

REDD, REDD+ and India

India has more than 70 m ha under forest cover with four global biodiversity hot-spots, and is one of the 17 megadiverse countries. In India, approximately 200 million people are dependent on forests for their livelihood. India recognizes that conserving, expanding and improving the quality of our forests is a major national priority. This has enormous domestic and transnational mitigating benefits. Not only it is a cost-effective and efficient way to mitigate the effects of climate change, but it also improves India's water security, safeguards its rich biodiversity and provides livelihood security for millions of Indians¹.

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) is the global endeavour to create incentive for developing countries to protect, better manage and save their forest resources, thus contributing to the global fight against climate change.

REDD+ goes beyond merely checking deforestation and forest degradation; it includes incentives for positive elements of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Countries that reduce emissions and undertake sustainable management of forests will be entitled to receive funds and resources as incentives. REDD+ conceptualizes flow of positive incentives for demonstrated reduction in deforestation or for enhancing quality and expanse of forest cover. It works on the basis of creating a financial value for the carbon stored and enhanced in the biomass and soil of standing forests. The REDD+ approach incorporates important benefits of livelihoods improvement, biodiversity conservation and food security services.

India will gain a lot from REDD+ as it has opened avenues to get compensation for the efforts of pro-conservation and sustainable management of forests, which will result in further increase of forest cover and consequently forest carbon stocks. The incentives which will be received from REDD+ would be passed on to the local communities which are

involved in forest conservation. It is estimated that India could provide capture of more than 1 billion tonnes of additional CO₂ over the next 30 years and will gain US\$ 3 billion as carbon service incentives.

The REDD+ initiative will help local Indian communities as it clearly safeguards their rights. India is committed to the fact that monetary benefits from REDD+ will flow to local, forest-dependent, forest-dwelling and tribal communities. This is ensured for three reasons; first, in the Indian context, REDD+ is intended to be an additional co-benefit to the goods and services already accruing to and being enjoyed by the local communities, and therefore, it comes as a bonus without compromising on the existing benefits. Second, the Indian Government additionally ensures that REDD+ will not adversely impact the traditional and legal rights of the local communities over forests, but on the other hand, will ensure more monetary benefits flowing to them. Third, REDD+ recognizes and respects national legislations relating to safeguards for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and aims to promote their participation in implementation and monitoring of the endeavour.

India has a unique stand on REDD and REDD+ in the ongoing global negotiations. India believes fairness requires that a unit of carbon saved by checking deforestation should be treated the same as a unit of carbon added due to conservation and afforestation measures. In essence, India has been insisting on following a comprehensive and holistic approach in realizing the full potential of mitigation in the forestry sector. India's stand was finally accepted in 13th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 13) at Bali, when elements of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks were added to the then existing text of reducing deforestation and forest degradation as part of the Bali Action Plan.

India is playing a crucial role and has taken a strong course in favour of a comprehensive REDD+ strategy. India has started an ambitious 'Green India Mission' under the National Action Plan on Climate Change with a budget of Rs 46,000 crore over a period of 10 years. The objective of the Mission is to increase forest and tree cover in 5 m ha of land and improve quality of forest cover in another 5 m ha. Thus, the Mission will help in improving ecosystem services in 10 m ha of land, and increase the flow of forest-based livelihood services and the income of about 3 million forest dwellers. India has made a submission² to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on REDD, sustainable management of forest and afforestation and reforestation in December 2008. A technical group has been set up to develop methodologies and procedures to assess and monitor contribution of REDD+ actions. A National REDD+ Coordinating Agency is being established. A National Forest Carbon Accounting Programme is being institutionalized. India is hosting the Conference of Parties (COP-11) of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2012, to coincide with 20 years of Rio. A report on the study of the impact of climate change on India's forests assigned to the Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment, has been released in November 2010. In the year 2030, 8–56% of forests are likely to experience a change in vegetation type with respect to those observed in the 1970s. There is likely to be an increase in net primary productivity ranging from 20% to 57%.

1. India's forests and REDD. Report, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.
2. India: Making rapid strides on forests and climate change. Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, 27 May 2010.

Jaimini Sarkar (*S. Ramaseshan Fellow*).
e-mail: Jaimini_dhane@hotmail.com