereof, as deemed appropriate, in accordance with their capabilities and national circumstances.

2. National REDD-plus framework

Paragraph 71 of the decision, inter alia, outlines essential elements of a national REDD-plus framework comprising a national strategy of actions, a national reference level and a transparent national monitoring and reporting system.

2.1 National strategy

India's national strategy aims at enhancing and improving the forest and tree cover of the country thereby enhancing the quantum of forest ecosystem services that flow to the local communities. The services include fuelwood, timber, fodder, NTFP and also carbon sequestration. It is underlined that in the Indian context, carbon service from forest and plantations is one of the co-benefits and not the main or the sole benefit. Initiatives like Green India Mission (GIM) and National Afforestation Programme (NAP), together with programmes in sectors like agriculture and rural development would add or improve 2 mha of forest and tree cover annually in our country. This will annually add 2 million tonnes of carbon incrementally, and post 2020, the forest and tree cover will be adding at least 20 million tonnes of carbon every year. This would require an investment of Rs. 90 billion (USD 2 billion) every year for 10 years. We expect a substantial part of this investment under REDD-plus financial support from UNFCCC.

2.2 Institutional mechanism for REDD+ at national level

The Government of India has established a REDD+ Cell in the Ministry of Environment and Forests having the task of coordinating and guiding REDD plus related actions at the national level, and to discharge the role of guiding, and collaborating with the State Forest Departments (SFDs) to collect, process and manage all relevant information and data relating to forest carbon accounting. National REDD+ Cell would also guide formulation, development, funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of REDD+ activities in the States. The Cell will assist the Ministry of Environment & Forests and its appropriate agencies in developing and implementing appropriate policies relating to REDD+ implementation in the country.

2.3 Institutionalization of national level forest carbon stocks accounting

In so far as national forest carbon stocks accounting is concerned, the Forest Survey of India (FSI) has adequate capability in this field. Backed by its expertise in estimation of forest and tree cover in the country, the FSI is capable of handling this national responsibility.

The FSI will act as the Lead Institution for the country and will have a networking approach involving Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Wildlife Institute of India (WII), and any other organization that FSI deems fit to co-opt.

India intends to further work on i) technological and methodological issues, and ii) policy and definitional issues to be able to contribute proactively in the future deliberations of the UNFCCC on REDD-plus. Review and fine-tuning of technological, methodological and connected infrastructural capabilities are considered to be essential for operationalizing the national level forest carbon stocks (FCS) accounting.

2.4 Methodological issues of estimation of FCS

India's future strategy in this regard is to devolve more and more responsibility on the State Forest Departments (SFDs) to carry out the assessment and estimation of forest carbon stocks (FCS) in conjunction with the biennial exercise of assessment of forest and tree cover (FTC). This is considered essential to improve the precision level for estimation of FCS as the State Governments can cover more number of sample points, than that being covered by the FSI at present due to constraints of time, finances and in adequate number of technical experts. In future, the SFDs can take the responsibility of carrying out the inventories for FTC and FCS by more effectively utilizing the services of their Remote Sensing Centres/Space Application Centres. FSI at that time can act as the source for providing satellite imageries required by the States for the purpose.

2.5 Methodological issue of precision in estimates

On the question of limits of error that will be acceptable for FCS estimation, especially in view of the continuous refinement of technology, it is intended that at the national level, the biennial

assessment may conform to $\pm 5\%$ precision (confidence limits), and at the State level it may be $\pm 20\%$, which may be reduced to $\pm 10\%$ by the year 2017 (third biennial assessment beyond 2011). Same precision as at State level may also be maintained at the district level. The aforesaid is summed up as under:

For estimation of forest carbon stocks (FCS)

Precision level at national level $\pm 5\%$

Precision level at state/district level $\pm 10\%$

As regards frequency of compiling and submitting national FCS accounts, India believes that it should coincide with the FSI's biennial State of Forest Report (SFR) and, therefore, should be in multiple of 2 or 4 years.

2.6 Policy and definitional issues

India intends to work upon the definitions of REDD-plus activities listed in paragraph 70 of the AWG-LCA document of COP 16 to be able to implement the same in its national context and circumstances. Specifically, more insight into understanding the definition of sustainable management of forest (SMF) is required to steer its proper application in forestry mitigation actions in different parts of the country. In ensuring the safeguards for the rights of the local communities including tribals, and above all of women folk of the local communities, India intends to involve the civil society and state forest departments in working out provisions and modalities for the same under the extant Forest Rights Act, and approaches of Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Community Forest Management (CFM). In addition to providing help in developing mechanisms for facilitating flow of REDD-plus incentives and other ecosystem benefits to the local community, it is expected that the Civil society would also contribute in analysis and impact of policy issues relevant to operationalization of REDD-plus in the context of local communities.

2.7 Local communities and co-benefits of forest ecosystem services including carbon service

While moving forward towards implementation of REDD-plus, participation of local communities with compulsory representation of women would be the central theme. Government

of India is committed to ensure that full and adequate incentives from REDD-plus go to the local communities as and when these become available. IN India's context, the forest will not be managed for 'carbon services' alone, but for all the ecosystem services that are flowing to the local community from the forest. Incentives for carbon services will be an add-on to the benefits that the local communities are already receiving from the forest ecosystems.

In future, whenever the REDD plus incentives begin to flow, these will be transmitted from the Centre to State Governments and then to District level. The State Government and District level authorities will plan and manage the flows further down to the local communities. Broad guidelines for flow of incentives from the Government of India (GOI) to State Governments will be developed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

In the longer term, guidelines for flow of funds from district to the lower levels will also be developed. In the interim period, the States/Districts will make and adopt their own procedures and arrangements for the purpose with prior approval of the MoEF.

2.8 Capacity building of State Forest Departments

FSI is expected to take the initiative of developing the capabilities of the state forest departments in forest carbon accounting so that they are more capable and consequently confident and self reliant in making inventories.

2.9 Choice of a starting phase

Paragraphs 73 and 74 of the AWG-LCA outcome document relate to the choice of a starting phase in consonance with the country's circumstances, capacities and capabilities. India is well prepared to move into the final phase of results-based actions that will be fully measured, reported and verified. However, initiation of results-based actions would be subject to agreement on the fixing of national forest reference level and procedures and processes for measuring reporting and verification.

2.10 National forest reference level

India gives highest priority to fixing of the reference level for carbon stocks in its forest and tree cover with a view to making assessment, monitoring, verification and reporting of

- i) baseline forest carbon stocks, and
- ii) incremental forest carbon stocks

India considers that the reference level in essence will be a baseline forest carbon stocks position corresponding to a specific year, which may be called as the 'zero year'. The 'zero year' would need to be fixed with consensus amongst intra-country stakeholders which would include the Central Government, State Governments, forest experts and scientists, local community and civil society. It is presumed that the starting point for fixing a forest reference level will be agreement on the 'zero year' backed by sound logic, timeseries of scientific historical data, and milestones of relevant legislation and/or policy prescriptions. The reference level would need to be agreed at the technical level, i.e., amongst scientific organizations, and subsequently at the government level involving the Central and the State Governments. Government of India intends to form a consortium of following scientific organizations for evolving consensus on a reference level, and zero year:

Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore

Forest Survey of India, Dehradun

Indian Council of Forestry research and Education, Dehradun

Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, Dehradun

National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad

Centre for Environmental Education, Ahmadabad

Central Government, Ministry of Environment and Forests (REDD+ Cell)

State Forest Departments

3. Safeguards

Developing countries are expected to follow safeguards, as mandated in paragraph 69 of the Decision with a view to ensure full participation of indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders, and conservation of natural forests and biodiversity in implementing the REDD activities.

India intends to ensure that all REDD-plus incentives available from international sources will flow fully and adequately to the local communities which participate in management or manage

the forest resources or are dependent on the forest resources for sustenance of their livelihood. Part of the incentives are expected to be invested in conservation and improvement of the ecosystem services like biodiversity and non-timber forest produce (NTFP). Local communities would be encouraged to develop microplans to incorporate such priorities.

4. Guidance from SBSTA

Notwithstanding above, India will keenly participate in the deliberations of SBSTA for development of modalities for

- i) measuring, reporting and verifying forest related emissions and removals, assessment of forest carbon stocks and changes therein.
- ii) a system for providing information on how the safeguards for ensuring participation of local communities, and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services

In India, tribals, forest dwellers and other local communities have always enjoyed legal safeguards to practise their customary rights and traditions. India has had a fairly successful initiative involving local communities for protection and management of government forests. Joint Forest Management (JFM) ensures a fair share in the forest produce for the protecting communities. So far, more than 100,000 JFM committees covering about 22 million ha, which is about 30% of total forest area of the country, have been formed with about 22 million participating members. JFM has recently been integrated into more democratic organizations of local governance, i.e, 'gram sabha'. The total area under JFM is now comparable to the areas managed under national parks and sanctuaries in India.

Promulgation of the Forest Rights Act has further strengthened the legal framework in the country for safeguarding the rights of local communities. Also, India will adopt, as appropriate, the modalities of the system as would be agreed in SBSTA for providing information on internal safeguards to the UNFCCC.

5. Pilot projects on conservation, sustainable management of forests (SMF), and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (EFCS)

Subject to availability of funding, India intends to launch three pilot projects, one each based on the concept of conservation, SMF and EFCS (Bali Action Plan) respectively to understand the

intricacies of maintaining baseline forest carbon stocks, forest carbon stocks changes, and forest carbon accounting. These projects will be taken at locations that cover different forest types and socio-geographic regions of the country. For example, project on conservation can be taken up in the Western Himalayan region comprising States of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, whereas Western Ghats should be suitable to test the concept of SMF. EFCS project can be taken up in any of the States registering increase in forest and tree cover according to SFR 2009.

6. Finances

Paragraph 77 and 78 of the of AWG-LCA outcome document requests the parties to explore financing options for full implementation of the results based actions in the context of national strategies or action plans, policies and measures, and capacity building. India reiterates its position of favouring a flexible combination of market based and non-market based approaches. Separate financial approaches need to be adopted for providing positive incentives for the two types of carbon stocks under REDD plus regime as under

- (a) Change in carbon stocks
 - (i) Incremental carbon stocks
 - (ii) Reduced deforestation
- (b) Baseline carbon stocks

The financial mechanism for providing positive incentives for (a) change in carbon stocks, and (b) baseline stocks is proposed to be as under:

- (i) A market based approach for fluxes with respect to a reference level for actions mentioned in paragraph 70 (a) Reducing emissions from deforestation; (b) Reducing emissions from forest degradation; (d) Sustainable management of forest¹; and (e) Enhancement of forest carbon stocks; of the AWG-LCA Cancun document

¹ When the activity results in increase of forest carbon stocks

- (ii) A non-market based approach for stocks with reference to actions mentioned in paragraph 70 (c) Conservation of forest carbon stocks²; (d) Sustainable management of forest²; of the AWG-LCA outcome document

Definitions, modalities, rules and guidelines relating to REDD plus mechanism including establishment of the market and non-market based financial approaches for disbursement of positive incentives need to be finalized early, and placed before the COP in its 17th Session at Durban.

² When the activity results in maintaining the present level of forest carbon stocks, i.e., when there is no increment or decrease in forest carbon stocks.