

German Climate Finance in India's Forest Sector: Supporting Tree Plantations and Ignoring the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

by Souparna Lahiri

1. Introduction

One of the strategic areas of support for climate change adaptation and mitigation in India are the State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC). They focus on mainstreaming climate change adaptation as a development model. One initiative, the Indo-German development project Climate Change Adaptation in Rural Areas of India [1] is financed by two German Ministries, [2] through a German Agency for International Collaboration, GIZ, [3] which is a private company that is majority-owned by the German government.

The project is jointly implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Government of India and GIZ, and has facilitated the development of a SAPCC in sixteen states and two Union Territories. The SAPCCs integrate climate change concerns into policies, plans and programmes at the state (federal) level, and contribute to building

Important Acronyms

SAPCC	State Action Plans on Climate Change
NECCAP	North East Climate Change Adaptation Programme
NAPCC	National Action Plan on Climate Change
GIZ	A private company that is majority-owned by the German government, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
KfW	A German government-owned development bank
GIM	Green India Mission
JFM	Joint Forest Management
JFMCs	Joint Forest Management Committees

capacity for adaptation at the local level.

Similar to the SAPCCs, KfW (a German government-owned development bank) has supported the North East Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NECCAP), covering four more Indian states.

Both the SAPCCs and NECCAP are of serious concern to forest communities and biodiversity in India, due to the involvement of monoculture tree plantations and centralised, top-down governance structures that have excluded rights-holders from decision-making.

2. GIZ and the State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC)

GIZ supported the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change to develop a common framework for preparing the SAPCCs, and appointed climate experts to carry forward the process. By 2015, all of

the SAPCCs had been endorsed by India's National Steering Committee on Climate Change.

The sixteen GIZ-supported states are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Haryana,

Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, and West Bengal.

2.1 Strategy on forests and biodiversity in SAPCCs

Three pillars formed the basis of the strategic plans for forests and biodiversity in GIZ-supported SAPCCs:

- i. Increasing forest cover through afforestation and reforestation,
- ii. Participatory forest management or Joint Forest Management (JFM), and
- iii. Monitoring and Implementation of the strategic plans through the State Forest Departments as key stakeholders.

Afforestation and reforestation are key to all 16 SAPCCs through the implementation and promotion of the Green India Mission (GIM, see section 4) and National Afforestation Programme, both of which are Government of India initiatives.

For example, the **Tamil Nadu SAPCC** bases plans to increase forest cover both inside and outside of forest areas on the Green India Mission, which includes a promotion of industrial tree and energy plantations through Public-Private Partnerships. [4]

The **Rajasthan SAPCC** includes afforestation in 13 districts, and states: *"Massive efforts for tree planting and restoration of forests in Rajasthan are required in order to encourage carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation. This action would be supplemented by the proposed afforestation on large scale under the newly launched 'Harit Rajasthan' (Green Rajasthan) programme..."*. [5] Afforestation on 1,775,000 ha of forest land and 3,575,000 ha of non-forest land has been set as a target for carbon sequestration purposes.

In the **West Bengal SAPCC**, the main thrust is "on the improvement of forest trees and productivity of forests." [6] It includes a set of nine strategies which are in line with the Green India Mission, and involves the identification of non-native tree species that can survive climate change, and the adoption of short rotation species.

The **Manipur SAPCC** promotes plantations of economically important species in order to convert the degraded Reserved (protected) forests into high-quality forests, with better vegetation density, and with a view to increasing the viability of commercial timber harvesting. Several adaptation and mitigation measures proposed under the SAPCC for the forest sector are taken from the Green India Mission and the National Afforestation Programme. [7]

3. KfW and the North East Climate Change Adaptation Programme

The North East Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NECCAP) is supported by KfW, and is based on overall Government of India climate change policy and on agreements made between KfW, the Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region and the State Governments of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Sikkim. The programme aims to implement adaptation measures designed to address the current and future impacts of climate change in the region.

Aspects of the programme follow the Green India Mission and aim to enhance ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and storage, hydrological flows, and biodiversity, as well as increasing the value of fuel wood and small-scale timber harvesting, and non-timber forest products. The programme output includes the “optimisation” (read regulation) of *jhuming*, a traditional and culturally important form of “shifting cultivation” in hilly areas, and output indicators include improved

forest/vegetation cover. [8] Clearly there is a danger that land used for traditional agricultural practices could be used for monoculture plantations instead.

Specific to Sikkim, the strategy is to strengthen Green India Mission initiatives in the state and implement the National Afforestation Programme on more than 10,000 ha of land. [9]

4. The Green India Mission (GIM)

The Government of India announced its first ever National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in June 2008, and the GIM is one of the eight national missions incorporated under the plan. GIM was “launched to enhance eco-system services including carbon sinks...”. [10]

The formulation of the NAPCC and its specific mission plans was not a participatory or transparent process. [11] Public consultations on GIM were organised in just six locations across India over a one month period, thereby excluding a large number of forest groups and communities. GIM was formally adopted in February 2011. [12] However, days before the UN’s Conference of the Parties in November 2010 in Cancun, and without any formal consultation or policy decision, the Ministry of Environment and Forests hailed GIM as India’s REDD+ Action Plan, [13] thereby closing the door to any further discussion on it. [14]

In brief, the GIM aims to:

1. Increase forest/tree cover on 5 million ha of forest and non-forest lands and improve the quality of forest cover on another 5 m ha (a total of 10 m ha).
2. Improve ecosystem services including biodiversity, hydrological services and carbon sequestration.
3. Increase the forest-based livelihood income of about 3 million households living in and around forests.
4. Enhance annual CO₂ sequestration by 50 to 60 million tonnes in the year 2020.

In India, development in the forests sector focuses largely on afforestation of degraded forests, wastelands and

farmlands. State Forest Departments routinely implement afforestation programmes which are largely dominated by monoculture species including eucalyptus, acacias, teak, sal, pines and poplar. Such afforestation programmes often take place on cultivated lands, village commons, and community pasture lands, where land is taken away from people who depend on it for their food security and income. Plantations reduce community access to forest produce and grazing areas for livestock. On top of this, land clearance for plantations often results in the destruction of biodiversity-rich natural forests and grasslands. This is the context into which GIM, a vast afforestation programme, has been introduced.

In a joint statement dated July 10, 2010, the forest movements in India referred to GIM as a “Formula for More Land and Resource Grabbing”. The statement said: “*This Mission, in its current form, will lead to increased land grabbing, violation of people’s rights,*

environmental destruction, and loss of common lands and livelihoods based on them, without any way [of] genuinely responding to the burning problem of climate change”. [15]

The forest movements further pointed out that: *“the Forest Department has neither the expertise nor the skill to implement “restoration of ecosystems and habitat diversity,” nor is there space for such expertise. Within the document itself, the old Department line shows through: forest restoration is almost equated with plantations and grassland restoration with grazing reduction. The [GIM] document totally ignores indigenous and local knowledge about ecosystems and eco-restoration. While expressing the point that monocultures are “more vulnerable”, the draft document nowhere rules them out, and they would be the natural result of this process.”*

The joint statement concluded that *“The Green India Mission is likely only to result in conflict, resistance, impoverishment and displacement, while itself causing environmental damage. Any such Mission has to begin with a democratic framework that, in particular, disempowers the Forest Department and creates the space for genuine people's empowerment. ...we oppose this program and call instead for the Environment Ministry and the Central government to respect people's rights, indigenous knowledge and democratic control over forest and land resources, which will do far more to tackle climate change than such dangerous programmes.”*

The State Action Plans that have been supported by GIZ are still being implemented, so it is still too early to say definitively what the impacts of the GIM in those states is or has been.

However, a recent study has detailed the impacts in other states where GIM and the National Afforestation Plan have involved plantations.

In **Odisha**, tree plantations have taken over village commons, forest land that communities have customary rights of access to, and even land where communities have rights to habitation and cultivation. From 21 villages surveyed, one hundred households have lost access to such lands. In **Maharashtra**, it was also found that plantations had been set up on lands that communities have rights of access and grazing to. And in the state of **Jharkhand**, plantations have been implemented forcibly, resulting in violence. These plantations cover lands to which communities have rights of habitation and cultivation, pasture lands and sites of religious and cultural significance. [16]

5. Participatory forest management: ignoring Village Councils and Free, Prior and Informed Consent

The implementation strategies for SAPCCs and NECCAP encourage participatory forest management through Joint Forest Management (JFM) schemes, where Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) are created to implement the plans at the local level. However, this completely ignores Gram Sabhas (Village Councils), which are statutory bodies at the village and hamlet level for indigenous and local communities. JFMCs on the other hand are non-statutory bodies, with no legal basis. [17] Under JFM, ownership and control over land and forest resources remain in the hands of the state, while communities are denied a governance

role. Further still, JFMCs work under the supervision and direction of Forest Department officials, meaning that forest governance remains centralised under state-level bureaucracy.

India's Forest Rights Act 2006 provides for decentralised forest governance, resolving to *“recognise and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in such forests for generations”*. The Act enshrines “community forest governance”, led by the Gram Sabhas, recognising that Indian forests have to be managed, governed and conserved by the forest

dwelling communities themselves, and not by JFMCs or the Forest Departments.

The Forest Rights Act 2006 is very clear that for any activity that takes place in Indian forests the consent and consultation of Gram Sabhas is mandatory. However, the SAPCCs and the NECCAP were devised and approved without any consultation or consent from them. Instead they have been bypassed in favour of unaccountable, unrepresentative and bureaucratic JFMCs.

6. Conclusion

This case study has highlighted how SAPCCs and NECCAP, through close alignment with the Green India Movement and Joint Forest Management governance structures, promote the spread of monoculture tree plantations across India. This is likely to result in substantial ecological harm to natural ecosystems, and harm

to communities through a loss of access to land. The structures that govern these state-wide plans have led to the exclusion of rightsholders from decision-making, where the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Indian forests has not been sought.

GIZ and KfW should aim to safeguard the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as ensure that the projects they support protect the health of natural ecosystems.

[1] Climate Change Adaptation in Rural Areas of India – CCA RAI, German Cooperation, GIZ, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India, 2014

[2] CCA RAI is financed by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), which has been supporting climate and biodiversity protection projects in India through its International Climate Initiative (IKI) since 2008, and by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

[3] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH

[4] Tamil Nadu State Action Plan for Climate Change, GIZ, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2014

[5] Rajasthan State Action Plan on Climate Change, Government of Rajasthan, 2014

[6] West Bengal State Action Plan on Climate Change, Government of West Bengal, Government of India, 2012

[7] Manipur State Action Plan on Climate Change, Directorate of Environment, Government of Manipur, 2013

[8] Indian-German Financial Cooperation, North East Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NECCAP), Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), Government of India and KfW Development Bank, Project Document, 2011

[9] Sikkim State Action Plan on Climate Change (2012-2030), Government of Sikkim, 2011

[10] National Action Plan on Climate Change, Government of India, Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, 2008 <http://www.moef.nic.in/downloads/home/Pg01-52.pdf>

[11] Dams, Rivers & People, June-August 2009, Vol.7, Issues 5-7, South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People in https://sandrp.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/drp_june-aug-2009.pdf

[12] See http://www.moef.gov.in/sites/default/files/GIM_Mission%20Document-1.pdf

[13] Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+) was first negotiated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2005, with the objective of mitigating climate change through reducing net emissions of greenhouse gases through enhanced forest management in developing countries.

[14] See <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/sites/indiawaterportal.org/files/India%27s-forests-and-REDD-Plus-A-factsheet-prepared-by-Ministry-of-Environment-and-Forests%20%282010%29.pdf>

[15] Formula for More Land and Resource Grabbing: Dangers of Green India Mission, Joint Statement issued by Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) and National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), July 10, 2010, New Delhi

[16] Community Forest Rights Learning and Advocacy, Interim Report on Impact of Compensatory Afforestation on Land and Forest Rights, 2017 at <https://fra.org.in/document/National%20Brief%20on%20CAMPA.pdf>

[17] See <http://www.ielrc.org/content/e9004.pdf>