

# MAUSAM

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## **The Durban Talks and where we Stand: Do we Stand anywhere? Some Random Thoughts from India**

### 1.

Another fresh series of those by-now-ritual climate negotiations is round the corner: come this November, interested parties meaning governments of the world, experts, NGOs and powerbrokers of all shades and hues will throng the streets of the picturesque sea-side city of Durban, in South Africa. In India this will mean that the domestic media will sit up 'sensitized', and we'll know plenty about the arctic sea melting, glacial retreat and other manifestations of a crisis that remains a crisis only during the climate summits. We'll also know the political angle; the Indian government reasserting its no-compromise-with-the-country's-growth-trajectory-at-any-cost stand, and the country's just war about getting a fair share of the global carbon space.

Yet, will we really know anything? Will we have an informed position on the very real and imminent menace of climate change? When the climate talks started two decades ago and later the Kyoto Protocol was formulated, scientists (including naysayers), politicians (a few) and technocrats held all the 'climate' knowledge; the civil society representation consisted of a handful of NGOs. As the global warming threat became more palpable over the years, many movement groups across the world who usually did not bother too much about 'environmental' issues per se took up the climate issue and today climate justice movement is increasingly providing a political platform for various social movements.

Yet there's still a great amount of tentativeness when we urban individuals think of action; our opinions and actions are relentlessly conditioned and shaped by the 'real' events (which include governmentspeak and political prep-talks) as reported by the media, in some cases academic discourses, and often conjectures. Because none of these stimuli provides exact action roadmaps, at the end there's only more bafflement. There's simply too much information: if you google for 'climate change', an overwhelming stream of information floods you in an instant. How to judge, assess, filter? How to take a decision? This is so complex, and what can one do anyway?

Out of our (and billions of peoples' affected by global warming) sight and knowledge, meanwhile, governments, politicians and companies continue

playing their games. We'll mitigate and adapt: either the global warming will go away through more carbon soaking miracle plants, or we trap the truant carbon underneath; we'll set up the win-win market for trading emissions, the greenhouse gases which the developed northern economies need to emit in order to maintain their present growth labels will be offset (the august UNFCCC will supervise and regulate, don't you worry) by green projects set up by the responsible corporations in the South. This is mitigation. Part of the money the offset projects earn will be set aside for the global adaptation fund, we'll give the deserving poor in the climate-affected south enough money to build sea dykes and storm shelter sand food, in case the crops fail.

This jabberwock of unintelligible jargons, pointless mathematics and dubious science today stand for the great Kyoto Protocol; in which many 'environmental' groups, other of course than governments and experts, still believe. Why the belief? Because what other 'practical' and 'pragmatic' options do we have else? Even when the governments and corporations are caught lying, they still remain powerful--and unless we convince the powerful, how can things move?

Therefore we rot. Emissions increase despite a worldwide emissions trading market, islands disappear routinely, crops vanish and visible and imminent climate disasters threaten more than two thirds of the world's population. We look forward to governments like ours who talk about beautiful climate missions and do nothing. We sit up during Copenhagen, Durban and similar annual COP carnivals and take notice, and yet do not know what we can do beyond being concerned; at best we discuss CFL bulbs, energy-efficient chulahs(stoves) and more trees in our localities.

## 2

Only an understanding of the political context of the physical phenomenon of climate change may help us arrive at an informed position on the issue. Because the civil society in India hasn't been that responsive to the issue so far, there isn't a recognizable civil society position yet, and here civil society is meant to include social movements, many of which do not have a position. The political parties including many on the left of course have one: they squarely support the Indian government's position, barring small differences.

We need to examine several things in examining the government position. The logic the Indian government has been using in rationalizing its

energy-intensive and hence predominantly fossil-fuel intensive development/growth trajectory so far has consisted of two things: 1. poverty alleviation in tune with the Millennium Development Goal (less of that in last couple of years) and 2: democratization of the carbon space. While the poverty alleviation plank doesn't merit serious discussion, the second is more problematic: it contains the binary of us/them and our right-to-grow/right-to-emit formula as opposed to the industrialized countries' contribution to the global emission curve.

For us, the really important thing to know and understand is the direct link between the democratic-sounding and apparently politically correct 'the right-to-grow/right-to-emit' logic and the impacts of the increasing growth-emission curve on the poor and marginalized. There is a need to smoke out in the open the commons-resource access-livelihood discourse latent in the climate discourse, and show that India's greater share in the carbon space will result in more social and environmental disasters inside the country: as an instance the new spurt in mega thermal projects and the struggles around those, on both land and pollution aspects, and also coal mining; meaning more dispossession, more deforestation, and hence more poverty and emission.

We need to look at the other half of the government position: its adaptation and mitigation exercises including the no-holds-barred promotion of all forms of market-linked instruments of carbon trading. It can be shown(see articles in this issue) that for the Indian people these add to the prevailing misery, and only the state and the corporations benefit: even a cursory review of the so-called alternative energy practices will show that the rich control both the mainstream and the alternative: wind, hydro, biomass, waste-to-energy and so on.

We need to look at adaptation and link this to the vulnerability of people: the impacts already studied and being felt along coasts, mountains and agricultural fields: drought, change in monsoon cycle, crop production cycles affected (see articles inside). We need to understand how the Indian people are victims thrice: victims of climate change/global warming caused by the industrialized countries, victims of India's carbon space democracy politics as manifested in 'development' disasters and struggles, and most ironically, of the mitigation policies as well.

We need to see it bottom-up, what the 'carbon space' means for the victim people: understand, rather than going into the Copenhagen and Durban intrigues too much, how India's utilization of the just 'space' means

enclosing people's spaces. And we need to take a stand that says: phase out the use of fossil fuel and change the resource-guzzling growth trajectory not only because of increased emission but also very much because the process is inequitable, unethical, unjust and unconstitutional in a purely domestic context.

### 3

It's important to understand that things are not going to change automatically. Kyoto and such sham solutions to the greatest threat the life forms in this planet have ever faced will not change anything beyond making the corporations richer (just look at how carbon trading benefits the corporate in India and elsewhere). The corporations won't change: if public opinion forces them to go green in the North, they'll go more off-shore in the South(or, pollute at one place in one country, say India, and set up windmills somewhere in the same country: our government in India has recently announced an internal emission trading).

How will things change, then? They may not change at all (not likely, it's extremely doubtful whether the

virtual buoyancy of the neo-liberal capitalism will be potent enough to absorb the impacts of climate change and of course the recession). Alternately, they may change in pockets in some country to start with, depending upon the strength of people's movements, and other economic and political realities.

Many small locals have to be counter-posed to the invasive and destructive global; and we need many localized actions in the days to come. Politically speaking, however, so long as these locals remain merely 'local' and do not link with each other, pressure on governments won't build up. The linking up has started to happen in India, though minus the climate aspect, and largely on temporal issues. We need to wait for this yet tottering process to gain more political articulation and remember that the fight for climate justice will be many things simultaneously, and will take many shapes. But let's not lose track of the fact that in today's world, this fight will essentially be a protracted battle against resource-usurping and marauding corporations, and the capitalist system that feeds these oligarchs, inside and outside the country.

**soumitra ghosh**

*(Soumitra Ghosh, a social activist and researcher, is associated with National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers and NESPOL, and can be contacted at [soumitrag@gmail.com](mailto:soumitrag@gmail.com))*



## A guarantee waiting to be realized: India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and Climate Change

*NREGA has created millions of water-harvesting structures; each of them an insurance against climate change impacts on farmers. We are yet to redeem that guarantee.*

It was a severe drought in 2009. Climate change again played in everybody's mind. What would happen when it impacts with full steam? But, there were plenty good news as well! India got around 77% of its average rainfall. Use-wise, this is more than double the quantity of rain we need in a year. Not to waste this, the country had weaved a web of an unprecedented 0.8-million water-harvesting/conservation and drought-proofing structures during March-October 2009 under the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). In addition to it, since 2006, NREGA has created another 2 million such structures with storage capacity of 523-million cubic metres that must have harvested enough water from last two normal monsoons. To make things easier for small farmers, the NREGA has treated 10-million hectares of drought-prone farmland in the last three years. Ideally, the country should celebrate such a time in history!

In 2005, the NREGA was conceived to drought-proof Indian villages, reduce farm distress and usher in rural prosperity using the precious capital of human labour. The Act is impressive in its creation of village water structures. The number quoted above is historic as never before in the country's public wage programmes have we created so many structures in such a short span of time. Each of these structures is an effective economic instrument for small farmers who account for close to 20% of the national GDP.

However, an obvious question is: why could these structures not avert the drought of 2009? Rather, the drought of 2009 turned out to be the fourth severest drought in the past 100 years. Government reaction was usual: mount emergency relief as it is being done for more than 100 years.

The answer to this question comes from the fact that a substantial number of farmers have sailed through the deficit monsoon using the NREGA structures. The NREGA, for the government, is the cheapest irrigation mode costing one-tenth of the current average of 150,000 rupees per hectare of irrigation. It means that the NREGA has the potential not only to drought-proof the country but also at least cost.

A closer look at the government data shows how we lost this opportunity. Out of the total works created under them (as quoted above), average of last three years show that more than 50% of them have either remained not completed or abandoned half way through. In 2008/09, hardly 50% of water conservation and 60% of drought-proofing works were completed. Till 28 August 2010, only 16% of water conservation and less than 10% of drought-proofing works have been completed. In a way, we have wasted close to one million water-harvesting structures, which would have been useful in averting the drought by retaining surplus water from last two normal monsoons as well as retaining flowing water from current monsoon.

In fact, district-wise assessment shows that many drought-prone districts have large number of water conservation works pending completion. One glaring example is Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, a chronic drought-prone district from where the NREGA was launched. In 2009, it completed only 29 drought-proofing works out of 7981 undertaken in the last five months. At the same time, villages with completed structures have their crops unaffected by the deficit monsoon.

Secondly, most of the structures created in the last three years do not have any effective plan for maintenance and operation. This means that those completed have not been maintained well to be effective. And, thirdly, a handful of five states account for close to 90% of total such works thus not making water conservation a country-wide priority even though 68% of net sown areas of the country are drought-prone.

After the severe drought of 2002, the Union and state governments realized that drought is not a disaster but a condition created more out of mismanagement of the rainfall than shortage in rainfall per se. The NREGA is a creative formalization of that realization. It will be a criminal oversight if we let this unrealized.

### Climate change and the NREGA

Going by scientific predictions, climate change would intensify drought, floods, and extreme heat and rainfall conditions. Worse is that it would make the monsoon, arguably the most important factor controlling Indian economy, erratic. The natural hydrological cycle of India would be distorted and

the severity of droughts will substantially increase. Broadly speaking, we can fight climate change in two ways: by curbing emissions of GHGs (greenhouse gases) that cause global warming and by preparing the communities to fight the impacts of climate change in effective ways. The first option needs a wider arrangement among the developed and developing countries to work on a plan that cuts down emissions. We have been doing it for close to two decades but without results. Cutting down emissions involves crucial changes in our development models and also in our use of technologies. So, it is a critical long-term approach. Even if we stop emitting GHGs now completely, the earth has enough carbon dioxide accumulated over the past 200 years to trigger changes in climate for the coming centuries. The next option is to empower communities to fight the impact effectively. This must be done urgently as communities across the country are reporting strange changes in the monsoon pattern and losing crops more frequently than earlier. If we do not make our rural communities secure from climate-change impacts, poverty would further escalate.

We have been facing drought and floods with religious regularity. The concern now is their rising intensity. As a country, we have more than 150 years of formal experience in managing drought and floods. Despite this, every time a disaster strikes us, we are found helpless. Just imagine a situation where these disasters would be more in intensity and spread. The question therefore is: can we fight the impacts of climate change? Certainly, yes. I will limit my argument for the purpose to the water sector.

Let's take two examples: Hiware Bazar in Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra and Bangomunda in Balangir district of Orissa, both of which are chronically drought-prone. This will explain how climate-change impacts can or cannot be mitigated or adapted to. The villages are studies in contrast. The latter gets around 1000 mm of rainfall but suffers from chronic drought and the former gets around 400 mm rainfall but has surplus water. Both the villages have been covered under the Drought Prone Areas Programme for close to 50 years.

Hiware Bazar had a past similar to Bangomunda. In a changed climate scenario, drought would be more pronounced for both the villages. But, Hiware Bazar has insured its future from climate change while Bangomunda would continue to suffer from drought, rather more frequently.

What is the insurance of Hiware Bazar against

climate change impacts? It has invested heavily in water conservation in the last one decade. And, it did not ask for extra money from government to do so. The village community just used existing drought mitigation programmes to invest in water conservation. The result is that from a water-scarce village it has become a water-surplus village. It has now created such a sustainable and prosperous economy that people those who had migrated to urban areas are coming back to the village (in mid-1980s the village was virtually abandoned). By default, the village has become a climate-change crusader.

On the other hand, Bangomunda village, despite access to government programmes, never took up water conservation. As a result, the villagers have to migrate out for close to eight months in search of work. In a changed climate scenario, its future will only be worse. Therefore, the participation of the communities is important to make the existing programmes sustainable.

### **To be climate-change neutral**

India can virtually insure its every village from climate change without any extra cost, that is, with the help from the NREGA. It guarantees manual jobs to those who need it. Using this employment, the Act creates village assets, mostly water conservation and drought-proofing works. Moreover, it mandates a village to plan its development and seeks works that would be suitable for the village situation. Since its inception in 2005, more than 4% of India's population, mostly poor, has worked under the Act. In the last five years, more than three-million water-conservation and drought-proofing works have been undertaken under the Act.

On an average, each village has created six water-conservation structures. There are reports of such structures ensuring good agricultural productivity despite constant drought. The water level in dug wells and check dams has increased. Many villages in the drought-prone areas have reported second crop for the first time using the harvested water. Hiware Bazar village used funds from a similar programme in implementation in the state since early 1970s for water conservation. However, there are also reports of official contractor nexus forcing villages to agree for road construction. The wage structure is such that people get less money for working in water conservation projects than in road-building works.

In order to turn the NREGA into a climate-change

security tool, 'the mandatory village plan provision for communities' should be judiciously used to identify problems as well as solutions; and incentives in terms of high wage rate for taking up water-conservation and drought-proofing works should be brought in to programme at village levels.

This needs minor changes in the wage guidelines of the Act. This will make people earn more while ensuring that their village remains secured from the impacts of climate change. The change we need now is to make every Indian a climate-change crusader. And, we need the change now.

**richard mahapatra**

*(The author, a Delhi-based development writer and Senior Editor at Down to Earth, can be contacted at <[richardmahapatra@gmail.com](mailto:richardmahapatra@gmail.com)>)*



## Deepening Desertification: experiences from Orissa

*Farmers in Orissa believe that the end has just begun. Thanks to climate change, water is getting increasingly precious.*

As a build up to the CoP-15 (Fifteenth Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC) in 2009, the WIO (Water Initiatives Orissa), a network of civil society groups and experts working on water and climate change issues, met farmers of Orissa in order to frame their 'agenda' for the world governments. Most of these farmers were from villages in the non-irrigated areas of Sambalpur and Jharsuguda districts, and were relatives or fellow villagers of the farmers who had just committed suicide after their crops failed following an erratic monsoon.

Suicides by farmers (at least forty by then) had surprised the government and the people of Orissa. Unlike farmers of irrigated areas of the state, farmers here are mostly poor adivasis with small landholdings who primarily depend on rain-fed irrigation, where the cost of production is much less compared to their counterparts in irrigated areas. The WIO's assessment found that these farmers could be victims of climate change. Late arrival of monsoon and increased heat during the sowing period might have been responsible for the growth of swarming caterpillars and other insects to an extent that the farmers couldn't cope with: their traditional mechanisms failed and the ones who could not bear the shock committed suicide. The issue had hit the state big, so much so that the next Assembly session was to be abruptly closed half way through. A central team visited the state in order to assess the drought situation and suggest appropriate relief measures. Such teams and the governments need to realize that simple relief measures such as subsidy in motor pumps and fertilizers will no longer help. Villagers that the WIO met believed that climate had started killing their life support systems such as water, land, and forests, especially water

### From bad to worse

In most of these villages, where the crop has failed, forcing farmers to end their lives, water is a precious resource. They depend on rain for their crops and to meet their drinking water needs. 'Traditionally we have been dependent on the tanks and wells for irrigation and drinking water,' says Durga Bagh, a local activist based in the Rengali block of Sambalpur district. Things changed with the building of the Hirakud Dam in the sixties and local weather

patterns have undergone a drastic change ever since, he argues.

'However, in the Rengali block and many areas in Sambalpur, Sundergarh, and Jharsuguda districts, from where most of the farmers' suicide cases are reported, first coal mining and then thermal power and steel industries have fuelled the drastic change in local climatic conditions,' says Prof. Arttabandhu Mishra, a retired teacher of the Sambalpur University. 'Massive deforestation coupled with industrial activities has given rise to local temperatures. Monsoon has as such gone erratic. A combined effect of all these has been that the area has turned drier,' adds Prof. Mishra.

People in the villages where the WIO visited have been witnessing a regular decline in water availability during the last one-and-half decade. 'Water table has gone down by at least 70 feet in the last few years,' informs Bagh. His claim is supported by the continuously diminishing irrigation potential of the block over the past decade. Government officials also inform that the area under irrigation has gone down by at least 50%, despite available capacity. As a result, out of the total 19,300 hectares of land, only 200 hectares are now under irrigation. At least nine lift irrigation points are standing idle. 'Most of the wells and tube wells go dry in summer and at least 30% of the tube wells have permanently become inoperative,' informs Bagh.

### Deepening desertification

In 2006, the WIO had warned that Orissa was experiencing a 'desert climate' and moving fast towards total desertification. In Rengali block, the signs are already visible: 'At least 40% of the fertile land of the block has turned barren in just a decade and half,' says Bagh. The WIO research had come up with similar indicators. It had also pointed out from the government records that in just 13 years between 1991/92 and 2004/05, areas classified as 'severely degraded land' increased by 136% in the state, while barren land increased by 69%, and land converted to non-agricultural uses increased by 34%. A latest report by scientists of the ISRO (Indian Space Research Organization) also indicates that Orissa is on a desertification path. The scientists, who have done the first ever national-level spatial inventory for the entire country, giving information on various land degradation processes and their severity, have put Orissa next to Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir,

Gujarat, and Maharashtra as those states having high proportion of land undergoing degradation.

It is now evident that scientists' projections and local perception on climate change have a converging point. The impact is getting severe by the year and is more pronounced on the poor and marginalized of the state. The tale of Sumitra Bhoi is a testimony : 'Things have been turning worse and this year we lost everything,' said Sumitra, widow of Balaram Bhoi of Gulamal Padhanpali village in Rengali . 'The swarming caterpillars ruined us forever,' rues she. Earlier that year, Balaram (35) consumed the pesticide, which he had bought to kill the caterpillars. Unfortunately, the medicine which proved ineffective in controlling the pest menace successfully ended Balaram's life. Balaram had one acre of parental farming land and was doing share-cropping on another three-and-half acres. 'He was a daily-wage labour earlier and only after I kept insisting that he started farming. Everything was going well; last year, we had a great crop. But this year, the rain failed us. I curse myself now, says Sumitra. 'Balaram borrowed 8,000 rupees from moneylenders at 10% interest per month and I took a loan of 6,000 rupees from our self-help group at 2% interest. We were quite hopeful that we would have a good harvest and would be able to repay all the loans besides feeding ourselves. But fate decreed otherwise and now that he committed suicide, some more people come to me and claim that he took loans from them as well.'

She rolls *beedis* (home-made country cigarettes) for living and has little idea about how to repay her loans and at the same time, rear her four children.

The delayed arrival of monsoon, inadequate rainfall and increased heat led to the voracious caterpillars, and Bhoi's farm was ruined overnight. 'We have been suffering from water shortage for a while now; but this year was the worst. All our streams and ponds have dried up and most of the tube wells are defunct,' Sumitra complains, 'Us women are the most affected. Longer summers and less water have become routine'.

A crisis is brewing and deepening because of climate change, affecting Sumitra and tens of thousands of women like her who have to now travel a lot more distance than before in search of water, in gruelling heat. The crisis affects millions of farmers across the country practicing rain-fed agriculture, like Balaram, Sumitra's husband, who had to commit suicide because of crop-failure. Whom should the people appeal to for redress when the rain god refuses to listen? Do they know about global climate negotiations, the mitigation fund and the adaptation strategies, the Kyoto, COP and such abstruse concepts which flourish and hog the media headlines during the climate summits and then are promptly forgotten?

When will the people start demanding answers?

**ranjan k panda**

(Ranjan K Panda is an independent researcher and the Convener of Water Initiative Odisha; he can be contacted at [ranjanpanda@gmail.com](mailto:ranjanpanda@gmail.com))



## India knows how to avoid collapse?

*India is a country where already existing huge social tensions are set to multiply. Not only will climate change make life more precarious for the poor, but the suggested solutions to climate change will destabilize them yet further. However, India also contains the seeds to an effective solution to this, especially amongst its activist struggles.*

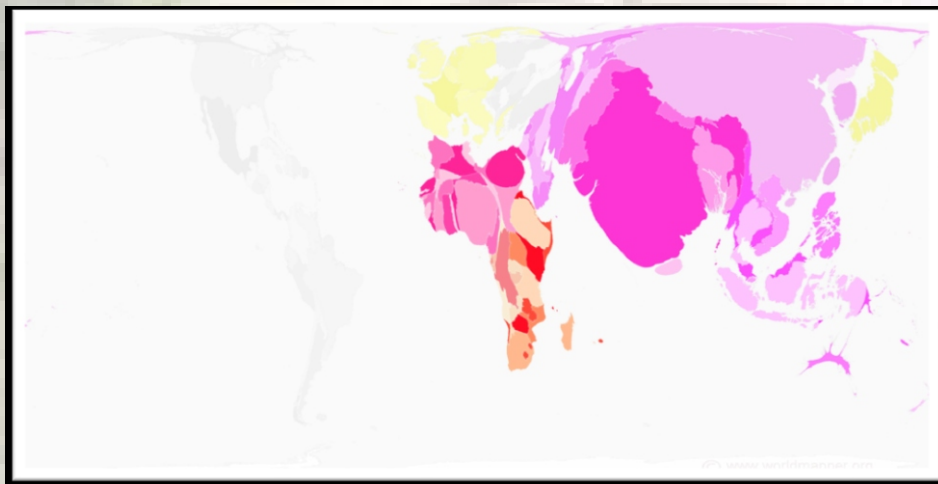
Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* is a chilling read, as its account of the implosion of civilizations past traces the arc of our current global predicament (Diamond 2005). He teases out the implications of population and consumption growing exponentially: it means that consumption hits natural (resource) limits at a very great speed, and that the moments before that collision are a huge party for those at the top, since consumption is at its absolute peak. This leads to a situation where the rich are living such a high life that it is near impossible for them to imagine the plight of the poor, who are the first people to be hamstrung by the dwindling of resources. This gap is what disables the early warning systems of failing societies, and it is precisely this gap that we see opening up around climate change. Right here, right now, in India, but also even more so globally, this fatal gap in understanding between rich and poor is stark and growing.

No-where illustrates this better than India. Because of its huge population and very high levels of land

terms, the whole world needs social solutions under climate change that will create stability in densely populated areas. This applies to Asia as a whole but specifically to India, which holds the most number of poor people than any country on earth, with some 30% of the population living on less than a dollar a day.

Food and land markets are a good place to analyse this gap in understanding. The food-price spike in 2008 was attributed by the World Bank as being 75% down to the growth in biofuels. Cultivable land, instead of being used for producing food to feed humans, was turned over to feed energy markets. Food markets are dominated by the poor, in terms of sheer weight of numbers, although their pitifully low purchasing power confounds that to a great extent. This is what lets countries export food even as people starve.

Energy markets are, by stark contrast, utterly dominated by the rich, since energy consumption and income track complement each other very closely (Strahan 2007). Figure 2 shows how energy consumption translates into carbon emissions worldwide; and comparing figures 1 and 2 one gets a sense of the gap between the distribution of population and that of energy consumption. When energy markets became tight--for instance in 2008 when demand for oil out-stripped supply it was very



**Figure 1** World map with area adjusted by population

pressure (Figure 1), Asia is highly vulnerable to climate change. It lacks huge areas of free land for people to move into, and is also nuclear-armed (China, India, Pakistan, and so on). So in security

easy for purchasing power to cascade, as a gold-rush, through linkages like biofuels, into food markets and so hit the poor very hard. In other words, the scarcity of oil leads to a rise in the cost of energy, and this is

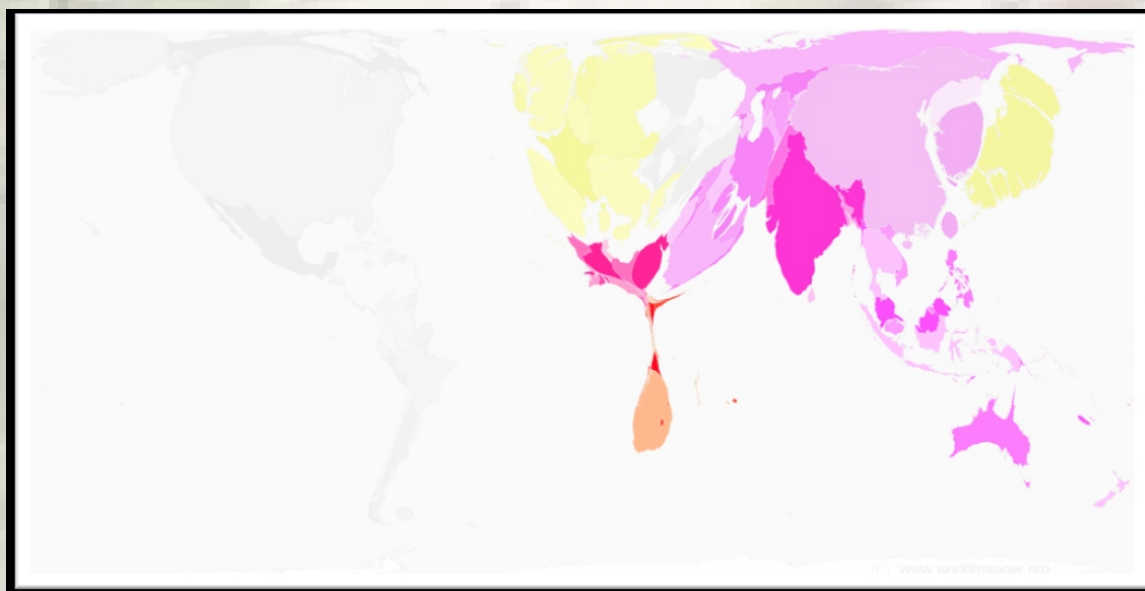
passed on into a rise in the cost of food through investment and speculation in land and land-based production. In 2008, the oil price went to 100 dollars a barrel. Even the International Energy Agency now admits that it is just a question of when conventional oil production peaks, and they say the year is 2020 (Macalister and Monbiot 2008). Then the price could go as high as 300 dollars a barrel (Strahan 2007). Just imagine the impact on food prices. Does this not sound just a bit like *Collapse*?

When natural resource consumption grows exponentially across the board, it clearly leads to 'resource shortage', around minerals, around carbon commons under the carbon trading arrangements, increasingly around fresh water, (Barlow and Clarke 2002), around oil (Strahan 2007), and around the perceived potential for rising prices, and so be followed up by gold-rush after gold-rush of purchasing power seeking out quick and lucrative fixes to the problems of over-consumption. With biofuels, this is exactly what is being seen all over the world, from Madagascar where a deal to grow palm oil as a biofuel contributed to a coup to Sudan where South Korean companies have bought up 690,000 hectares of land (Vallely 2009). *Financialized* solutions to resource shortage, such as carbon trading, essentially to deal with a lack of

exclude the poorest from economic entitlements to these resources by overwhelming their already feeble purchasing power.

Marginal groups are communities who most often rely directly on the commons that are being enclosed, such as forests and 'waste-land', carving out livelihoods from them outside the cash economy. Moreover, being drawn into the cash economy will only expose them further to the economic forces of resource-shortage gold-rush and likely to signal their undoing under conditions of scarcity. They simply cannot secure access to a livelihood by cash when in competition with the rich-world purchasing power in a dwindling resource base. So the *economistic* language of large institutions leads to *financialized* approaches to climate change, which heighten the crisis for those actually facing shortage in a life-threatening sense. This is what Jared Diamond means by 'gap' written across the face of the earth.

Climate change is likely to create a crisis of direct entitlements to food from the environment due to unpredictable weather and displacement by sea-level rise, as well as a crisis of purchasing power, with the gold-rushes described above likely to be a major factor. So what you need in order to deal with this



**Figure 2** World map with area adjusted by carbon emissions

space for carbon in the sky, seem to be the only language that policy-makers speak. This is unfortunate because of the huge 'externalities' it causes by generating these gold-rushes, which

combination is some kind of protected non-tradable entitlement that is immune to these gold-rushes and that allows communities to develop some buffer against climatic unpredictability.

What is it that can provide a buffer to rich-world purchasing power in the face of dwindling resources? India is as good a place as any to analyse these questions, since it contains 30% of the world's poor. Centralized schemes like the NREGA (National Rural Environment Guarantee Scheme) are not necessarily to be relied upon. Apart from it being unclear if the government can afford them, they also, without major improvements in local democracy, have a tendency to descend into corruption and to bring about *patronclient relations* between the implementers and receivers of assistance. This is very much the view of groups like the DDS (Deccan Development Society), working with food security, or rather as they simply put it as 'food sovereignty'.

The contention of the DDS is that climate instability can be met by traditional crops such as millets, which can grow under dry conditions. However, millet cultivation is looked down on as backward and not at all lucrative, and so can only take place where communities have control of their own land and some sort of autonomy from local political and economic processes. It is a picture that every activist here will recognize that any relation with a government or business body tends to turn exploitative, based on political and economic purchasing power. This is a situation already being worsened in the emerging natural-resource gold-rushes. So, the answer is local autonomy over natural resources, a return of control over the commons as Anna Pinto puts it (Pinto 2009). It is only in this way that communities can choose how they subsist, and also have enough control over their production to adapt to changing conditions.

This kind of community control over natural

resources is exactly what the FRA (Forest Rights Act) 2006 attempts to put in place. There are provisions in the Act for claiming rights over 'community forest resources' where local democratic bodies, the *Gram Sabhas*, are given control of local natural resources within the traditional gathering range of the village, with accountability to entire population of the village, as well as to committees at various levels of local, district, and state government. This also introduces checks and balances; so these provisions have the potential to trigger major reform of local democracy, if only there is a real political will to do so. It is such measures that secure livelihoods regardless of the flows of purchasing power that are likely to protect direct entitlements to food and other bases of subsistence in the face of resource-shortage gold-rushes, as well as giving enough local autonomy to let people adapt to change.

With resource pressures mounting across the board, these kinds of approaches need to be broadened to create an inclusive safety net for the poor in the face of a rapidly changing world. This is an area that is ripe for further study and policy work, to move India further towards an integrated regime of democratic natural resource management. What India really needs in order to move in this direction is the political will to make it so, especially in the thorny area of reforming local government towards having more substantial democratic oversight over natural resources. This may be born of the understanding that there is nowhere else to go, but it is also only really likely to happen via political pressure. In bringing this about, India, and by this I mean activist India, could start to bring into being avenues towards avoiding collapse.

## Acknowledgements

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**daniel taghioff**

*(Daniel taghioff is an anthropologist looking at the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and the implications for a more general Green politics in India; Daniel can be contacted at [sustainablelearning@gmail.com](mailto:sustainablelearning@gmail.com))*

## The CDM Scam

### Case studies of CDM projects :Industrial CDM projects in Orissa :

***Waste-heat-recovery-based captive power plant: Bhushan Power and Steel Ltd, Thelkoloi, Rengali tehsil, Sambalpur district***

#### What the PDD says

##### *The project*

Bhushan Power and Steel Ltd (BPSL) established its steel plant in Thelkoloi village in Sambalpur district in 2003 after acquiring huge chunks of agriculture and forest land. BPSL produces 0.6-million tonnes of 'value-added steel' annually. The plant is implementing a waste-heat-recovery (WHR) captive power project in two phases: a 40-MW unit in July 2005; and a 60-MW unit in May 2006. In 2007, the company got the CDM clearance from the Government of India for the power project. The main characteristic of this component as claimed by the company is reduction of black carbon emission to the atmosphere.

During the 10-year crediting period (2009-2019), the project will earn 3,334,810 CERs, 333,481 annually.

#### *Sustainable development*

- The project activity generates electricity from the waste flue gas and thereby reduces GHG emissions. The purpose of the project activity is to meet the partial in-house requirements of BPSL. In exigency cases, power from the state grid is imported. If there is surplus power available, it would be exported to the Orissa State Grid.
- The project activity has contributed to 'Sustainable Development of India' by generating power using waste heat gases. By generating clean power, BPSL has replaced power generation from polluting processes, enabled reduction in carbon-dioxide emissions, and saved the conventional fuel. The location of the project in a rural setting contributes towards poverty alleviation by generating both direct and indirect employment, and has improved quality of life of local people.
- The project's initial investment is to the tune of 501.2-million rupee in addition to the envisaged continuous inflow of funds considering CDM revenues. The project will also earn additional revenue for the local and central government.

#### What our field study reveals

The region where BPSL is located in Sambalpur district used to be a vast green expanse of primary forests, fertile farm land, and grazing fields. This is also the region that has the distinction of being the first-ever 'officially recorded' (1936) community forest in the state, which has inspired many other community forest groups to come up in many other places. Today, BPSL, along with other industrial projects such as the Hirakud Dam, Hindalco coal mines, the IB Thermal Power Plant, Vedanta Aluminium Smelter, and dozens of sponge-iron units, has not only eaten up most of the forests but also turned green into an industrial graveyard. Around the BSPL plant, a live cauliflower looks like a mound of cow dung, meticulously and deceptively placed on the ground: so much for the claims of the PDD to ensure a clean environment as part of the project's sustainable development impacts.

Manbodh Biswal, a local villager who had been jailed for fighting against illegal acquisition of forest land their sole economic base in the region, puts the crisis in perspective, "They come and chop off our head, and then talk about some miserable monetary compensation, saying that this is enough to keep the rest of the body alive for a lifetime!"

In fact, acquiring land for setting up industrial units has not been really tough for private companies as the 'welfare state' provides welcome and much-needed support in terrorizing and forcing people to leave their lands. Those who lost land and forest to BSPL share their nightmarish experience of how they were forced to leave their fertile lands and rich forests. People now live amidst smoke and dust the plant chimneys emit. The entire area is covered with thick coal dust. Water sources, farm lands, animals, and households the pollution spares none. People living in Jamindar Pada and Gond Pada in Thelkoloi village remember the good-old days when they could get everything they needed from the forest and the field. Now that they have nothing and have to go to the market for every little thing, it has become extremely difficult to survive. A woman looking at the Bhushan factory says, "All the promises that the company made to people while grabbing resources seem to have turned into that thick black fume coming from the chimneys, and vanishing into the sky."

Out of 70 families in Jamindar Pada / Gond Pada, members of only 7 or 8 families have got jobs in the factory and that too contractual work: 12 hours of

slogging for mere 100 rupees or even less. To add to the misery, the payments are erratic.

There is absolute lawlessness in the area as Bhushan dumps the fly ash wherever it pleases in the middle of the state highway; even large agricultural fields are filled with ashes, thus destroying the crops.

People in the area say that after a prolonged protest by them, the chimneys of the company now do not emit dark fume during daytime; but do it after sunset, as the *babus* (bureaucrats) would never come at night to inspect. During our visits to the area, we noticed that ourselves it was all clear throughout the day and the moment it started getting dark, the chimneys started to belch thick black smoke.

Among thousands of families affected by the project, only 165 were 'officially' rehabilitated and the rehabilitation colony lacks even basic services. The houses are not fit for human beings; however, there are families residing in them as there is other choice. It may sound surreal, but there is a school near the rehabilitation colony on a large patch of land that is used for defecation by people. A resident of the resettlement colony says, "You can see how we are treated by the company; our children can't even have a clean place to study; the stink here is too much..." As we were talking to people, we saw a water tanker taking rounds and filling the pots kept outside the houses. People said that it was the only source for water in the colony, and the water tanker comes at will.

An elder (who pleaded anonymity) of the widely respected Lapanga Prajarakshit (community-protected) Jungle Committee says: "What tremendous collective efforts and care had gone into protecting the village forests here, for decades! But who can now live in this place anymore...Not only have we lost large

areas of forests to factories all around, the environment is totally destroyed... even the social environment now stinks! Living here is going to be even tougher in future." Another member, a middle-aged man who also pleaded anonymity, says: "Our elders had sown the seeds of prosperity for us by keeping the forests, and my generation reaped the harvest. But what is our next generation going to do? What will they survive on? We still have about 300 hectares of forests. But suddenly, after Bhushan came here, trees in our forests are being felled every day and taken out. We fight, but they come with armed goons. We don't know how to tackle the problem. The elders had protected this forest for over 100 years by contributing food grain set aside from family rations and also by giving voluntary labour. Earlier, 80% of the village forest and farmlands was lost to the Hirakud Dam; now the company eyes the remaining 20%!" An elderly member of the Ghichamunda village forest committee, near the Bhushan plant, says: "We have been protecting more than 800 hectares of village forests for decades. But the Bhushan steel plant (and the Vedanta smelter) is wreaking havoc. They dump ash in our forests; Bhushan has in fact taken away the grazing fields and lands from the adivasis in addition to a large government area that they now use as ash pond. Industrial pollution turned leaves in the trees black, and trees stopped growing. These days we avoid the old village road to the town because it is full of dust. We practically have no road now. They are constructing new roads inside the forest only to do more ash-dumping. All the petty agents and contractors have come under the patronage of Bhushan. The moment one tries to raise one's voice, a bundle of currency notes is pushed into his mouth, to choke his throat. If that does not work, they threaten you for life. A terrible time has descended on us. But we will keep up the fight. We have given our sweat and blood to our forest, our goddess!"

**subrat k sahu, mamata das**

(Subrat Kumar Sahu, an Independent Filmmaker and Researcher based in Delhi, can be contacted at [subrat69@gmail.com](mailto:subrat69@gmail.com). The e-mail of Mamata Das, an activist and researcher associated with National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers, is [mamata68@gmail.com](mailto:mamata68@gmail.com))



## Coal-fired CDM projects in Maharashtra

### Why coal-fired CDM projects?

The Government of India has plans to set up nine special UMPPs (ultra-mega-power projects) in the country. One of the pilot projects in the state of Madhya Pradesh (at Sasan) and another in Gujarat (at Mundra) are expected to generate 70,000-MW of power and--the government thinks--to solve the brewing power crisis in the country to a great extent. While the Sasan project is an initiative of the RPL (Reliance Power Ltd) of the Reliance Group, the Tatas own the Mundra.

While both these projects applied for CDM status, a third similar project at Tirora village, in Gondia district of Maharashtra by the Adani Group managed to earn the distinction to become the first such officially declared "clean coal" CDM project in the world. Very recently, the Sasan project too got the nod from the CDM Executive Board of the UNFCCC. The Tata project at Mundra was turned down on additionality grounds. Several other coal-fired projects across the country have since applied for CDM.

Why Reliance or Adani or any other company should be allowed to burn huge amount of coal in the name of clean technology and earn obscene amounts of money is a question without any answer. The official argument is that adoption of a new technology (supercritical) in such projects will ensure less carbon dioxide emission, in comparison with the existing subcritical technology scenario. It is said that approximately 54% of India's 123,907-MW installed capacity is based on sub-bituminous coal, with the entire coal-based generation capacity implemented with subcritical technology. As a result of supercritical parameters, operational efficiencies of the project activity will be higher than the identified baseline scenario of subcritical technology. Higher operational efficiency will, in turn, lead to lesser coal consumption and lesser carbon-dioxide emissions.

Can there be a greater nonsense? How can a thermal power project that will mine and burn millions of tonnes of coal for years to come even remotely be considered as a 'clean' project, let alone given the CDM status? At a time when even children are aware of the necessity of cutting down fossil-fuel consumption, who plans 'ultra mega thermal' projects and dares to call them environment-friendly? That countries like India and China require energy cannot be a justification for setting up large thermal power plants, and then subsidizing and green-washing the criminal assault on the environment and the planet by passing them off as 'new technologies'. The irony is that while every such

project displaces and devastates thousands of poor families, pollutes the local and the global climate, and destroys biodiversity, the Indian government argues for emission equity, on the pretext that India need to use coal as the primary source of energy... to assert, among all things, its holy right to the 'carbon space!' Call it a paradox or the neo-liberal wisdom, the UNFCCC readily buys these arguments!

The Indian government argues, and the World Bank and the UNFCCC approve. Clean coal or supercritical coal projects are now accepted by the UNFCCC as a valid category of CDM, and the World Bank Group's IFC (International Finance Corporation) would even go to the extent of supporting the Tata's ultra mega thermal project at Mundra. According to the IFC's environmental and social review summary for the project, 'Due to [Mundra's] high energy efficiency of supercritical technology, the CDM Executive Board meeting (under UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol) of September 2007 approved the eligibility of supercritical coal-fired plants for carbon credits in developing countries, and the company is exploring an opportunity for the project to be registered under CDM.'

The bizarre rationale for this is that carbon emissions would be even greater if the power plants in question installed the same power-generation capacity in several smaller, lower-efficiency, coal-fired plants without supercritical combustion technology. And, they can do so because India cannot be forced to control its emissions. So, the international community, via CDM, subsidizes Indian corporations to pollute. Scarce global resources are used to sweeten dirty polluting projects that will emit over several thousands of million tonnes of carbon dioxide during their operating lives, and this whole criminal exercise is projected as a climate-change 'solution'!

### High-efficiency power generation using coal-fired supercritical technology:

**Adani Power Maharashtra Ltd, Tirora, Gondia district**

### What the PDD says

#### *The project*

The Adani Group, a diversified conglomerate has interests in various activities including commodity trading, edible-oil-refining, infrastructure, and services. Adani Power Maharashtra Ltd (APML) is a subsidiary of Adani Power Ltd. APML will implement

a high-efficiency power-generation project located at Tirora town in Gondia district using coal-fired supercritical technology aimed at resulting in reduced consumption of fossil fuel and emissions of associated GHGs for thermal power generation. The installed capacity of the project is 1320 MW (2x660 MW). The electricity generated will be exported to the local/regional/national Grid.

The 10-year CDM status for Adani's coal-fired, supercritical power plant commences in August 2011 and ends in July 2021. The total CERs to be earned by the plant during the crediting period is 11,930,172 CO<sub>2</sub>e.

### ***Sustainable development***

- The high-efficiency, power generation project would offset fossil-fuel consumption.
- Since the technology employed is the first-of-its-kind in the thermal power generation sector of Maharashtra, the project activity would initiate capacity building and development of new skills and knowledge base.
- Due to its location, the project activity would contribute towards poverty alleviation by generating direct and indirect employment for the local community. By contributing to improvement of the power deficit situation, it would improve quality of life and facilitate accelerated implementation of rural electrification initiatives in India.
- The project proponent would extend medical care facility to the employees

### **What our field study reveals**

During our first visit to Tirora, Iswardayal Bhauji Patle, a local resident, informed that the APML had taken for its plant 550 acres of land from Chikhali, Churdi, Bhiwapur, Tamsar, and Mehandipur villages. This land was originally acquired about 15 years ago by the state government for the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). The same land is given to APML and, additionally, the company is eyeing on another 300 acres of land. The local people have been organizing themselves demanding employment and compensations from the company for the land they have lost. Paying no heed to the protests, APML is going ahead with its work even without procuring an NOC from the Panchayats and this has irked people in the area.

The closest villages to the project site are Mehandipur, Ramtola, and Dimantola, all under the Mehandipur Panchayat. Ramtola with about 40 families is completely displaced by this project. Some villagers are now working as daily-wage construction workers,

and some others are rehabilitated in Kachewani village, which is in a forest area. Villagers said that some 15 years ago the district collector had given notice to the village for acquiring about 150 acres of land in the area; the government, however, later acquired 100 acres of land at Ramtola village. Upon seeing that the land was handed over to Adani power plant, villagers said to the government officials that NOC ('no-objection certificate' by local self-government or Panchayat) for the plant could only be given in exchange of permanent jobs and other civic facilities. Villagers allege that the local sub-divisional officer (SDO) acts as an agent of AMPL, and not as a public servant. AMPL, however, started the project without an NOC from the village. The Sarpanch of Mehandipur Panchayat, Shantabai Rahangdale, who had lost her 18 acres of land to the Adani plant, said that the NOC was given in 2009 with the following conditions, which the company had agreed to oblige.

- One person from each family to get a permanent job in the plant
- AMPL to construct a building for the Aganwadi (childcare centre)
- Constructing a road from Mehandipur to Kairabodi, which would link up the NagpurGondia Highway
- Compensation for each acre of land to be 1,500,000 rupees, considering the market price... or, on the basis of land for land

After procuring the NOC, Adani has done absolutely nothing, apart from providing school dresses to village children and an almirah (cupboard) to the Gram Panchayat.

Shantabai said that Adani had duped the local people with false promises. All workers in the plant are outsiders; most of them from the state of Bihar. The local people are refused when they demand work, even in construction activities. She said while all the villagers of Ramtola lost their agricultural lands, about 50 families from the Mehandipur have met the same fate. The company already had local leaders and even ministers on their side; so there is no one to go for support.

The sarpanch added that that environmental problems created by the Adani plant did not at all figure in the agenda of the public meeting held only once so far. People, however, raised the issue of Adani denying employment to the local residents after taking away their land; which resulted in only about 25 people being engaged in some kind of daily-wage work in construction site under the contractor (not under Adani) and they are paid a paltry wage of 70 rupees a



day, which is much less than the stipulated minimum wage. She demanded in the meeting before the district collector and SDO that the old people should be given pension, and that each acre of land acquired should be compensated with 1,750,000 rupees as nowhere in the region they can buy land below the price of 1,500,000 rupees per acre. People would not give any land to the project otherwise, she announced in the meeting.

Unlike Churdi village, which is very close to the Adani project, all other villages in the vicinity such as Garada, Chikali, Malpuri, Thanegoan, Kairabodi, Kachewani, and Gumandowda have lost all their agricultural lands to the Adani power project.

The sarpanch of Gumandowda, Omprakash Patle, informed that despite 500 acres of land being acquired for the MICD some 15 years ago and later handed over to the Adani group, the company is still looking for another 350 acres of land. The company has not taken any NOC from the village Panchayat; yet they directly contact people and try to strike deals with them for land. No one from his village has got any permanent employment in the project; some villagers only managed to get some wage work under the contractor. Like Ramtola in Mehandipur Panchayat, Udaytola village under Gumandowda Panchayat had also been totally displaced and rehabilitated in Kachewani. The sarpanch said that the Adani project has announced the compensation for their land as 700,000 rupees per acre, whereas the ongoing market price is 2,500,000 rupees. He also complained that the district collector has altered land records in favour of the Adani group.

Omprakash Patle also told us about another incident as to how laws were being twisted to favour the company. The sarpanch of Khairbodi village, he said, had demanded the Gram Panchayat tax from the Adani plant for using the village land. But the Adani group did not agree, saying that the land belonged to MIDC and so the Panchayat had no right to ask for any tax. Omprakash Patle too has put a list of demands before the Adani group.

- At least one member from each affected family should be given permanent job in the project.
- Land has to be bought at the ongoing market rate.
- No farmer should be forced to sell his land; the rights to decide whether to sell their land or not rests only with the farmers, and their 'sense of self-respect' should not be outraged.

Ghanshyam Punaji Pardhi, sarpanch of Thirekhani, fumes that Adani has entered into dubious personal agreements on several occasions with just one member from a joint family, which not only undermines the

market price of the land but also creates rifts within the family. Moreover, without having fulfilling the commitments, Adani has started forcefully digging the land for the project activity on farmers' farm land.

Some more examples of land grab: Ghanshyam Punaji Pardhi and Himanshu Agrawal have not yet got any compensation, but the company is forcibly digging their lands. Kamlesh G Thakare has not accepted the compensation being offered to him, but Adani is using his land, too. Thakare who has been demanding a permanent job and proper compensation tried to stop the work, but the company did not pay any heed. Debilal N Rahangdale, on the other hand, has no issue with compensation, but he has been demanding a permanent employment in the project in exchange of his land; so he has stopped the company's work on his land. Rupchand T Bhagat, Shobelal Rinait, Panthulal Pardhi, Moti H Thakare, and Ramesh D Sharanagat have also stopped the work on their land in demand of just compensation and permanent jobs. While Shivcharan G Sahare has got some compensation at 100,000 rupees per acre, Dhonduji Rinait has been offered a price of 600,000 rupees per acre. In another case, Zhamendra M Jambulkar who lived in a joint family has taken the money from Adani without telling any of the family members in a deal in which both the land and part of the house (for pipeline) will be destroyed.

We then visited Bhiwapur and found more narratives of injustice. The former sarpanch of Bhiwapur, Sunada Patle, along with other villagers Rajesh Patle, Bhimrao Rahagdale, Tejram Patle, Charandas Rahangdale, Munnaji Yede, and Tejram Rahagdale lamented that the company has not got into any agreement with the Gram Panchayat, which should ideally make any work it does in the area illegal. As a result, the people are agitated and have been organizing rallies and demonstrations, they said.

The villagers said that the company bought lands from some farmers directly, without consulting the Panchayats and other local bodies. The sitting Sarpanch of Bhiwapur, Ramteke, however, opined that the Adani power project technically need not take an NOC from his village as it does not come directly under the project area. However, some villagers own land in the project area in Mehandipur village and they are going to be affected by the project.

Ramteke informed that the villagers of Kairabodi, Gumandowda, and some other hamlets have now come together to form the 'Unemployed Agricultural Action Committee'. They had held a rally and hunger strikes for two days, demanding that local people



should get the first preference in jobs offered by the company and that all the people who have lost land and livelihoods to the project should be employed.

The company convened a meeting after sustained protests, in which people blamed it for causing pollution, health hazards, and unemployment in the area. Questions were also raised regarding lack of roads, absence of education facility, and the plight of displacement. Villagers also alleged that APML has forcibly captured forest land for this project, such as in Kachewani village.

In Chikali village, at least 12 people lost their lands to the Adani group. Chanda Kailash Patle, the Sarpanch of Chikali, said that she had to give away her two-and-half acres of land for the Adani power project. Rajkumar G Rangari, a local *Bidi* contractor, said that the government had acquired his 12 acres of land in Mehandipur village in 1995 in the name of MIDC but later sold that to the APML. He is demanding compensation as per the now-prevailing land price, which is about 700,000 per acre. Arvind Hirankhede, the vice-sarpanch of the Panchayat in Chikali village, said that only 2% of the local people get some kind of daily-wage jobs, that too under the contractors. Providing employment to the people is never in the scheme of the company. People are also demanding electricity supply, road, water system, check dams, and plantation from Adani.

The Adani power plant has been lifting water from the Vainganga River. The company laid a big pipeline from the nearby water uplift project called 'Dhapewada Uplift Water Kawalewada'. It destroyed huge areas of fertile land in the village Thirekhani. There is even a small dam on the river exclusively to feed the Adani power plant.

The PDD says that the higher efficiency of power generation would reduce fossil fuel consumption: less coal consumption will improve the local environmental condition by reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other air pollutants like sulphur dioxide and suspended particulate matter. But, people were not told how such a

'high efficiency' plant would work and sustain itself; and moreover, the company was completely silent about the mining at Lohara and the threat to the rich forests and biodiversity, which people feel is a blow to the self-sustainability of the environment, the local ecosystems, as well as people's livelihoods.

### **Postscript**

On our second visit to the Tirora plant site in December 2010, we failed to meet anybody who was ready to talk. By now a palpable feel of terror and unease hung over the entire locality, and it was clear that people were too afraid to talk. Our main contact in the Kachewani village, the social activist who had been organizing the villagers against the plant, could not meet us despite a previous appointment. Later we learnt that there had been an accident a couple of days ago at the plant site, and one of the local workers died. Angry villagers demonstrated at the plant gate and threw stones, and a huge police contingent had to come and drive them away. The company filed a complaint naming many of the protesting villagers, and the police and the company goons were looking for them.

We saw the vast enclosure of the plant and the towering chimneys belching 'clean, sustainable' smoke and tried to photograph those. Evidently, we were trespassing and violating the 'sanctity' of the company premises: as soon as we were on a village alleyway that skirts the plant fence, we were detected by the security guards. Soon afterwards, the hefty security officer of the plant in person gave us a chase and detained us with arrogant confidence inside the village. "Some disruptive forces are trying to rouse the villagers against our plant", said he, "we have to be on our guard!" He made sure that we were not planning to stop anywhere inside the village to talk to people and finally let us go, after much persuasion.

We did not dare to stop. The coal-fired supercritical CDM plant owns much more than their fenced-off few hundred acres, apparently. It looked that they own the villages and the land and the roads, and even things beyond. The control, for the time being, seemed total and absolute.

**Table:** State-wise spread of high-efficiency coal-fired CDM projects in India

States	Total CDM projects <sup>a</sup>	Number of registered projects	*kCO <sub>2</sub> /yr	**2020 kCO <sub>2</sub> /yr	*** kCERs issued
Andhra Pradesh	3	0	2004	20036	0
Gujarat	5	1	7652	76517	
Haryana	1	1	12	137	
Jharkhand	1	0	1744	17445	
Madhya Pradesh	3	1	4068	40684	
Maharashtra	2	1	2301	23014	
Punjab	4	0	4544	45445	
Rajasthan	1	0	1097	10972	
Tamil Nadu	1	0	522	5221	
West Bengal	1	0	1004	11308	
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>24948</b>	<b>250779</b>	<b>0</b>

<sup>a</sup> Four transport-sector projects Lohia Auto Industries Electric Vehicles, EKO Electric Vehicles, Electrotherm Electric Vehicles, and Hero Electric Vehicles will perform in all regions and provinces of India and thus the respective values are added to each state.

\*Annual reduction claimed in 1000-tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per year

\*\*Total reduction to be claimed in 1000-tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent by 2020

\*\*\* Saleable CERs, in 1000-tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent, officially issued by the UNFCCC so far

**nishant mate, with hadida yasmin and soumitra ghosh**

(Nishant Mate, a teacher in a college in Nagpur, Maharashtra, is also an activist and researcher. His e-mail: [nishant24@gmail.com](mailto:nishant24@gmail.com). Dr. Hadida Yasmin teaches biology in a college in North Bengal, and researches CDM, among other things. Hadida's e-mail: [hadiday77@gmail.com](mailto:hadiday77@gmail.com))

## The Fraud by the Name of 'Carbon Forestry'

Carbon forestry, like other carbon-trading projects, is a well-designed and benign-looking fraud that fulfils a simple purpose: it gives the corporations in the North a 'green' excuse not to reduce their very real emissions at source. The same corporations enter into 'strategic' partnerships with their counterparts in the South, the local governments are bribed and duped, and affected community members are told packs of lies. At the end, corporations backed and subsidized by the state enclose peoples' commons to create new carbon sinks. This process is overseen by the World Bank and a host of big NGOs like the Forest Trend, who peddle ecosystem services trade, including carbon forestry. Experiences from a host of countries bear this out; there are numerous instances of monoculture plantations filling up precious grasslands and rainforests in Brazil and other Latin American countries, in Africa, and in Asian states like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Carbon forestry is a fraud because there can be no reliable scientific estimate of any forest's carbon-sequestration capacity, once again mainly because the real forests are living dynamisms subject to sudden changes, which can upset calculations any time. Deforestation, forest fires, encroachment for development works, these all result in massive amount of emissions instead of carbon storing, and there are always chances that a forest may store and release carbon in equal proportions. To ensure that carbon remains safely stored in forests one has to, in

turn, ensure that forests are not 'used' by humans at all, and prevent all natural calamities that can result in forest destruction. So far, the trend was to create commercial monocultures for future logging and claim that these also double as sinks as long as they are not cut and, therefore, they earn credits.

While what the World Bank and Indian government (and many others) are trying to do is to create sinks out of natural forests through the REDD/REDD Plus (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) scheme, the logic being that conserved and protected forests store carbon and earn credits; and if these are sold in the market, the money goes to the communities who will then stop using forests. REDD is yet not official, but anybody is free to sell credits in mainly the American voluntary market.

Apart from two private REDD Plus (there can be more) projects and several voluntary 'offset' projects, India at present hosts 9 LULUCF (land use, land-use change, and forestry) CDM or, simply, 'carbon forestry' projects in 10 states. Besides the REDD project in East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, we cover here one of the largest and definitely the most publicized CDM: the ITC project in Khammam district of the state of Andhra Pradesh. For a clearer historic perspective, a brief piece on India's carbon forestry is added. We also give two contemporary statements by forest movements in India on Green India Mission and REDD.



## India's forests: sinking in the carbon-holes!

In the *Foreword to India: State of Forests Report 2009*, the union environment and forests minister Jairam Ramesh writes, 'Our commitment to the forestry sector continues to be strong. India has more than doubled its budget for forestry this year to 8300-crore rupees (USD 1.85-billion) and this financial increase is going to be sustained.' Besides this whopping budgetary allocation, the MoEF has also mobilized a mind-boggling amount of 46,000-crore rupees (USD 10-billion) for an ambitious and controversial Green India Mission.

Why does India's forest department need such obscene amount of money? Of course, they have to live up to the standards and objectives laid down some 150 years back: to establish and sustain their feudal control over the forests, to irrevocably alter natural vegetational mosaic in commercial interest and start wholesale logging, to fill forests with ecological garbage of eucalyptus and teak monocultures, to push forest communities to the far end, to harass, abuse and even kill the people inhabiting for ages what the FD now demarcates as Protected Areas and Sanctuaries. There's also this largely unrecorded factor of collusion organised timber smugglers and poachers! And, the latest addition to this list is to sell India's forests in the global carbon market.

### The inscrutable business of carbon

Of late, of all the things, carbon is selling like hot cakes! Under the CDM or *clean development mechanism*, conceptualized at the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and described as a foolproof mechanism to mitigate global warming, industries are making billions of dollars by selling tonnes of carbon they 'notionally' save. As the concept goes, businesses in the developed world 'invest' in helping businesses in the developing world to set up and run 'clean technologies', which emit less carbon than the business-as-usual scenario. A price in the international market for a tonne of carbon is agreed upon as per the guidelines of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), which monitors this new-world trade. So, the amount of carbon saved as compared to the business-as-usual scenario through clean technologies is compensated or 'offsetted' (as per the price agreed upon) to the 'implementing' business in the developing world by the 'investing' business in the developed world and, in return, the latter is allowed to emit the same amount of carbon back home.

Whether the so-called CDM projects (about 1700 now in India) actually emit less carbon as is being projected is an open question. For example, the day I visited villages near the Hindalco company's Smelter near the Hirakud Dam in Orissa, villagers were angry because full-grown paddy on tens of acres of farmland were burnt the previous day by toxic fumes coming out from the factory. Now, the same Hindalco Smelter claims to be CDM.

Nevertheless, the global carbon trade goes on. Smoke-belching coal-fired power plants are certified as CDM projects and are making billions; dams that inundate thousands of hectares of primary forests and produce lethal greenhouse gases such as methane are certified as CDM.

So, why should India's vast expanse of forests, which, for a change, genuinely stores carbon, lag behind?

### India's forests for sale

In a document released in August 2009 by the MoEF, titled *India's Forest and Tree Cover: contribution as a carbon sink* which is actually an abridged version of a 'technical paper' produced by the ICFRE (Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education) minister Jairam Ramesh writes, 'Forestry is at the centre-stage of global climate change negotiations. This is because forests have the potential to be a carbon sink as well as a source of carbon emissions. ...It is India's view that we need an agreement on a comprehensive framework for compensation and positive incentives for forestry as part of the ongoing climate change negotiations.'

This position falls perfectly in line with how the Indian State, since Lord Dalhousie, has been looking at the country's forests: a never-ending revenue reserve! Now, in the context of climate change negotiations, India's forests have opened up 'enormous opportunities' to maximize the revenue 'beyond imagination'.

But, how will this work?

The technical paper by the ICFRE which has become the basis of the climate change negotiations involving India's forests contains all arguments, '...[Forests] absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from atmosphere, and store carbon in wood, leaves, litter, roots, and soil by acting as 'carbon sinks'. .....Forests by acting as sinks are considered to moderate the global climate.'

The document says, '...Our estimates show that the annual CO<sub>2</sub> removals by India's forest and tree cover is enough to neutralize 11.25% of India's total greenhouse gas emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent) at 1994 levels. ....This is equivalent to offsetting 100% emissions from all energy in residential and transport sectors; or 40% of total emissions from the agriculture sector. Clearly, India's forest and tree cover is serving as a major mode of carbon mitigation for India and the world.'

And the catch comes in the end, 'Putting a conservative value of USD 5 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> locked in our forests, this huge sink of about 24,000 MT of CO<sub>2</sub> is worth USD 120 billion, or Rs 6,00,000 crores [6000 billion]. Incremental carbon under scenario three [in which India's forest cover increases at a rate higher than the historical rate by 2015] will add a value of around USD 1.2 billion, or Rs 6,000 crores [60 billion], every year to India's treasury of forest sink, assuming a value of USD 7 per tonne.'

An NFFPFW (National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers) position paper titled *Imaginary Sinks: India's REDD ambitions* (released in 2009) says, 'This opportunity becomes a windfall with the advent of REDD, or the proposal that CDM projects should cover the *Reduced Emission through Deforestation or Degradation* scenario, which means if a project reduces any emissions caused by deforestation and degradation of forests, it should get CDM status. India now contends that it should be given carbon credits for both its old and new forests.'

Sensing this opportunity, the country has an ambitious programme of regenerating and raising 30-million hectares of new forests and plantations, on 'degraded' lands and farmlands, challenging both livelihood and food security of people dependent upon those.

However, all these lead to questions. To list a few:

*How authentic is India's assessment of forest cover? How is the capacity of carbon sequestration of Indian forests calculated?*

The NFFPFW position paper throws some light, '...instead of being linear and 'constant' constructs, Indian forests (like any other forest) are part of a larger, dynamic, and ever-changing socio-political and socio-ecological discourse (or multiple such

discourses). Mathematical calculations and simulated models to project uptake and release of carbon in forests over time can never be expected to accurately reflect the innumerable, essentially asymmetric variables that shape the interaction between forests and people; neither hypothetical baselines nor imaginary 'future' scenarios can explain/interpret/predict contextually related but often spatially separated sets of uncertain social, political and ecological events influencing deforestation events. This methodological impossibility, coupled with doubtful and unverified official forest cover estimates, makes any credible estimation of all carbon stock in Indian forests downright impossible.'

*If India's forest cover neutralizes 11.25% of our total greenhouse gas emissions, how is it of any importance in terms of mitigating global warming?*

Forests are natural resources; and global warming is largely a man-made disaster. And, if we are actually serious about containing emission in order to address global warming, it would require invention of the highest kind to rationalize and justify domestic emission by displaying its forests. The perfectly silly argument goes like: since we have so much of forests absorbing so much carbon, industries can just pay a price and happily emit as much quantity of greenhouse gas. Is it a move towards mitigation, or is a recipe for disaster? In any case, there is already a huge pressure on India's forests from the over-consuming development model we so belligerently pursue.

*In case India's forests get REDD status, who gets the benefits?*

It is often argued that if the carbon offset regime is really about rewarding those who have lesser carbon footprints, the forest people and the rag-pickers of the world would have been the richest communities on earth by now! But, that will not happen. Because the regime is all about 'business'; it has nothing to do with emission reduction or global warming; the latter is just a 'premise' to strike profitable deals. So, the sincerity in which the Indian government is pushing for India's forests to get REDD+ status is precisely to clear hurdles to privatize India's forests. Because, with so much of money at stake, the forests cannot be left in the hands of those who cannot *manage* them *efficiently* ('efficiency' being a capitalist construct). So, history is now about to repeat itself in full circle reminding us of Dietrich Brandis who came to India on Dalhousie's invitation to *manage* our forests *scientifically* some 150 years ago; now



private players are waiting to *manage* our forests *efficiently*.

## Sharks in the forests

In fact, the attempt to privatize India's forests is not new. The Indian pulp and paper lobby has been trying since 1992 to lease 'degraded' forests in order to meet their growing demand of raw material. The Indian government had, in fact, tried to push a bill in 1994 to facilitate handing over 'degraded forests' to industries. Besides stiff resistance from community groups, the contention that degraded lands do not support biodiversity and communities had to contend with an expert committee constituted by the Planning Commission and chaired by N C Saxena in 1998. The Committee's report which later came to be known as Saxena Report categorically rejected the position. The report warned that leasing out forests to industries would prove to be both ecologically and socially harmful, and would be an injustice to communities who use the forests for livelihoods and other purposes. It clearly stated that no forests in the country could be labelled 'degraded'.

In 2003, the industry retorted with the *Re-greening India* report (published by the Confederation of Indian Industry), which strongly called for leasing forests to the private sector. In the CII report, the idea of earning carbon credits was mentioned in great detail 'because trees sequester carbon'. Then *The World Bank Forest Strategy 2003* came out screaming that most traditional communities *fail* to garner the *full potential* of forests, even though they are successfully protecting them. In its assessment, the total income from commercial timber, bamboo, and non-timber products on forests if *managed* by private players would rise from an estimated 222-million dollars in 2004 to nearly 2-billion (2000-million) dollars by 2020.

With so much money locked in the forests, it would be foolish to even expect the private sector to resist the temptation. One can well imagine what turn the 'market' will take once REDD and the forestry CDM idea truly catches on. as to The NFFPFW paper adds, 'This is a new market, which, besides the Indian government, all sheds of carbon brokers, consultants, and investors eye expectantly, and for good reasons. Even in the non-Kyoto voluntary market, forestry credits

are fetching about 8 dollars per credit (UNFCCC has not yet issued credits to forestry projects). This can increase enormously with UNFCCC approval.'

And, considering the drama at Copenhagen in 2010 December and the restively recent release of the Green India Mission draft, one suspects that an agreement on REDD modalities is imminent. As such there will be an unprecedented increase in deforestation and industrial emissions; the rates of deforestation and emission being directly proportional to the rate of economic growth.

It is time we realize that so long as the whole discourse of rights over forests is trivialized by making it simply an issue of *forest management*, despite communities putting in enormous efforts in protecting their forests, the state will keep on appropriating people's rights and efforts. Forests are being managed anyway, by communities. The core of the issue here and always is: 'who controls the forests at the end of the day?' And, the unfortunate fact is that the Forest Department has so far managed to sustain its authority over people's resources. This underlying dynamics is now going to take a lethal turn with the advent of carbon trading, which seeks to 'unlock' the billions and billions of dollars of wealth locked in India's forests.

The NFFPFW says, 'What will happen to the carbon stored in the forest biomass under the FRA? The Act says that the community owns all Non-Timber Forest Produce of plant origin in any forest of India. Will the carbon supposedly stored in the biomass and forest soil be treated as a NTFP and hence treated as a community property? The Indian Government has evidently not thought about it yet. The 'Technical Paper' once again talks about JFM and does not mention the FRA at all. This clearly shows that the Government, despite very clear and precise provisions in the FRA, wishes to retain effectively control of the country's forests. The "REDD" money will act as an incentive here, and the very strong forest bureaucracy of India will want to hold on to it. In reality, a "REDD" agreement as currently discussed in international climate could, in effect, severely undermine implementation of the FRA.....and unless the forest movements of the country develop a strategy to counter REDD and all forms of carbon trading in the country's forests, the gains of the FRA may be irretrievably lost.'

And, perhaps, forests will then be renamed after companies. Niyamgiri may be called Vedantagiri five



years down the line; and the Khandadhar Mountain, POSCO-peak! Just as nobody today even knows that there once existed those quiet, idyllic, self-reliant forest villages called Kalimati and Sakchi, which

now lie buried under incessant roars of engines on a sprawling urbanscape what we know as Tatanagar or Jamshedpur in Jharkhand!

**subrat. k. sahu**

*(Subrat Kumar Sahu, an Independent Filmmaker and Researcher based in Delhi, can be contacted at [subrat69@gmail.com](mailto:subrat69@gmail.com).)*

## FORESTRY CDM: Reforestation of severely degraded landmass: ITC Social Forestry Project, villages in Khammam district

### What the PDD says

#### *The project*

Under the project activity, the degraded lands covering an area of 3070.19 hectares owned by the rural poor (tribals) are developed for raising monoculture eucalyptus plantations. The Bhadrachalam unit of the Paperboards and Specialty Papers Division (PSPD) of ITC Ltd is the primary developer of this project, initiated through the local NGOs. The participating NGOs are Action for Collective Tribal Improvement and Vocational Education (ACTIVE); Human Organisation for Poverty Eradication (HOPE); Society for Health and Agriculture Department (SHADE), Society for National Integration through Rural Development (SNIRD), and Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) all promoted by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. These bodies identified the tribal beneficiaries and grouped them into a *Sangha* (users' union/society) for taking up the plantation activity. Apart from providing finances for the project, ITC also distributes planting stock nurtured from hybrid clonal plants of eucalyptus developed at ITC's own R&D Centre in Bhadrachalam. The species considered for carbon sequestration are *Eucalyptus tereticornis* Smith and *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. These species have not exhibited any invasive behaviour, as natural regeneration is absent. These are also not considered as genetically modified organism.

With its headquarters located at Sarapaka village, about 5 kilometres from Bhadrachalam town, the project activities take place in the tribal belt of the catchment area of river Godavari, spread across the following 14 mandals of Khammam district: Aswapuram, Chandrugonda, Kunavaram, Velerupadu, Aswaraopeta, Dammapeta, Mulakalapally, Kothagudem, Bhadrachalam, Dummugudem, Paloncha, Burgampahad, Kukunuru, and V R Puram.

The project targets to sequester 58,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e each year.

#### *Sustainable development*

- *Social well-being:* The present project activity will lead to strengthening of the village level institutions that works towards empowering the poor and the deprived. The institutionalized mechanisms for the implementation of the project activity through *Mandal Samyakhya* would be

responsible for bringing about social well-being to the poor and marginalized farmers in the region.

- *Economic well-being:* The project activity would result in the alleviation of poverty by generating additional income from the proceeds of the wood sale. The initiatives by ITC to share knowledge and assist the farmer with agricultural/forestry practices would enhance the income-generation capability of the farmers and thus lead to improvement in living standards of the farmers.
- *Environmental well-being:* Plantations, once established, would act as a carbon sink. In addition, it would also act as a man-made green-belt and bring about gradual environmental improvement to the region. Further, as the project activity is undertaken on degraded land, the plantations would help control soil erosion, which, in turn, would improve soil and vegetation cover in the region.
- *Technological well-being:* The project activity uses clonal technology, which is environmentally sound and cost-effective. Taking advantage of this activity, the local tribals, who lack the technological expertise, will be able to harness information and knowledge and benefit from the degraded land by using this technology. This technology would also foster continuous improvement in productivity.

### What our field study reveals

In the vast spread of the project area along River Godavari and River Kinnerasani, fishing is one of the primary economic activities of the locals, besides farming. The important crops grown in the district are jowar, bajra, maize, red gram, groundnut, cotton, and chillies. Paddy is grown in the upland areas purely under rain-fed conditions. *Khari* paddy is cultivated between June and December and *Rabi* paddy between November and May. The cultivation is mainly dependent on river channels, wells, tube wells, and tanks. The soil quality is favourable for cultivation purpose.

We visited many villages in Khammam district that come under the carbon forestry project by ITC, and found the following.

#### **Tippampally village, Chandragonda mandal**

Pepped up by the ITC initiative, Venkateshwar Rao, 65, of Tippampally village took to eucalyptus plantation on 7 acres of his land in 2002 leaving aside groundnut farming that he had been doing traditionally. He was struck by the slogan of ITC "less labour, more

profit" as he earlier had difficulties in meeting the labour demands in his fields. He also got the eucalyptus seeds on a 50% subsidy. He harvested the first crop of eucalyptus after three years, in 2005, and sold it to ITC for 200,000 rupees. But, today Rao regrets having the switch-over to eucalyptus. He said that this was a sure-shot loss-making proposal, which he could not understand in the beginning. He used to earn more by growing groundnut. Not only that, now he cannot grow any plant besides eucalyptus on his fields, as the latter sucks all the water from the ground and turns the soil infertile for other species, decreasing productivity each passing year. He informed us that he was able to run his family today only because of the six acres of land that he owned separately where he grew mangos.

There are at least 15 farmers in the village who have switched to eucalyptus plantations, which now cover about 100 acres of land. Rao told us that if people directly sell the produce at the ITC factory, they are paid 2200 rupees per tonne; if ITC provides the transport, then they get 1800 rupees per tonne. A farmer has to invest at least 10,000 rupees a year on each acre of land for eucalyptus plantation, which is higher than other crops. Farmers somehow manage till the first two harvests; but by the third harvest, they go broke.

Even the village Van Suraksha Samiti (forest protection council) under government's joint forest management (JFM) programme is involved in the plantation of eucalyptus for which 50% of the cost is met by the government all in the interest of ITC and at the cost of the health of the forest.

Farmers are in no way stakeholders in the profits ITC would be reaping from carbon trading, and nor has any villager benefitted in any way from this project, villagers said. We observed that the company has no programme for the socio-economic development of the region.

### **Rampuram village, Kotagudem mandal**

In Rampuram, a tribal village in Pengadappa Panchayat, we met several farmers who have taken to eucalyptus farming for ITC: Pulchalal Srinivas (5 acres), K Sayaanarayana (1 acre), Chitna Chuchaya (3 acres), Chita Fullya (2 acres). All these people have already harvested once. Policharls Srinivas (3 acres) and Palicharla Jinnan (3 acres) are in the first phase of the plantation.

All these farmers have got eucalyptus seeds at 6 rupees per seed (no subsidy) and have planted 200 seeds in one acre. There is an understanding that ITC would

buy their harvest, but the company is not ready to get into any formal agreement. Attempts by the villagers to organize meetings with the company did not succeed. The farmers said they had to spend at least 30,000 rupees per acre in this plantation. The investment was not so much when they grew Jowar, pulses, and paddy. They are not so happy with their decision to switch to eucalyptus: they said that even though the land is of relatively poor quality, irrigation facility is excellent in the area, making it ideal for food grains. Eucalyptus plants do not need to be watered as they suck so much water from the ground. At least 10 farmers in the village have already gone back to traditional crops and cotton, as they felt that eucalyptus was not going to sustain in terms of returns to the farmers. Cotton was a better option, they said.

However, there were farmers we met who had just taken to eucalyptus after ITC approached them: Kokadpu Bhaskarrao, Kokadappu Ramarao, Fulsheela Ramkrishna, S Ramarao, and Fualsheela Sakkhyam.

There was no sign of any socio-economic development activity by the company in the area.

### **Penegudap village, Kotagudem mandal**

We met Ajmal Khan, who had taken 3 acres of land on lease from one Yellamelalla Prasad to raise eucalyptus, on an agreement that the profit would be shared equally. He bought the seeds without any subsidy and planted 1200 seeds per acre while the total investment for each acre turned out to be 40,000 rupees. After three years, when he harvested the first crop of eucalyptus and sold it to ITC, he found that he, in fact, incurred a net loss.

ITC, on the other hand, was not keen to advance any money to him, and nor did they show any interest in discussing the farmers' problems. Although one officer from the company comes to meet the farmers, she only talks about issues of buying and selling their produce strictly in a trader-like fashion, the villagers alleged. About 50 people in the village have taken to eucalyptus plantation, leaving traditional farming, and they all are perplexed about whether they took the right decision or not. In the absence of any help from ITC, a private company called BASIC has taken advantage of the situation and is now providing loan to the farmers at 7% interest rate, which the farmers find difficult to pay back. People have demanded that ITC should rather offer such loans directly, but the company does not pay any heed.

ITC has no programme for any local area development work or general welfare in the area.



## **Kotigudem village, Kotigudem mandal**

The Kotigudem village is inhabited mostly by the Koya tribe, among a few others. Padma Sayam, 24, a tribal youth, told us that he took to eucalyptus plantation on his 6 acres of farm land two years back; he invested 12,000 rupees from his own savings, only to get disappointed with the output. He said that the soil there was not at all conducive to eucalyptus plantation or any such cash crops. So, he had to abandon whatever he had planted and return to the traditional rice crop.

About 10 other farmers in the village had the same story to repeat. They all rued the fact that whatever they had invested to grow eucalyptus after being lured by ITC had gone down the drain. However, some felt good about their timely decision to stop growing eucalyptus. ITC had in fact done a soil test but misguided them by saying that the soil was good for eucalyptus. The company did not even consider compensating the farmers after they suffered losses. All of them have now gone back to paddy.

People here have no idea about the concept of carbon trading and how much ITC is earning out of this. It will be interesting to find out if ITC continues to show Kotigudem village as part of the project-activity area and counting carbon credits against it!

## **Kolgapally village, Kotigudem mandal**

Mandal Nageshwarrao, 50, in village Kolgapally told us that he was growing eucalyptus in 2 acres of land in which he had planted 3000 seeds. He got no subsidy for purchasing the seeds. He said that ITC had no contact with the farmers here as they sell their produce through middlemen. Nageshwarrao gets 1600 rupees for a tonne of the eucalyptus wood, which is much below the local market price. After investing 20,000 rupees, the return from one harvest after three years is only 35,000 rupees. Without resources, he now finds it difficult to switch to other crops. The project has in many ways impoverished him; but, ironically, the project proponent is not at all involved in the entire process. Nageshwarrao informed that at least 10 more farmers in the village are engaged in this plantation, and they all depend on middlemen and brokers.

## **Vadigudem village, Kotigudem mandal**

In village Vadigudem, Chinaballaya, 37, a Koya tribesman, has planted eucalyptus on his 4 acres after procuring 3000 seeds on subsidy. He had to wait for 4 years for the first harvest, which, sold to ITC, fetched 47,000 rupees at the rate of 1800 rupees per tonne. He cannot calculate the amount he has invested, but says 'about 20,000 rupees in the first phase'. Chinaballaya complains that ITC is not at all ready to sign an

agreement with him. ITC also refuses to give him some advance money so that he can look after the plantation better. He spent all the money he got from the first harvest in his son's education, and now works as a wage labour to run his family.

In the village, 40 farmers are engaged in eucalyptus plantation on a total land area of 160 acres. ITC never convenes any meeting with the farmers to discuss their problems, apart from the one meeting in Bhadarachalm in the beginning that Chinaballaya remembers as being the one in which they were given a good lunch and 50 rupees per person as travelling cost. In that meeting, the ITC officials had motivated and urged the farmers to grow eucalyptus in their farm land and sell the harvest to the company. Considering the unsustainable returns from eucalyptus plantation and the long gestation period, farmers in the village are now rather more interested in the Yidipappu plant, as that can get them more profits: 3 acres of Yidipappu plantation gets them 50,000 rupees a year in the open market. So, why should they wait for 34 years for the same amount, says Chinaballaya!

Besides, the Forest Department and ITC have jointly raised 40 acres of eucalyptus plantation in this village under the social forestry scheme. This plantation, which is on the road side, has destroyed the natural vegetation and forest there. Moreover, the Forest Department is using the local tribal people as daily-wage labourers in this plantation without paying them the stipulated wage.

People in this village have no knowledge about the carbon credits or trading associated with their plantation, as ITC has never thought it right to inform people about it.

## **Mangapet village, Kotigudem mandal**

About 50 farmers in village Mangapet got involved in eucalyptus plantation after ITC promised to buy the produce. Almost all farmers are small land-holders with holdings of 34 acres. Prasad Satidam, 35, told us that although it had been more than 3 years since he planted the species on his 3-acre land, ITC was asking him to wait for one more year to harvest the produce. He has already invested 12,000 rupees on this, and now finds it difficult to wait any further for the returns. ITC insists on not signing any agreement with any farmer in the village, and nor is it open to the idea of issuing cash advances to any farmer. Satidam survives on the paddy crop he is doing on the 5 acres of land he owns separately. But, most other farmers are in utter despair as the whole situation is so uncertain.

The Van Suraksha Samiti under the JFM scheme of the

Forest Department used to receive 1.5-lakh rupees a year from the government for forest protection and management of the 250-acre forest stretch. The fund somehow stopped coming in 2009. The Forest Department had started eucalyptus plantations through the Samiti on 25 acres of forest land in 2008. Villagers said that the fund that was coming for forest management was stopped at the behest of ITC so that the Forest Department could have some deal with the company for eucalyptus plantations on forest land. This has directly impacted the villagers as the forest they traditionally depended on now started to degenerate.

### **Malkara village, Dhammapeta mandal**

In the tribal village of Malkara, Ankata Brahmayya, 43, said that he had already harvested eucalyptus twice on his 3-acre land. He had to pay 6 rupees per seed when he bought them and was told that this was on subsidy as the price of each seed was 10 rupees. He was clearly cheated. After having invested 30,000 rupees, the first harvest after 4 years got him 45,000 rupees. On the second harvest, after another 4 years in 2008, he got 50,000 rupees. Brahmayya looked clueless about why he entered this mess of eucalyptus plantation as it does not help him feed his family!

The second time around, said Brahmayya, a middleman had already landed in the village to buy the produce; it was not sold to ITC directly. ITC does not heed any demand of the villagers to sign agreements with them, and does not entertain any request for cash advances. Villagers informed us that a NGO named ACTIVE conducts ITC's awareness programme among these tribal people about eucalyptus plantation; the NGO is active in villages Pedgolugudem, Lapuram, Deepugudem, Rcharpalli, and some others. The NGO is more or less acting as an agent for the company, the villagers said. While motivating farmers to take up eucalyptus plantation, ITC promptly assures of the transport and other facilities; but once the plants are cut, farmers are made to fend for themselves.

ITC did not even provide adequate information about the possible impacts of eucalyptus plantation on their farm land. Villagers are in trouble now as they want to get back to their traditional crops and find that the land would take at least a year to rejuvenate for that. However, all the farmers have now stopped growing eucalyptus and have switched back to corn.

### **Peddagulagudem village, Dhammapeta mandal**

Yogunand Rao in village Peddagulagudem has been engaged in eucalyptus plantation on 2 acres of land and already had one harvest, which he sold to a middleman

dealing with ITC. He observed that the land had degraded after the first crop and the plants demand more water now. ITC continues to encourage people of the village to go for eucalyptus plantation in place of their traditional crops. All the farmers engaged in plantations now rue their land going degraded and the top soil being washed away. None of them, however, has any idea about carbon trading the company is engaged in and the profit it mints, out of the farmers' hard work and at the cost of an impending disaster.

### **Chingolagudem village, Dhammapeta mandal**

Marthal Matthala, 40, of village Chingolagudem has been engaged in eucalyptus plantation since 2001/02 on 8 acres of land that he owns in Pedulugudem village. From the first harvest in 2003/04, he made 14,000 rupees per acre after spending 10,000 rupees on each. On the second harvest, he got 25,000 rupees after investing 20,000 rupees on each acre of plantation. Today, Matthala feels sorry about his decision to switch from rice and corn to eucalyptus, as the profit margin in eucalyptus is negligible and that too comes after waiting for 3 to 4 long years.

ACTIVE, the NGO is promoting eucalyptus plantation among the farmers of about 15 villages in the Panchayat. In this village, nearly 200 acres of land where earlier a natural forest stood is under eucalyptus. The NGO, which works out of Sarpaka village, provided labourers to raise the plantation on a casual basis at 70 rupees per day. The NGO is also using the NREGA scheme for plantation on another 150 acres of forest land where the labourers are paid a mere 40-45 rupees per day. ACTIVE is also engaged in eucalyptus plantation on some private lands.

The villagers Thota Venketesh, Machalu Venketesh, Khawarti Nagesh, Resi Naglu, and Rahala Shiddager expressed that all the farmers are now looking for ways to abandon eucalyptus plantation and get back to paddy and corn farming.

### **Aravapally village, Kukunuru mandal**

Village Aravapally is inhabited by the Koya tribe. Malkandam Ramlu, 79, told us that out of the 2 acres of land he owns, he planted eucalyptus on one-and-half acre. He had invested 5000 rupees, but could not wait for the long gestation period to count the paltry return he would have. So, after two years, he cut down all the trees and used them as firewood. His brother and other villagers like H Sirmaya, Kharam Satyam, and Payam Randu also narrated similar stories to us. Eucalyptus plantations, which covered about 15 acres of land in this village, are almost bereft of trees now.



## **Laxmigudem village, Kukunuru mandal**

Laxmigudem is another village of the Koya tribe where ITC and its partner NGOs claim to have implemented the eucalyptus plantation project. Villager Sunav Ramalu, 35, informed us that one official (he is not sure whether he was from ITC or some NGO) came to him to sign a deal before he started growing eucalyptus on his 2-acre land. This person who had visited had first claimed 1100 rupees from Ramalu as consultancy fees. Then, he took a demand draft of the value of 2200 rupees from Ramalu to process a loan of 150,000 rupees towards the expenses of eucalyptus plantation up to the third harvest. Although the so-called official handed over a cheque of 50,000 rupees to him in the end, the cheque, the agreement, and the addresses he gave turned out to be all fakes. Many other farmers have also fallen for such cheating by the same person, who has not appeared again in the area since then.

## **Teklaboru village, Kunavarm mandal**

In village Teklaboru, Kogur Shiva, 45, the Mandal secretary of the Communist Party of India, raised eucalyptus on 32 acres of land; out of this, he owns 7 acres and the rest is taken on lease from others. He gave us an account of how invested 1,040,000 rupees and got a return of 2,016,000 rupees after three-and-half years. The profit margin is going to come down yet further on each harvest, he said.

ITC is not willing to sign any agreement with him, despite the comparatively larger size of his plantation, which makes the future extremely uncertain for him. What fuels his worries is the ever-escalating lease money he has to shell out. He has been advising his fellow farmers to raise eucalyptus only on degraded land rather than wasting any fertile land for such insignificant returns. But, the company keeps sending agents to motivate farmers to take up plantation on any land they have.

Kogur Shiva informed us that in Kunavarm mandal, eucalyptus plantation is being done on about 2000 acres of land, and on 500 acres in Kunavarm town alone. However, without proper knowledge about eucalyptus farming, farmers in many villages are in a state of utter confusion and thereby prone to suffer huge losses. There are no provisions for bank loans or crop insurances in eucalyptus plantation, which makes the smaller farmers extremely vulnerable to risks. He regrets for not having gone for traditional crops such as chilly, tobacco, and paddy, which would have ensured him much better returns annually. Moreover, the massive eucalyptus plantation in the region is deleteriously affecting the traditional crops being done by other farmers.

Shiva said that, five years back, ITC had held a meeting with the farmers; but that was all about coaxing them to get into eucalyptus; there was no mention of climate change or carbon trading.

## **Sarapaka village, Bhadrachalam mandal**

We met Chanu Nayak who holds a degree in chemical engineering and is the Sarpanch of Sarapaka village. He informed that farmers in the village are engaged in eucalyptus plantation, which covers an area of 200 acres. The Van Suraksha Samiti (VSS), formed under the JFM scheme of the Forest Department, has been growing eucalyptus plantation on about 350 acres of forest land. While the farmers buy the seeds at the rate of 5 to 8 rupees per seed, the VSS gets all the seeds for free from the government. Eucalyptus plantation on farm lands in the village had started in 1996 in which the farmers earned a paltry 1 to 2 rupees per plant at each harvest. However, for the past 3 years, farmers are withdrawing from eucalyptus plantation on their farm lands.

Initially, ITC had convened a meeting with farmers and urged them to go for eucalyptus plantation and had promised 2000 rupees per tonne at harvest. They said this would make the farmers millionaires. Farmers fell into that trap and now had to wait for 3 to 6 years to sell the harvest for pittance. Self-reliant farmers have thus turned into wage labourers.

This is a tribal area protected under the special Schedule-V of the Indian constitution where, according to Law, tribal land cannot be taken for any industrial activity. However, the law is being brazenly violated and the Forest Department hand-in-glove with the company handed over 350 acres of forest land to the company for business purpose. The Integrated Tribal Development Authority (ITDA) had gone to the court challenging the hand-over of 89 acres of tribal land in the scheduled area to the company. The court, in turn, dismissed the case by advising ITC to pay 1,000,000 rupees for tribal development in exchange for keeping the land.

This being tribal land, the company had 'officially' adopted the village for implementing developmental programmes in order to get the sanction. However, there is not a single developmental programme visible in the area. The former sarpanch had given the NOC to ITC without consulting the people. The local administration openly sides with the company and heeds to no appeal by the villagers. People have now got organized and are protesting against the injustice.

The population of Sarapaka has increased by 80% in the



past 30 years owing to the presence of ITC's paper and pulp plant, as labourers come from Odisha, Bihar, Kerala, and other far-away places and stay in the village. So, the natives are now reduced to a mere 20% and are pitted against the 80% outsiders brought by the company.

The waste effluent from the plant has poisoned the water bodies and toxic dust has filled the air. Local tribal people are now inflicted with unheard-of diseases such as breast cancer, ovary cancer, asthma, and other respiratory and skin ailments. Waste water is even released to the Godavari River directly. ITC had also tried to snatch a patch of 37 acres of village land illegally; as villagers protested, the company returned the land to the village.

ITC has also roped in NGOs by giving them contracts to promote and develop the plantation projects in the area. HOPE is one such NGO, which has got huge funding from ITC to promote the interests of the latter.

The sarpanch is aware about the CDM status (since 2000) of the ITC paper and pulp plant (the company claims to run six separate CDM projects within it!). He tried to explain to the people the benefits of a CDM project they should get, and organize them to demand for the benefits from the company. People also questioned the pollution control board for its inaction to curb pollution from this CDM project!

In another brazen violation of law, ITC has been able to coax the ITDA to close down the sericulture scheme in order to promote plantations. For tribal communities, who primarily depend on the forest and agriculture, this is a big blow to their economic sustenance.

People have now started a mass movement against the company under the leadership of the sarpanch, and have made it clear that the Gram Panchayat is the sole decision-making authority here and not the company. They have asked for 100-million rupees from the company towards village development, as one of the demands.

### **The great CDM fraud in Khammam**

All the claims in the PDD about social, economic, environmental and technological well-being are a big hoax. Nowhere could we find any trace of how the

project activity led to 'strengthening of the village-level institution to empowering the poor and the deprived', as had been claimed by ITC in the PDD. The *Mandal Samyakhya* is neither technically and politically equipped nor adequately mandated to monitor the activity of the project in order to ensure benefits to the poor farmers. Farmers had only been tricked to raise eucalyptus plantations and were then left to their own devices, as they invested their own money and used whatever little knowledge they had about eucalyptus in absence of any knowledge-dissemination mechanism or training. In the end they had to be content with the paltry return they got. With a completely new and alien species to deal with in place of their traditional crops, the already existing village-level institutions and support systems seem to be collapsing, as they are incapable to support the farmers in such a scenario.

Instead of uplifting the economic status of the farmers, the project has impoverished them. In a predominantly tribal milieu where forest-produce and agriculture make the backbone of the economy and culture, the eucalyptus plantation project has changed people's resource base for the worse. Thousands of acres of fertile farm and forest land have been converted to commercial plantations of such a species that eventually turns fertile lands degraded a disaster that farmers of the region have already started discovering the hard way. They even find themselves in a trap because they cannot so easily switch back to the earlier crops as the land would need at least a year to rejuvenate for that luxury the poor farmers cannot think of.

On the other hand, as eucalyptus sucks a large amount of water from the ground, the plantations have already wreaked havoc on other farming and forest outputs, plunging the farmers in deeper despair. In sharp contrast to what the PDD claims, eucalyptus plantations have resulted in massive soil erosion and eaten up natural vegetation covers and forests.

In conclusion, the Paperboards and Specialty Papers Division (PAP) of ITC Ltd has achieved what it actually had set out for large profits by exploiting and further impoverishing the poor. Apart from making immense profits from paper-manufacturing, ITC is also all set to mint a huge amount of money by selling the supposedly sequestered carbon in the international carbon market.

**Table 9:** State-wise spread of forestry CDM projects in India

States	Total CDM projects	Number of registered projects	*kCO <sub>2</sub> /yr	**2020 kCO <sub>2</sub>	***kCERs issued
Andhra Pradesh	1	1	58	1128	0
Chhattisgarh	1		4	46	
Delhi	1		15	188	
Himachal Pradesh	1		41	601	
Haryana (Afforestation)	1	1	12	137	
Karnataka	1		106	1377	
Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh (bundled)	2		461	7972	
Tamil Nadu	1	1	3.6	61	
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>700.6</b>	<b>11510</b>	<b>0</b>

\*Annual reduction claimed in 1000-tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per year

\*\*Total reduction to be claimed in 1000-tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent by 2020

\*\*\* Saleable CERs, in 1000-tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent, officially issued by the UNFCCC so far

## REDD+ in India, and India's first REDD+ project: a critical examination

In its issue dated 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2011, the Indian environmental magazine *Down To Earth* (DTE) broke the story about India's first REDD project. A watershed conservation project in East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya is now being developed as the 'maiden REDD pilot' in India, it was learnt. The story further mentioned that the project met 'several REDD criteria': one, it is situated in an area which in recent years saw a 5.6 percent increase in forest cover because of community action, and two, communities have established ownership rights over forests in that locality.

The brief story raised more questions than answers. Does anybody know what a REDD project will look like in practice, and how it will operate? Besides extremely vague and confusing statements that periodically come out of international climate negotiations, and gruesome stories of exploitation of communities in the name of REDD<sub>1</sub>, what public knowledge do we have about one of the most bitterly controversial climate change mitigation schemes ever proposed?

These, and similar questions are accentuated when we see that the project proponents Community Forestry International (CFI) seem quite sure about the REDD nature of their project; it would seek financial support from 'agencies like the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility' so that the communities can 'engage in sustainable practices', we were told. More importantly, a senior officer (Jagdish Kishwan, additional director general of forests, wildlife) in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India (MoEF, GoI) praised it, saying that "these kind of pilot projects help understand the role communities play in influencing carbon stocks at the grassroots level"<sub>2</sub>.

The present report tries to examine and answer these and some more questions, first by going through some *REDD texts* (texts which either came out of REDD meetings/negotiations or contains statements/submissions by REDD+ proponents, especially in India) and then by presenting an account of a visit to Mawphlong in East Khasi Hills in search of India's first REDD+ project.

### Part 1: Reading the context and the REDD claims: Unravelling a range of REDD texts

#### Text 1: Minutes of the ARWG meeting<sub>3</sub>

The DTE story came out in May 2011. In February this year, the first meeting of the newly formed Asia REDD+ Working Group (ARWG) took place in Delhi. Not one, but two REDD pilot projects in India (the other, also from the North East India, is being conducted in the Naga Hills of Manipur) were presented in the meeting. Community Forestry International, the hosts of the ARWG meeting, has designed both the projects, and both are located in community-held forests (it needs to be kept in mind that most of India's forests are government-owned, a forest bureaucracy originally created by the British still runs them in a typically feudal style).

The minutes of the ARWG make interesting reading: like all other pro-REDD meetings, the ARWG Delhi meeting too talked about the need for financial incentives in forest conservation and asserted that REDD (here REDD+) presents a great opportunity: *"the meeting participants agreed that REDD+ represents a historic opportunity to create a mechanism that rewards low-income resource dependent communities for environmental services including carbon"*. Also, *"The ARWG's mission would emphasize formulating REDD+ strategies that achieve multiple objectives including resolving resource rights conflicts, enhancing the livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples, and supporting the provision of a broad range of environmental services"*. The ARWG would also expectedly *"create support mechanisms for innovative REDD+ projects and strategies through the provision of institutional, technical and financial support...including the sale of carbon credits in international private voluntary markets"* (all italics added).

How will the Asian REDD+ projects be 'supported'? Several finance and business strategists were there in the Delhi meeting to deal with the practical project finance and carbon market linkage aspects of these community-centric projects. The Plan Vivo system "which currently has 16 projects from three continents in their pipeline and will soon reach one million tons of certified carbon" was discussed, and also "how project developers were excited to see that Plan Vivo's system supported "multi-goal REDD+ strategies" with "user friendly methodologies", "ex-ante carbon sales with short term gestation periods of 12-18 months" and "an



integrated system for community-based REDD+ project design and development". Terra Global Capital presented "TGC's mosaic REDD+ methodology" with "VCS approval" which "has been used in the Oddar Meanchey REDD project", "effectively describing" the "innovations and complexities involved in modelling and measurement".

It was asserted that the ARWG "will continue to seek ways to insure methods that allow *rigorous carbon stock measurement and monitoring at low costs* and with *maximum community involvement*". Obviously, the "Munden Project" was all about one such method: "a strategy to use development finance coupled with private sector support for REDD+ crediting *bundling together different types of capital with risk profiles, maturities, and profit-margin objectives*". It further suggested how risk-reducing, low-transaction cost, "community-REDD+ project portfolios" could be created with increased "investor liquidity, while protecting smaller projects from manipulation and erosion of carbon revenues" (all italics added).

The "Sub-national developers of community REDD projects at the meeting strongly endorsed the concept of the ARWG as a support network that could build on their desire to *create non-carbon centric, multi-goal oriented community-based REDD+ projects that build on existing initiatives and institutional resources*, while filling technical and financial gaps (italics added)", said the minutes.

Reading the minutes, we see the following: 1. The AWRG type of REDD+ plus projects meant resolving resource-right conflicts (why the conflicts come about and how these are to be resolved were not specified), enhance livelihoods of forest-dependant people (the project presentations suggest how: we'll come to that later) and support the 'provision of a broad range' (for whatever that may mean) of environmental services (not specified, nor the extremely significant question of who will control those services). Then we learn that AWRG will set up sales deals for the carbon credits coming from projects in the voluntary offset market: hence all the shop-talk above about risk-reduction and investor liquidity. AWRG will also ensure community involvement in carbon stock measurement; in other words, communities in REDD+ projects will learn how to measure carbon stored in their forests according to pre-specified models, courtesy AWRG. We are led to believe that despite all the talks about the carbon market, AWRG REDD+ projects will not be 'carbon-centric', and will be 'multi-goal community-based' ones, because AWRG is all about honouring the demands of the community leaders who attended the meeting.

## **Text 2: INDIA'S FORESTS AND REDD+, a note from MoEF, GoI, 2010**

The note informs us that the Indian Government's interest in REDD plus is purely altruistic: it wants to 'pass on' the incentives received from REDD+ 'to the local communities in protection and management of the forests'. Immediately afterwards, the note claims "that a REDD+ programme for India could provide capture of more than 1 billion tonnes of *additional* CO<sub>2</sub> over the next 3 decades and provide more than USD 3 billion as *carbon service incentives* under REDD+ (italics added)". "REDD+ will benefit local communities as it explicitly safeguards their rights and those of indigenous peoples. India is committed that monetary benefits from REDD+ will flow to local, forest dependent, forest dwelling and tribal communities", it goes on to claim further. Explaining the benefits yet more lucidly, the note sees REDD+ first as "an additional co-benefit to the goods and services already accruing to and being enjoyed by the local community", which comes as "a bonus without compromising on the existing benefits", and then as an instrument to "ensure more monetary benefits flowing to" the communities. "India's own acts, guidelines, executive instructions and orders at central and state level additionally ensure that REDD+ will not adversely impact on the traditional and legal rights of the local communities over forests", the note asserts and assures that "all international REDD+ deliberations and negotiations recognize and respect national legislations relating to safeguards for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and aim to promote their participation in implementation and monitoring of REDD+".

Interestingly enough, the note then plunges into the *Green India Mission*, one of India's eight climate missions, and showcases it as both REDD+ and REDD-readiness exercises. The "new flagship forestry programme" of India will generate 5 million hectares of new vegetation cover and resuscitate and conserve another 5 million hectares of forests with "a budget of Rs 46,000 crores (approx. USD 10 billion) over a period of 10 years", and thus, "will help in improving ecosystem services in 10 million ha of land, and increase flow of forest based livelihood services to, and income of about 3 million forest dependent households". The note claims that the Mission marks a "fundamental shift from our traditional focus of merely increasing the quantity of our forest cover, towards **increasing its quality and improving provision of ecosystem goods and services** (emphasis added)", by "not merely focussing" on "plantations to meet carbon sequestration targets". The Mission is all about a "deliberate and major focus on autonomy and decentralization" and will be "implemented through an autonomous organisational structure with a view to

reducing delays and rigidity, while ensuring accountability". The "local communities will be at the heart of implementation, with the Gram Sabha as the overarching institution overseeing Mission implementation at the village-level", backed up by "a cadre of young '**Community Foresters**', most of whom will be from scheduled tribes and other forest dwelling communities, to facilitate planning, implementation and monitoring of Mission activities at local level".

Besides taking up the green mission, India has "made a submission to UNFCCC on "REDD, Sustainable Management of Forest (SMF) and Afforestation and Reforestation (A&R)" in December 2008, a "Technical Group to develop methodologies and procedures to assess and monitor contribution of REDD+ actions" has been set up, 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 (CBD) in 2012, and a study on the impact of climate change on India's forests assigned to the Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment (INCCA), has been released in November 2010 which shows that there is likely to be an increase in Net Primary Productivity (NPP) ranging from 20-57% by 2030 in India's forests.

**Text 3: 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), a submission by MoEF, GoI, 2011**

This note lays down the outlines of the institutional framework for REDD-plus in India, and assures us that such framework will have all the space for 'local communities'. India's national strategy for REDD+ "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* (italics added)", says the note, "...in the Indian context, carbon service from forest and plantations is one of the co-benefits and not the main or the sole benefit". Immediately after, though, carbon estimates come in: "Initiatives like Green India Mission (GIM) and National Afforestation Programme (NAP)...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". All that the world needs for this huge amount of carbon safely sequestered in

community-friendly Indian forests is a small token investment of "Rs. 90 billion (USD 2 billion) every year for 10 years", which will come mainly from "financial support from UNFCCC".

The note then presents the institutional structure of REDD-plus: "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* (italics added)". No confusion here whatsoever: the wording makes it amply clear that the MoEF and the forest bureaucracy under it assume sole and complete responsibility of running the REDD+ show. In the next sections, the note talks about carbon accounting, which the Forest Survey of India (FSI) and the state-level (or in REDD terms, 'sub-national'-level) forest departments will do together.

The country is keen on "*ensuring the safeguards for the rights of the local communities including tribals, and above all of women folk of the local communities*" says the note, and that it "*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)* (italics added)". Further on, the note lists the 'safeguards' the developing countries are expected to follow in order to "ensure full participation of indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders": "ensure that all REDD-plus incentives available from international sources ... 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* (italics added)". The note then explains how: "In India, tribals, forest dwellers and other local communities *have always enjoyed legal safeguards to practise their customary rights and traditions*" (italics added) and perhaps we need to keep in mind here that the colonial forestry practices started in India only after all 'adverse' rights had been extinguished, and in the history of Indian jurisprudence, there hasn't been any 'forest' act since then that even remotely allowed 'customary rights and traditions'. The success story of Joint Forest Management (JFM) follows: "...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" (italics added and it may be relevant to remember that forest movements and community groups in India never accepted JFM: they always viewed the JFM and the related data with distrust. Another point is that JFM has not been codified through legislation: rather, interpretation of it has always depended upon state forest departments). The Forest Rights Act, the only true 'legal safeguard' for indigenous rights in India was barely mentioned: "Promulgation of the Forest Rights Act has further strengthened the legal framework in the country for safeguarding the rights of local communities".

Reading the above in conjunction with Indian government's Green India Mission (GIM) Statement and India's previous country submissions on REDD and REDD+, following postulates emerge: 1. India has successfully measured the carbon stored in its forests, and also mapped the storage potential. 2. Its emphasis on REDD+ is driven by its desire to do the right with forest-dependent communities. 3. It knows exactly how much incentive can be generated out of India's forests, and consequently, can be passed on to the communities. 4. It not only has the necessary legislations in place that ensure that all existing community rights will be safeguarded under the REDD+ regime but also a decentralized autonomous structure in place to ensure community involvement in REDD+ projects. 5. This structure is Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC) under the Gram Sabha (the village assembly), overseen and monitored by District Level Committees comprising and led by government representatives like the District Forest Officer, community representatives like the members of JFMCs, and other unnamed stakeholders. 6. These REDD+/GIM structure is in consonance with international REDD+ agreements and the commitment to upholding community rights expressed therein.

Each of these postulates is questionable, to say the least. Despite the self-proclaimed community-centric nature of REDD+, communities so far have not been meaningfully involved in carbon stock measurement activities anywhere, and nor do people living in Indian forests (or, for that matter, in other forests) know anything about the carbon sequestration potential (and hence, business potential) of their forests. Following an utterly non-transparent and undemocratic process limited to a handful of government officials and a few handpicked NGOs, the forests have been measured for their so-called 'carbon value', also avoiding the moot question that even in the Indian national context,

measurement of forest carbon has always been an 'academically' disputed issue, and there's still no universally accepted and standardized models of such measurement. Though the Indian government likes to emphasize the non-carbon values of forests in REDD+, it ends up with estimates of carbon credit sales when talking of specific incentives. One reason for this may lie in the relative non-tradability (for the time being, at least) of 'other' non-carbon environmental services (hydrological services, for instance, and bio-diversity) to be had from forests.

As to the enabling legislations and decentralized GIM, this is perhaps enough to mention that India's promotion of REDD+ and its Green India Mission have been severely challenged by forest movements and community groups in the country; in fact, both GIM and REDD+ have been seen as attempts to short-sell the country's forests in the international carbon markets. The Indian Government, particularly its MoEF, had been consistently undermining and sabotaging the implementation of the historic Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (the FRA), 2006, ever since the process started, the movement groups point out. The REDD+ and GIM will only accentuate the prevailing inequity and miscarriage of justice inherent in India's forest policy regime, the core of which consists of coercive colonial legislations like the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and the draconian Wild Life Protection Act, 1972, they say.

Coming now to the international REDD agreements, we now randomly but in slightly greater detail examine a 'draft' (so far, there have only been drafts and no definite agreements) circulated during the COP 2009 in Copenhagen.

#### **Text 4:**

**Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention/Draft conclusions proposed by the Chair/Addendum (Draft decision -/CP.15)/** *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.*

1. Affirms that the following [principles][principles and provisions of the Convention] guide the implementation of activities referred to in paragraph 3 below:
  - (a) Contribute to the objective set out in Article 2 of the Convention;



(b) [Contribute to the commitments set out in Article 4, paragraph 3, of the Convention;]

(c) Be country-driven and [voluntary] [put forward voluntarily];

(d) Be undertaken in accordance with national circumstances and capabilities of the country and respect sovereignty;

(e) Be consistent with national sustainable development needs and goals;

Decoding it, we see that the process will depend on the country which is reducing its deforestation, and its 'national circumstances' and 'capabilities', meaning that the process will depend much on the nature and extent of the forestry operations as well as the land-use in the country. If it was decided that timber/logging operations and converting forest land to non-forest purposes are more necessary than conserving forests, the targets will be set accordingly.

'National sustainable development needs and goals' were talked about in 1/e above, which is entirely vague. For instance, India has no such clearly assessed 'national needs', and while forest use is ideally subject to 'binding' legislations and judicial orders, forest land can still be 'diverted' on a large-scale for so-called development projects, which means that deforestation can be a country's economic priority than conservation of forests.

(f) Facilitate sustainable development, reduce poverty and respond to climate change in developing country Parties;

(g) Promote broad country participation;

Once again, vague: such declarations without explanations and specific instances mean what? The World Bank has been talking about poverty reduction and sustainable development since its 2002 forest strategy, and has been financing essentially logging projects like Joint forest Management in India and other countries.

2. *Further affirms* that when undertaking activities referred to in paragraph 3 below, the following safeguards should be [promoted] [and] [supported];

(a) That actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;

(b) Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation and sovereignty;

What is meant by 'Transparent and effective national forest governance structures', is not clear at all. 'Effective' in what sense? In ensuring that deforestation reduction targets are met? It is quite possible that existing forest governance structures will be drastically altered to meet such targets, and to 'effectively' ensure that deforestation events decrease. Read in conjunction with 1/e above, deforestation can go on in a country and at the same time forest laws and policies can be altered to suit the global REDD effort. 'Transparency' here means 'transparency' on a global scale, which means that the specific details of future deforestation reduction programme inside a developing country will be made available to the global monitoring body for REDD (or any such structure that may come up in the future). In short, this will lead to unlimited and unrestricted outside interference in a country's forest governance structures, seriously compromising sovereignty, and potentially harming the interest of forest-based adivasis and other communities.

(c) Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

Unless specifically provided in terms of governance rights, what does 'Respect' mean? The economic interests of the logging and other companies (those that need forest areas for various purposes) inside and outside the country have shaped the forest policies in developing countries so far, and no respect has been shown to the rights of indigenous and members of 'local communities' (once again the term 'local community' is entirely unclear and can be used to denote local elites like contractors and timber merchants too). There is nothing in this REDD Draft that ensures that things will be different in the REDD and REDD+ programme.

(d) Full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, including in particular indigenous peoples and local communities in actions referred to in paragraphs 3 and 5 below;

Because the 'relevant stakeholders' have not been defined, and neither has any clarification for 'full and effective participation' been provided, this provides no safeguards for indigenous rights.

(e) Actions that are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that actions referred to in

paragraph 3 below are not used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmental benefits;[1]

The above means that actions under REDD will act as incentives towards forest protection and conservation of natural forests and not for conversion of forests to non-forest land use.

The problem lies elsewhere. In providing that countries can set their own country-level REDD targets according to their 'national' needs, the essentially decentralized nature of forest use by indigenous and other forest-based communities has been completely ignored. The only effective reduction of deforestation is possible through decentralized and local/forest-area specific forest governance structures. For instance, the Forest Rights Act 2006 in India provides some rudiments of such a structure. The present Draft does not even mention anything like that, and pays only lip-service to the crucial question of indigenous peoples' and forest communities' role in forest governance.

(f) Actions to address the risks of reversals;

(g) Actions to reduce displacement of emissions;

Both 2(f) and (g) above overlap 3, while 2(f) says that deforestation reduction (or, forest conservation) programmes must be executed in such a manner so that these forests remain 'conserved' indefinitely.

Because forests are living dynamisms subject to both natural and human interventions, how can it be ensured that any particular forest is conserved for infinity?

4. *Requests* the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice to undertake a work programme to identify land use, land-use change and forestry activities in developing countries, in particular those that are linked to the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, to identify the associated methodological issues to estimate emissions and removals resulting from these activities, and, to assess their potential contribution to the mitigation of climate change, and report on the findings to the Conference of the Parties at its [xx] session;

What the above means is that the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice will undertake surveys in developing countries to determine the

factors behind deforestation and to prepare quantitative estimates of GHG emissions (and how such emissions can be reduced) resulting from specific deforestation events.

Which is an impossible task. Factors behind deforestation in any developing country are extremely diverse; both in nature and scale, and there's still no scientific consensus as to the assessment of those factors. Most importantly, deforestation events cannot possibly be controlled and influenced without profound socio-economic and sometimes political changes.

5. *Also requests* that a developing country Party aiming to undertake activities referred to in paragraph 3 above, [provided that support is made available,] in accordance with national circumstances and respective capabilities, develop:

(a) [A national strategy or action plan and, if appropriate, a subnational strategy, [as part of their low-carbon emission strategies and in accordance with decision x/CP.15 (*Mitigation*)]];

The clause is apparently emphasizing the need for setting up National and regional REDD targets (extent of conserved forests, quantity of emission reduced and the amount of carbon stored and to be stored in forests).

Because no scientific consensus exists about the amount of carbon stored (or potential storage) in a given forest system, preparing error-free national and regional carbon storage estimates are not possible. Neither can definite forest conservation targets can be set in reality, especially when the target conservation activity consists mainly of storing carbon in trees and soil. Any strategy to do such scientifically impossible tasks is bound to fail and will be open to all sorts of manipulations.

(c) [A robust and transparent national forest monitoring system for the monitoring and reporting of the activities referred to in paragraph 3 above, and the safeguards referred to in paragraph 2 above], with, as appropriate, subnational monitoring and reporting as an optional interim measure,2 in accordance with the provisions contained in decision x/CP.15 (*SBSTA decision*) and any further elaboration of those provisions agreed by the Conference of the Parties;]

Once again vague, this is probably talking about setting up of national and regional systems to monitor REDD activities. Because nothing has been said about the



possible modalities for constitution of monitoring bodies, the bodies can be subject to a range of outside interferences like the involvement of the financing organizations etc.

7. *Decides* that the activities undertaken by Parties referred to in paragraph 3 above [should][shall] be implemented in phases, beginning with the development of national strategies or action plans, policies and measures and capacity-building, followed by the implementation of national policies and measures, and national strategies or action plans and, as appropriate, subnational strategies, that could involve further capacity-building, technology transfer and results-based demonstration activities, and evolving into results-based actions [that shall be fully measured, reported and verified];

The REDD process in typically vague terms. While the need of the hour is to take immediate and time-bound steps to prevent large-scale conversion of forests for commercial purposes, and to halt industrial logging operations in natural forests, the Draft process as suggested above is time-consuming and complex, which will translate into tangible financial benefits for a whole body of consultants and NGOs, and not much else.

9. *Requests* the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, at its [xx] session, to develop, as necessary, modalities for [measuring, reporting and verifying] anthropogenic forest-related emissions by sources and removals by sinks, forest carbon stocks, forest carbon stocks and forest area changes resulting from the implementation of activities referred to in paragraph 3 above, and for robust and transparent national forest monitoring [and reporting] systems as specified in paragraph 5 (c) above[, and consistent with any guidance for measuring, reporting and verification of nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing country Parties agreed by the Conference of the Parties], taking into account methodological guidance in accordance with decision x/CP.15 (*SBSTA decision*), for adoption by the Conference of the Parties at its [xx] session;

Which means that the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice will prepare methodologies for 'measuring, reporting and verifying' (1) the amount of emissions from forest destruction by human

activities, (2) The process to set up possible 'forest sinks' (forests where carbon remains captive, and which therefore act as 'sinks' for atmospheric carbon), (3) The amount of carbon stored in such sinks, and (4) the changes in amounts of stored carbon in forests and in forest areas due to implementation of REDD activities. It will also develop ancillary methodologies for 'robust and transparent national forest monitoring systems', and 'guidance for measuring, reporting and verification of nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing country Parties', meaning that it will determine the contours of the national-level REDD monitoring process.

While perhaps emissions resulting from forest destruction can be measured, none of the other tasks can go much further beyond abstract mathematical calculations and a lot of 'scientific' conjectures. Creating leak-proof 'forest sinks' is not physically possible, without putting a stop to all kinds of usual human activities in the proposed sink, because many such activities may influence the carbon stocks in a forest, like agriculture, livestock rearing and collection of small timber and firewood.

11. [*Requests* that the promotion and implementation of all activities referred to in paragraphs 3, 5, 6 and 7 above, including consideration of the safeguards referred to in paragraph 2 above, and early action, be supported in accordance with [paragraph 1 (b) above and] relevant provisions agreed by the Conference of the Parties including:

- (a) [Decision x/CP.15 (finance);]
- (b) [Decision x/CP.15 (1 (b) (v)),] [for result-based activities a flexible combination of funds and market-based sources subjected to modalities to be agreed by the Conference of the Parties at its [xx] session];
- (c) [through existing bilateral and multilateral channels;]

The important part about the role of the developed countries is still unclear, especially how the REDD activities will be funded. 11(a), (b) and (c) mention some of the possible options like Government-to-Government funding, funding through multilateral channels (like the International Financial Institutions probably), and carbon trading, meaning that the carbon supposedly stored in the REDD sinks will be priced and sold in the global carbon market to the polluters in the Developed countries, and this will act as a source of finance.



## **Reading the Texts Together: What is REDD? What is Indian REDD plus?**

Our reading of the above texts tells us several things in unambiguous terms. One, though both the REDD and REDD+ concepts are still yet full of uncertainties and imprecision, the Government of India has started compliance exercises inside the country, without bothering to clear any of the innumerable apprehensions about the process.

As of now, there are no safeguards for forest communities' rights in the REDD+ process. On the contrary, there is every danger that all kinds of community access and use of forests will be badly restricted in a functional REDD+ project. The stories coming from all parts of the globe about communities being blackmailed, tortured and made subject of all sorts of exploitation in the name of REDD, where both national governments and private companies are involved. Despite the 'community-talks' in the AWRG deliberations and the MoEF REDD+ note, there is no guarantee that things will be different in India, given the regime of sheer feudal tyranny by the government-owned forest department in most of the country's forests, and the increasing hold of corporate capital over forest areas.

The concepts of 'local communities' and 'rights' as expressed in the REDD texts are dubious, to say the least. The AWRG meeting didn't bother to define the term 'communities' and the MoEF equates 'communities' with JFMCs, which are nothing but extensions of the forest department. Such simplified assessments ignore the deep divisions within the forest-dwelling communities, the class, caste, gender and ethnic conflicts that often simmer under the placid construct of a non-existent homogenous 'community'. The forest and *adivasi* movements in India are grappling with the challenge of a truly democratic and equitable resource governance practice in their prolonged struggles of implementing pro-people legislations like the FRA and PESA, and in most places, recognized community institutions such as Gram Sabha do not exist even on paper. How this scenario fits in with extremely specialized and complex tasks like carbon-storage assessments and carbon credit sales, let alone being benefited by carbon money, is anybody's guess. The question of 'rights' is more problematic as the Indian government has no updated record of rights so far as forest communities are concerned, and it continues to ignore its own legislation (the FRA), which recognizes a range of community and individual rights including providing for completely community-managed forests in all

types of forests, in favour of creating rights-free 'protected areas' for wild life conservation, and also for development projects like mining, large dams and power plants.

The texts above tell us that money, and largely money from carbon trading, is the core of REDD+. It's a business like any other, where investors invest, brokers earn commissions, and profiteers of all shades and kinds reap profits. Hence the emphasis on investor liquidity and low-transaction costs, and hence the business representatives in Delhi AWRG meeting. REDD business is looking more lucrative also because of availability of international funds for REDD readiness and such exercises, which mean more and substantially more money. Some of that money can trickle down to the poor among the forest communities in some cases once the REDD+ (and GIM) gets going, but the fund-flow will definitely be controlled by the elite and the powerful. And the trickling down too will happen essentially to keep the forest-dependant poor away from the forests, because the Indian Government is pushing a Joint Management model, where crucial decisions about forest usage are taken not by people but by forest officers. Given the experiences of JFM in India, the money will come in form of so-called 'support activities', for instance, manufacture and/or supply of low-smoke or woodless stoves.

Another important question remains unanswered. Apart from talks about the huge monetary potential of REDD+, and sometimes allaying people's just fears about curtailment of rights, what other information about REDD+ will be given to the communities? Will the poor forest-dependant people already severely affected by changing monsoon cycles, and other climate change impacts come to learn that their forests are being traded in international markets so that polluting companies in the rich countries can continue with their business-as-usual emissions? With its apparent emphasis on non-carbon forest services and talks of multi-objectives, REDD+ projects may try to create an illusion that in its present avatar REDD+ is anything but carbon trading. Will the communities-to-be-benefitted-by-REDD+ be given an informed choice about rejecting or accepting the project?

In most parts of India, where the government continues to exercise management control over all forms of forests, the answer is clearly no. As in previous and ongoing externally aided forestry programmes, the Government officials will control the GIM and any other REDD+ type programme in entirety, and the only permitted community presence will be through JFM. In some other parts of the country, particularly the North-

East, where there are still customarily held community forest areas, it's still an open question. In the next part of this report, while dealing with East Khasi Hills REDD+ project, we will try to look for an answer to it.

## Part 2: The Khasi Hills REDD+ project in Mawphlong, Meghalaya

### The Visit to Mawphlong: Talking to T Lyngdoh, Secretary, Mawphlong Hima

The beautiful sacred forest of Mawphlong, nearby the colonial and touristy hill station of Shillong, is a prominent tourist attraction, which the websites on Meghalaya tourism regularly advertise and tourists and local people visit in droves. On my visit to Shillong in 2006 I also went there in driving rain, and saw the island-like forest floating in mist, amidst open meadows. A toothless old man opened a wooden barrier and waved us through with a big smile and the forest seemed like a good mirage, from a distance. Walking nearer, however, one could see the usual tourist waste, plastic bottles and wrappers, all along the fringe of the forest that was a dense mass of green.

After this age-old sacred forest earned the laurel of being the first REDD project of India, I went back to Shillong and Mawphlong in late June this year, trying to know more about the forest and the intriguing project that's taking place around it. There was less rain when we reached Mawphlong this time, and the car had to stop before a more solid-looking barrier. There were newly-dug trenches around the fields touching the forest. The smiling old man could not be seen anywhere and neither was there any litter. My companion T Lyngdoh, the secretary of the Mawphlong Hima (the traditional Khasi term for a self-governed *elaka* (state) usually consisting of several clusters of villages), and also the local coordinator of the REDD project, informed that they were keeping the area pollution-free as part of the project.

Lyngdoh was friendly and full of information, but he didn't seem too eager to take me to the villages in his *Hima* when I rather naively asked him about the village people's level of awareness of REDD. "The project is just starting and people don't know anything about REDD etc yet. All they know is that we need to conserve our forests, and", he added, "we have been doing that for so many years." "Instead, I can take you to another place which I have to visit anyway in course of my work."

That "another place" turned out to be a fenced-off and 'prohibited' watershed project located deep in the

gorge of the Umiyam river. The hilltops and tablelands on two sides were mostly bare, barring the ubiquitous Khasi Pine here and there. Nearer the road and the dammed river, however, there were traces of older forests of broadleaved trees. "All part of our project area", said Lyngdoh, "the trees are coming back because of our eco-restoration project". Because the entire Khasi Hills is traditionally a *jhoom* or swidden cultivation area I asked him whether *jhoom* was the reason behind the hilltops looking bare. "No, No, No *jhoom* here!", pat came the reply, "the villagers here torch the forests to get dry wood". Lyngdoh said that their *Hima* was free from this menace, only people belonging to neighbouring *Himas* indulged in such practices. Up in the hill slopes, small bamboos-and-plastic huts could be seen. "Those were charcoal makers' huts", said Lyngdoh, "though those were not in my *Hima*, we do not want these people out of the project and we'll teach them to how to cut trees in a better way to make charcoal". How many of those charcoal makers are there? Apparently "many, so many of these charcoal makers" in the locality, but all in 'other *Himas*'. People burn and cut trees to get firewood, and cut and burn trees to make charcoal. There is also grazing. How does the REDD project propose to regulate those forest uses? "In my *Hima* we allow people to cut only some species." He showed us the straggling pines on the hilltops and talked about "assisted natural regeneration", which forms one of the three major components of the REDD project, the other two being afforestation and conservation of dense forests within the project area. "But isn't the Khasi pine some kind of an invasive species like the North Himalayan *Chir*, with a natural tendency to colonize open areas, project or no project?" By that time we reached the dam, and Lyngdoh couldn't answer the question. The dam water, which is the main source of water for the Shillong Town, was muddy and reddish at that time of the year and I didn't think of asking for the reason.

My talks with Lyngdoh failed to produce any document related to the REDD+ project in Mawphlong, ("the project's just starting and we didn't have the necessary paperwork yet") but he talked about it at length. Originally it was a forest landscape restoration project started by Community Forestry International (Khasi Community Landscape Restoration and Conservation Project), said he. That project, covering about 1200 hectares of forests, ran from 2006 to 2009 and was now being extended to cover 9000-10000 (8379 hectares, to be precise, of which 3652 hectares dense and the rest open/scrub forest<sub>10</sub>) hectares of forestland, said Lyngdoh, "The project will benefit at least 12000 people in my *Hima* directly, and we are thinking of even the Mawphlong bazaar area residents." How? It will help uplift people's livelihood, apparently.



Lyngdoh seemed to be well aware of the dangers of importing alien values to a typically customary management regime, and he talked about Government of India policies and Joint Forest Management in particular. Though the forest officers persuaded him to join the local JFM committee as the vice-president, he wasn't sure about the process: "Why should we allow forest guards and officers in our own forests? But they said they can't give any support otherwise, that's the rule". What would happen once the REDD project becomes operational, and more such unacceptable 'rules' come in and interfere with people's rights, this time not only from Government of India but also from international agencies? How would it feel to ask for outsiders' permission to use your own forests? Lyngdoh seemed distinctly uncomfortable: "Nothing is final yet. The Rules are not final. We haven't signed anything and please don't think we don't know how to take care of our rights...this is something we have been doing for centuries". But what about REDD? "REDD is only a presumption of some NGOs. We are just preserving our forests," he retorted. Does he know about where the credits from the Mawphlong project will go, and that most likely some big polluting company somewhere in the industrially developed North will use those credits to greenwash itself, and to evade its emission deduction requirements? "The preservation of our forests should not be an excuse for developed countries in maintaining their current levels of pollution", said Lyngdoh. But isn't REDD all about that? He doesn't know so much about REDD, said he.

## **The Mawphlong REDD+ project: the official version**

In spite of Lyngdoh's denial that rules interfering with people's customary usage of forests have not been framed in Mawphlong yet, the power point presentation<sup>11</sup> he and Ivan Roy (a retired IFS officer and one of three official coordinators of the project), made in the ARWG meeting in Delhi mentioned specific "mitigating deforestation drivers", which answered each deforestation/degradation activity with its corresponding 'mitigation' activity: forest fires with watchers, firewood collection with smokeless stoves, grazing with stall feeding, and stone quarrying with ban and new livelihoods.

That an elaborate set of rules existed even in the earlier and smaller eco-restoration project becomes clear from a CFI brochure for MacArthur Foundation and USAID<sup>12</sup>:

### **1) On Fire Control**

Create and maintain fire lines to prevent fires from entering the forests from the adjacent villages

Negotiate with cooperative agreements with neighboring villages to prevent fire from spreading.

Appoint firewatchers from forest dependent families during the fire season.

If fire breaks out, all able-bodied members of the community will put out such fire.

Post signboards banning smoking and match boxes within forest areas.

Strictly enforce local customary laws prohibiting setting of fire to the forests.

### **2) Control of Grazing by Cattle:**

It is realized that unregulated grazing by cattle and goats in forest areas is a major cause of forest degradation. In order to protect regenerating plants in the forests, it is imperative that grazing of cattle within the forest areas be prohibited. In order to achieve this, It is resolved that:

- Village cattle will only be allowed to graze in areas outside community-conserved forests.
- Cattle if reared, should be of superior breed and stall-fed with cattle feed procured from outside
- Inferior breeds will be replaced by more profitable livestock, such as pen-raised pigs and poultry

### **3) Control of Unsustainable Harvesting of Firewood:**

It is realized that unsustainable harvesting of firewood from the forest is another major cause for its rapid depletion.

- Cutting of green trees for firewood is banned
- All sale of firewood outside is prohibited.
- Alternative sources of energy such as coal briquettes and other eco-friendly and affordable fuel and efficient,
- smokeless stoves will be explored and adopted
- No felling of tress for commercial purposes will be permitted.

### **4) Control of Quarrying:**

Stone quarrying in the steeper areas of the project site has resulted in accelerated soil erosion and deposition of debris in the streams and reservoirs in the lower reaches. This has resulted in silting and drying up of such streams with the rapid depletion of fish, amphibians and other live form population.

- No quarrying will be permitted within the watershed containing the Mawphlang Sacred Grove and Community Forest areas by order

It had to be because the earlier eco-restoration project



was a "payment against environmental services" or PES project, where the project authorities signed 'contracts' with forest users for payment of money against specific, 'verifiable deliverables' like 'fire suppression, grazing control, natural regeneration'. The idea was to "reward Payments for Successful Forest Restoration and Verifiable Biodiversity Conservation", whatever that might mean<sup>13</sup>.

The present REDD project doesn't mince matters while talking of mitigation. In their "*Project Idea Note for the Umiam Sub-watershed REDD+ Project East Khasi Hills District*"<sup>14</sup>, submitted to PLAN VIVO, Community Forestry International and its local partners (an impressive array including the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, SYNJUK Umiam Sub-watershed Community Forestry Federation and Community Forestry Alliance North EastCFANE<sup>15</sup>), talk about "communities... mitigation activities" like "various forest protection, conservation and restoration measures", "in order to reverse deforestation and degradation trends". The protection, conservation and restoration "measures"( hardly any different from the above) are then outlined:

(a) Fire Control: ...In order to prevent and control forest fires, early detection and control of such fires is essential. The following activities will be used to control this driver of deforestation:

- (i) Creation of network of fire lines along the periphery of the forests.
- (ii) Appointment of firewatchers during the fire season
- (iii) ***Customary laws prohibiting lighting of fires in the forest areas should be made more stringent and smoking and carrying of match boxes in the forest areas during the fire season banned(emphasis added).***

(b) Fuel wood Collection: Over 99% of the rural community of the project area are dependent solely on firewood as a source of fuel. Firewood is collected from nearby forests by felling dead and dying trees and if not available by resorting to the felling of green trees and saplings. Being situated in a relatively cold region, firewood consumption per household in the area is high...to reduce fire wood consumption, fuel efficient stoves will be installed in every household of the project...*Efforts will also be made to encourage the use of solar cookers which the Government is supplying at highly reduced prices to rural community....fuel wood plantations will be raised at suitable sites in and around communities(italics added).*

(c) Un-controlled Grazing: *Rural communities keep large numbers of low quality cattle, goats and sheep,*

*which graze in the forest areas. Such grazing is another driver of forest degradation, as the grazing and trampling of saplings and young trees suppresses forest regeneration. In order to reduce cattle grazing in the forest...reduce the number of low-value livestock with more profitable stall-fed animals such as pigs and broiler chickens(italics added).*

(d) Stone Quarrying: ...a number of stone quarries are opening surface mines in forest and non-forest areas of the project site. Such stone quarries normally situated on steep slopes cause extensive landslides leading to deforestation...will be regulated through awareness programmes and *through the formulation and implementation of management plans(italics added).*

Not only these, the project 'developers' unequivocally declare that they "*fully intend to comply with all relevant national and international regulations governing REDD once they are formulated(italics added)*". The idea note clarifies that because the "Government of India has not yet established a national REDD policy or regulatory body", the project developers "met and discussed the project with senior policy makers at the Ministry of Environment and Forests" who "said that until there is a national policy they are not in a position to formally recognize the initiative or any other in India".

The note further says that even though the "project takes place on community forest lands and is not under the management of the national forestry system as noted in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of the Government of India", and there is no legal necessity "to comply with state forest lands regulations", "the project developers have established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Meghalaya Forest Department, a branch of the MOEF, to collaborate in the initiative".

There can be no doubt that the REDD+ project will frame its own rules to regulate forest usage by local communities beyond those customarily provided, at least on paper. Otherwise the mention of "customary laws" made "more stringent"(see a.iii above) makes no sense. The previous PES "contracts" can be replicated and extended to ensure compliance, or new frameworks made (*formulation and management plans* in 'd' above).

Despite its 'community' patter then, what the REDD+ project in Mawphlong in reality proposes to do is to impose an external and pre-decided regulatory framework upon the forest-using communities in the area to ensure 'mitigation' of 'deforestation' and 'degradation'. All available forest-based livelihoods will dry up: firewood collection and sale (reduction and ban), work in stone mines (ban), livestock rearing(ban),

and of course charcoal making because it means both felling trees and fire setting.

How does the project propose to compensate the livelihood loss of 12000 (T. Lyngdoh's estimate) people not only in Mawphlang Lyngdohship, but also in neighbouring Lyngiong, Nonglwai, Pamsanngut, Nongspung, Laitkroh, Mawbeh, Sohra-rim and Sohra? According to the project idea note, forest-dependent "low income families and landless labourers...will benefit through various programmes involving the increase in production of NTFPs and medicinal plants... fuel wood plantations... various project activities, which are highly labour intensive in nature". Besides, people will be involved "in Self-Help Groups that provide micro-finance and support livelihood activities". Because the "majority of the project communities live below the poverty line with an average daily income of less than \$2.00 per family of six members", the project, "in order to raise the standard of living" proposes "new cash crops such as plums, mustard and turmeric", horticulture, floriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry (improved variety animals and stall-feeding) and eco-tourism. In addition to the above, and most importantly, there's the money from carbon credit sales, though the project nowhere says that this money will accrue to the subsistence-level forest users directly. Rather, carbon money will keep the project going once the initial grants period is over.

The project note contains two more interesting pointers. One, it claims that because the community members actually own "all community forests within the project area", and hence, "all carbon rights pertaining" to such forests, there will not be any conflict of interests. The Khasi land-tenure system is "legally recognised" by all Government and other agencies, the note claims.

Two, to prove additionality (to prove that the reduction in carbon emission as claimed in the project is over and above the pre-project baseline, any carbon offset project has to prove that it is 'additional', meaning that the projected emission reduction won't happen without it), the note claims that "this effort to organize and implement a landscape level management strategy" will not happen without REDD, because of the "ongoing absence of financing and technical support". *"Without REDD financing and technical support there are no other initiatives that would create an enabling environment for community-based management systems to emerge(italics added)"*, it claims further. Though the Government of India gave enough money for development, "it has had no impact in slowing the rate of deforestation in the project area",

says the note, and claims that "this complete failure to stem degradation and deforestation" is due to the government's inability "to effectively engage forest dependent communities".

## **Mawphlong REDD+ project: Questioning the official version**

As it is usual with any such carbon offset or REDD project, questions as to the nature and purpose of the project abound. Besides, both the additionality and legality of the project are apparently suspect. Let's look at the additionality aspect first.

**Dubious claims of additionality:** The additionality claims made for the project are at best dubious, if not outright nonsense. The claim that 'a landscape level management strategy' for the area could not be done without this project is extremely weak. One has to remember that the project area is community-governed, and has been so since 'time immemorial', as the project developers didn't fail to remind us. Such governance is based on an elaborate and complex set of customary laws, and has proved effective enough so far in conserving many of the biodiversity-rich sacred groves and other prohibited/protected forests in Mawphlong and nearby Sohra. In Hima Mawphlong alone, there are several such separate prohibited/protected forests<sub>16</sub>:

*Khlaw* (also the variant *law*: both meaning forests) *Nongkynrih*, which can only be used when timber is needed for community purposes like construction or repair of the school buildings or the foot-bridge, with permission from only the Durbar Hima

*Khlaw adong Wah Lwai*, the prohibitory orders for which was further confirmed on 20/11/1951, during the chieftdom of Robising Lyngdoh

*Khlaw adong Kor-um Kharai Masi*, a forest reserved for conserving a catchment area, and where the late chief Robising Lyngdoh by his orders dated 20.12.58 prohibited a range of activities like the felling of trees, exploitation of sands, stones and even grazing and cultivation,

*Khlaw adong Dymmiew Blah*, which the Dorbar Hima held on 30-4-1970 declared as a protected forest, wood from which can only be taken for funerals,

*Khlaw adong Wahsein Iong*, During the tenure of the late chief Nakalsing Lyngdoh, the Durbar Hima held on 6/11/1948 formally declared this forest as a forest reserved especially for use of the residents of Mawmyrsiang and Wahrahaw villages. The Dorbar



Hima which met on 8/6/1960 re-confirmed the prohibitory orders.

*Khlaw adong Kyiem*: Similar kind of a village reserve, kept exclusively for use of the villages Wahlyngkien, Sunei, Ramklang and Kyiem. The Durbar Hima which met on 19/01/1968 decreed that not trees, but only grass and fern bushes can be collected from this forest.

That the weakening in recent years of the customary management practices in Mawphlong and other areas in East Khasi Hills is not because of lack of money becomes evident when the project admits that Government of India is spending enough money in the region. The customary practices in indigenous societies weaken and deforestation happens because of complex sociological, economic and political reasons, which the present project simply didn't bother to heed. Also, in case of Mawphlong, the customs are still resilient enough, which the ecologically vibrant sacred grove proves amply. It is totally unclear what new things or improvements this project proposes to introduce to the traditional and custom-governed resource management scenario at Mawphlong to check deforestation other than more government-forest- department-kind of policing and more codifications, which will directly hurt and damage the consensual and democratic nature of decision making in the *Hima* Durbars.<sup>16</sup> Neither is it clear how the customary resource-management practices in the Khasi Hills could be 'improved' in a so-called 'landscape-level management strategy' that, if the project note has to be believed, limits its 'strategizing' to keep the *bonafide* and legal owners away from the forests. The income-generation activities the project lists including the self-help groups are all covered by existing government schemes for rural and tribal area development (some of them pretty old by now), and the project fails to prove why and how such old schemes will perform better in the REDD+ scenario. We shouldn't forget that government agencies are very much present in the project: the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, one of the partners is directly Government, and besides, the project has already signed a MoU with the Meghalaya forest department. Moreover, the project proposes to utilize the Government of India funds for forest area development and National Employment Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in project work, besides money from joint forest management schemes.

Therefore, the REDD+ project is clearly non-additional: the project results can either be achieved though the existing customary and governmental instruments, or they cannot be achieved. The project will not make much difference so far as its stated

outcome is concerned.

**Is the project legal?:** The legal premises of the project totter miserably. It is not true that Indian forest laws do not apply in the project region. While the Indian Forest Act(IFA) does not apply in most forests of the area because of their land tenure types, other forest-related laws like the Forest Conservation Act(FCA) of 1980 and the Wild Life Protection Act(WLPA) definitely apply, and people in the North-East always disliked both of these intensely. While the Government cannot claim legal entitlement to forest produces in the community-held forests in lands falling under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, it can effectively interfere in others' using and marketing such produces, through the Forest conservation Act. The WLPA criminalizes hunting of all wild creatures anywhere in India, even ritual or ceremonial hunting still practiced by the tribal communities in the North East.

This means that carbon stored in the community-governed forests of the North-East can very well be treated as a forest produce, any use of which will be subject to complying with the relevant forest laws of the country, and also the present as well as future judicial orders dealing with such laws. Interestingly, the Indian government records continue to show all such forests as 'unclassified state forests', which proves that the government is not comfortable with their 'community' nature. Given this scenario, the absence of codified and written laws in the custom-governed community forests may go against the legal interests of the communities in a court of law in case of any challenge.<sup>17</sup>

There's also the question of tinkering with the customary rights of the community. On the face of it, the project proposes an overhaul or reform of such laws to ensure uniform compliance in its operational area, and hence the rule book and display boards proclaiming ban. It also proposes a complex and entirely alien hierarchy of self-help groups and local working committees at the bottom to 'community forestry federations', "community forestry alliances" and CFI at the top, with functional links to the state forest department and the District Council.<sup>18</sup> What if such excessive codification and institutionalization infringe upon a community member's legal rights of using the forest commons? The question demands answers because the various kinds of forest tenures in the Khasi Hills community forests contain widely diverse bundles of rights.<sup>19</sup> How does the present project proposes to negotiate with those is a mystery. For instance, each or all of the different permitted uses of forests-felling of trees, collection of stone and sand, grazing of cattle and jhoom or sedentary agriculture may legally exist in one or all tenures. Will



the drastic restrictions on forest use which the project plans to enforce be uniformly applicable in all of them? Moreover, what's the guarantee that the concerned durbars will agree to such restrictions, let alone enforce them?

This situation may prove to be a legal quagmire once the National REDD+ framework is finalized, and the scale and extent of international interventions are determined. Because, in order to be officially qualify as a REDD+ project, compliance with the body of national as well as international rules will be mandatory. And compliance here means that every single institution likely to be involved in this complex process the state or sub-national government agencies like the forest department, 'national' MoEF, the accredited validating agencies and finally, UNFCCC or any such apex international body might, singly or together, influence and to a great extent change the prevailing forest-governance practices if those are assessed to be likely to cause 'leakage', in other words, involve cutting and burning of trees (or any other activity which may release carbon into the atmosphere). The involvement of state agencies in the project is already a fact: the MoU signed with the Meghalaya forest department mentions Joint Forest Management: The state forest department will "seek to arrange funding for community forestry purposes through the Joint Forest Management schemes"<sup>20</sup>.

The project developers in their documents harp on the 'community' factor and say repeatedly that the durbars have been and will remain involved in project activities. The question is, how and in what way? Do the members of the Durbar know enough about the REDD+ process, or what such a project may mean for their age-old economic and cultural practices, as the traditional livelihoods choke, and the forest becomes off-limits for all practical purposes? Going by what T. Lyngdoh, himself a Durbar chief says, it doesn't seem too likely. There's little chance that any durbar will willingly say yes to such possibilities, especially when the local resource-use practices suffered so much in the recent past because of 'environmental' restrictions originating in Delhi. Therefore, it is perhaps wise to assume that a watered down and much rosier picture of things to come will be presented to the communities in future durbar meetings. The letter of approval the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council issued for the project makes the approval subject to future discussions in the Durbar meetings, and obtaining Durbar consent<sup>21</sup>. The project activity calendar annexed to the Plan Vivo idea note lists "Dialogue with 64 villages in the watershed Inform regarding REDD project meet with women's groups and present at Durbar (council) meetings" and "Meeting with

participating communities to assist them to develop Local Working Committees to manage local forests" in September-October to show compliance. **In other words the project developers, at the time of writing the project note, hadn't yet bothered even to inform the Durbars, the real legal owners of the forests in the project area, about the REDD+ project, let alone obtained their consent to it. Yet the project was announced to the press, presented in international REDD meetings, and money is already being raised for it. The so-called 'local working committees' (and the federations and alliances), which amount to a clear encroachment upon the territorial jurisdiction of the Durbars and an attempt at dilution of the governance powers of these traditional institutions, were evidently *fait accompli*: there's no need to first clear the concept with the Durbars. The project calendar also mentions meetings with the Hima leaders and 9 indigenous governments in the project region. While this may be important from the project perspective, it does not take away the legal fact that the Durbars and only the Durbars have the powers to regulate and manage forests. Wisely, the project decides to ignore and undermine the authority of the Durbar.**

Like all similar REDD+ or other carbon forestry projects of the past and future, the Mawphlong project too builds itself upon a perfect mix of ambiguities and lies.

## What's happening, really: The money in it

That deforestation has become somewhat endemic in East Khasi Hills can be felt even by a first visitor. As one travels along the highways radiating from Shillong, the hillsides, heavily quarried and mined, look like huge raw wounds. Neither customary governance nor more official government feats could halt rampant limestone and coal mining in the entire region. Where there is no limestone or coal, the hills are scooped up for construction material like stone chips. Added to mining, there's unrestricted and wholesale clearing of forests for various purposes.

As we said, it is not easy to pinpoint why customary practices decay: many debilitating influences starting from urbanization and subsequent cultural changes to religious shifts and the overwhelming lure of the market society can be identified, along with poverty and in most cases, unequal access to resources. In the Khasi Hills case, however, the general opinion is that deforestation happens because the 'community' now means the rich in the community, and the rich need quick and more money. Because forest-based industries like veneer factories and large logging businesses are

mostly no longer possible in the region because of restrictive acts like the FCA, mining is the only commercial option. What about the customary restrictions on forest use? It seems that in forests situated on *Ri Kynti* or lands exclusively reserved for certain clans, the land-owning clan determine the use<sup>22</sup>. According to Sanat Chakrabarty, an activist and journalist working in the community-held areas of the North-Eastern India for two decades or more, clans now mean only its elites. "The economically powerful elite of a clan control the resources in the name of the clan. The larger community interests are sacrificed, to feed a handful of private individuals. This is a process of privatization, and most of the community-held natural resources in East Khasi Hills are slowly being privatized", said Sanat. "These clan leaders can sniff money", said Sanat, "and it's quite possible that some of them are eyeing the easy money to be had from REDD. As long as there is money, nothing else matters".

Money? Judging by the estimates given in the Mawphlong project documents, there's not too much of it yet: the initial eco-restoration project had a total budget of US\$ 77,000 (Rs.35,35,085), and there's more ongoing support from the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation. Besides, another appeal has been made to the Waterloo Foundation for 100,000 Pounds. These and other possible grants will keep the project running until 2013<sup>23</sup>.

It'll be self-sustaining from the year 2014, when the first vintage, in other words the first sellable carbon credits from the REDD+ project will be due. The project estimates that it will generate a net annual average of nearly 14000 (13761) credits, and thus a total of 412,824 credits in 30 years<sup>24</sup>. Monetarily, this translates into anything between US\$ 42000 and 80000 a year (going by a relatively conservative price range of US\$ 3-9 per credit).

Not a great sum of money, by any standard, and even a small CDM project anywhere in India can earn twice this amount easily. After meeting the project costs (including the transaction costs like consultants' fees and validating agency's charges) will there be anything left for supporting the economic activities, let alone incentives for the communities?

And given the extremely volatile state of the carbon market these days, even this return is uncertain. In absence of standardization, and any regulatory international mechanism, the forestry credits now coming mainly from the Latin American countries like Brazil are going to the largely unregulated voluntary carbon offset market in America, where

credit prices can be notoriously unstable. In 2010, the average voluntary carbon unit price ranged around US\$ 6 in OTC (Over the Counter) sales, while in the more structured CCX (Chicago Climate Exchange), such units barely fetched one Dollar<sup>25</sup>. The market uncertainties may be one reason for the project developers trying to rope in Plan Vivo. The involvement of Vivo in the project means that at least a reasonably good amount of money will come to the project, as credit-buy back, and also to cover initial overheads and other costs. The project developers are also keeping an eye on the Government of India money that might come from Green India Mission and similar existing forestry schemes, and perhaps, also on the mitigation money India is looking for from the developed countries and the UNFCCC.

The project doesn't yet offer enough money even for the moderately rich in the clans in the Khasi Hills. One wonders whether they know enough about the market realities.

## Can the project deliver? Two Scenarios

What will happen is perhaps another story altogether: even if the voluntary carbon market picks up miraculously, and the REDD+ becomes official, and a larger market opens up for forestry credits, it is doubtful whether the Mawphlong Project will live long. The reason is simple: it won't deliver.

It won't deliver in either of the two possible scenarios.

Scenario One: The project hierarchy clicks, the committees, federations and alliances are formed, the docile durbars are informed about REDD, the women get enthusiastically involved. Subsequently management plans are developed, rules framed and enforcement starts alongside the economic support activities for the poor and the landless.

Will anything change, much? Not likely. Because from start to finish, the project cooks a recipe that's typically joint forest management, and the project documents read like archaic forest department working plans (and management plans), with their typical threat listings (is it a coincidence that two of the three coordinators the project engages are retired forest officers of the Indian Forest Service, and the third a recognized expert on JFM<sup>26</sup>). The project happens in custom-governed forests on diverse land tenures which contain a range of rights structures that evolved over a long period of time and in response to specific and actual needs of the user communities. Yet it not only ignores the traditional governance structure and supplants it with an alien institutional hierarchy, but also criminalizes natural



forest uses such as grazing and firewood collection. Ignoring the customary and in this case legal rights associated with specific land tenures for instance felling of trees and collection of timber for specific purposes it prescribes a flat set of rules generally applicable throughout the project area. The JFM did precisely this with its forest protection committees or VSSs, both its structure and rules pre-decided and framed by forest officers, and after about two decades of this utterly undemocratic and unjust exercise, even its biggest sponsor World Bank had to admit that the scheme lacked popular support and that it failed in almost all aspects<sup>27</sup>.

The present project, in JFM style, perceives the communities as something external in relation to the forests they use, and therefore, instead of integrating people with forest conservation, it proposes measures that alienate them from their natural resource-base. For instance, stall-feeding improved variety of livestock supplied by the project will mean a reduction of the traditional grazing space in forests. Smokeless stoves and solar cookers also denote a similar loss of forest space: community members will now get less firewood from the forest. A clear ban on fire will also mean space shrinkage: charcoal makers will not be able to access their forests any longer, and there will be yet less firewood. For any *jhoom*-practising community in the vicinity, the fire ban will also mean starvation, because *jhoom* is dependent on fire. A ban on quarrying and mining will mean loss of legal clan space.

Will the people, the bottom-level users of forests, respond positively to this space loss and adapt to the changed scenario? So far as the economic relocation is concerned, there is little chance that people will leave their traditional livelihoods in favour of non-forestry activities outlined in the project, and at best any future income from such activities may only supplement the regular income from the forest. There are no baseline socio-economic data about the users likely to be affected by the project, and according to the activity calendar, these data will be generated. One wonders how and on what basis then the project chose the income-generating activities. Also, there's hardly any money in the project to support so many activities in 9 *elakas* (regions), beyond the usual JFM money coming through the forest department.

The enforcement of the project rules will be anything but easy. People will not let go of their livelihood and, more importantly, right easily, and even if the Durbar consents can somehow be obtained (such things are known to happen), there is no guarantee that people will keep away from the forests without protest, and

without putting up a fight. Therefore, the 'deforestation and degradation drivers' will not shrink significantly. In other words, the rate of deforestation will not slow down as expected, and the carbon leakage will by far exceed the project limits. Which all means that the project will sequester much less carbon than anticipated, and will fail to meet its contractual and obligatory commitments to generate a certain amount of credit within a specific time-period. In other words still, the project will not deliver.

Scenario two: Similar to Scenario one, with the exception that no customary rights are compromised, and people continue to use forests in exactly the same way they are used to. T. Lyngdoh wanted me to believe this (does he himself believe this?).

This might indeed happen, however. The indigenous communities in Meghalaya refused to comply with any legislation and government order that sought to compromise their hold over their resources, and despite the FCA and its ban on felling of standing trees in natural forests, clearing of forests continued in the entire region<sup>28</sup>. The mining on forestland continued in direct violation of not only the FCA but also the Meghalaya government's own prohibitive orders. Ceremonial hunting of leopards continued in the Jaintia Hills forests, in defiance of a Shillong High Court Ban. The clans are all powerful, as Sanat Charabarty said.

John Kharsing, the chairman of the assembly of Hynniewtrep (the Khasis are originally known as the Hynniewtrep), and hence one of the most influential leaders of the region provided a different and more indigenous perspective. A 'two-minute only' talk with him lengthened into a 30-minute video interview, covering the Khasi customary practices and history and more recent events like the FCA controversy and REDD. Excerpts from the transcript of this interview will help us conclude this report, and consequently, to prove, why the Mawphlong REDD project+ and such similar projects in the area will ultimately fail to deliver:

"At the time of India's independence, the Khasi chiefs signed a treaty with the Government of India but didn't sign the instrument of merger, which all 565 Princes of Native States did, whereby their land became Government of India land. The chieftains refused to do this because the land wasn't their own...People hold the land. The Government has none. That's why the FCA was contested...the Government of Meghalaya owns only 5 percent of land in the Khasi Hills area, the rest is owned by people: village forests, individual land, clan land, family land, sacred groves and so on...under 54 Chiefs in Khasi Hills...The clans own the land but



there's not enough codification and therefore the customs do not have the force of law, the customs come into conflict with the Union acts".

"Our tradition has sustained...even after 150 years of British Rule. But there are conflicts over so many issues...*yes we are concerned about International treaties and agreements which might affect our traditional rights, even well-intended ratifications at the international level may not be applicable at the ground level*(italics added)....such treaties sometimes undermine the independence, sovereignty, liberty and the autonomy that the Constitution of India provided for while notifying these areas under its 6th schedule... But, well, big countries like to implement their own agenda, but ultimately people in the ground decide how the work is done...There are indigenous people's forums in the international level, but not much is done...sometimes wrong people represent the indigenous peoples, you see? A process takes time...people come with projects but get stuck at the ground level...the GoI came with the JFM project...

(q: people own the land here, what's the Govt doing? JFM is Govt)...

yes, we told them to give us the money. They said, no we need to have forest guards in the committees and the money will come to them..sometimes law-making is so ridiculous...I represented a case in National Commission for Scheduled tribes...the chairperson was from Jharkhand and he was surprised that we have a treaty...are yaar, you are lucky, said he. They have taken everything away from us...the need is to reframe the land laws of the country...how to balance the poor and the rich? So if the Govt comes up with all those crazy ideas, then...

(q: they may not come directly...it's important to know what you are entering into: people may come and say, here's a big deal, a beautiful deal, you just preserve your forests...when a person like you is not sufficiently aware of what's happening, how can you expect the people, the regular users of the forest, to know and understand the intricacies of REDD and such international processes?)

...I happened to attend some conferences here and there, in Delhi...I understood it's about climate change...I asked a stupid question in one meeting: when the FCA came, hundreds and hundreds of people were thrown into the street, and I had to go to so many village durbars because the chiefs were asking desperately for my intervention...*they banned the felling of timber, how can we make charcoal...if you stop that, you choke his livelihood..what'll he do...no*

*gas here...he has to cut trees...on the other hand you are also setting up industries that need charcoal...* (italics added and this needs to be read together with T. Lyngdoh's statements on charcoal making and the Rules on forest fires)

REDD is not final, and we are watching..

(q: this project is treated as a pilot REDD project...I want to know how?)

I don't know the aspect of carbon sequestration..I haven't been informed...all I know is that it's a developmental--climate mitigation--project, and the chief wants to extend the sacred forest area...in the areas adjoining the sacred forest...I'll crosscheck with the chief...all I know that people are being benefitted and they are being encouraged to grow more trees..but if you tell me this has been notified as a REDD project

(q: no notifications yet...REDD is all about trees storing carbon which you assess, price and sell in the market, international markets, after a validating agency validates your project...)

...carbon credits?...when the German gentleman came...he is from a bank...I think he is from REDD...I asked him why are they talking with the forest department? this land is private..So I am keeping a watch over things you know..I'll check how much info they have on REDD...even if it's a pilot project, it'll be good to know...who's the end user and all that?

The clans control 60 percent of the forest area...if JFM and such schemes are not modified to suit people's needs, they won't be successful. *I have not yet seen the present proposal...the final offer, what are the infringements on my rights...if there's any and then we'll be hundred percent opposed*(italics added)....For instance, **mining...the Government of Meghalaya tries to create a mining policy, which is essentially a process to implement the country's mining laws and rules here...otherwise these are not applicable. Here again all the mining landowners came together to oppose the mining laws...since they have not been modified to suit local conditions and land tenure systems....there was something called 'mining concessions'...what is a concession? How can somebody give me a concession to do something in my own land? FCA also..why do I need permission to cut my own tree? I understand environment and climate change and all that agenda, but when you say that I need permission to cut my own tree...I have lost my right to my land**(emphasis added)!

(Q: when REDD becomes official, these concerns will

*be more profound...there is no guarantee that they will let you cut trees in any REDD forest)*

...The Constitution has been amended before...and recently the Govt refused to sign the nuclear treaty...the same has to happen here...the govt must apply pressure so that the existing treaty is amended to include the country's needs..the opinion makers and public leaders have to be active...

### **Post-script: A possible 3<sup>rd</sup> Scenario**

Both these scenarios may contain another, and more potentially possible third scenario: Nothing changes on the ground and deforestation goes on as usual, because of customary practices and purely monetary reasons, unaffected by REDD+, and its rules.

And yet, the project happens. The project happens because there's a well-written Project Design Document or PDD that guarantees, with help of really clever mathematics, so many hundred thousand tonnes of emission reduction. The project happens because it has the necessary connections and it hires a really resourceful validating agency to come and certify the genuine nature of that emission reduction. Finally, the project happens because some dirty corporation somewhere in face-away California or some such place willingly suspends its sense of disbelief, and decides to buy certified credits from the project, believing in the lie that the carbon filth it emits day in and day out is being sequestered in the leakage-proof sinks in India's Meghalaya, keeping the indigenous Khasis happy in the bargain.

Win-win, perfect sync and cool.

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### **End Notes**

1. REDD and other variants of carbon forestry like smaller 'offset' plantation projects and larger Clean Development Mechanism or CDM plantation projects: for a compilation on REDD-related case studies see *No REDD, A Reader*, Carbon Trade Watch and Indigenous Environmental Network, 2011, <http://noredd.makenoise.org/>. See also the *REDD Monitor*, [www.redd-monitor.org](http://www.redd-monitor.org), for more news and critique of REDD. For market logic and information related to REDD and other carbon forestry projects see <http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com>

2. <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/soon-india-s-first-redd-project>

3. *Asia REDD+ Working Group (ARWG) Meeting Report, January 31-February 2, 2011, New Delhi, India*, Community Forestry International

4. Ghosh, S, Yasmin. H and Das. A: *Imaginary Sinks: India's REDD ambitions*, an unpublished report on India's carbon forestry programme, 2009.

5. *A Formula for More Land and Resource Grabbing: Dangers of the Green India Mission, Joint Statement by Forest Movements in India*, issued by National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers(NFFPFW) and Campaign for Survival and Dignity(CSD), 2010 and *ON REDD CLIMATE SCHEME, Joint statement by Indian forest movements*, 2009. See also Jha, S, *The Green India Mission (GIM): A Roadmap for Neo-liberal Exploitation in Forest*, 2011 and Aggarwal, A, *Implementation of Forest Rights Act, changing forest landscape and 'politics of REDD+' in India*, 2011 for more information on REDD in India.

6. For instance, in a period between 2007 and August 2011, 8,284 projects were granted forest clearance by the MoEF, and 2,03,576 hectares of forest land were diverted for various development projects. The pace of forestland diversion has apparently doubled in the past five years. A large proportion of this forestland (50,000 ha) has been diverted for mining and power projects. The maximum amount of forest land diverted for mining in any single year happened in 2010 about 14,500 ha. Coal mining accounted for more than half of all the forestland diverted for mining. As many as 113 coal mining projects were granted forest clearance the highest number cleared in any five year plan since 1981. 181 coal mines, 267 thermal power plants, 200 coal-based thermal power plants, 188 steel plants and 106 cement units also got clearance. See <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/environment-ministry-creates-record-forestland-diversion> for the full text of the Report by Center for Science and Environment, Delhi, India

7. No REDD, A Reader, and REDD Monitor, supra note 1, and also <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/carbon-cowboys-20110722-1hssc.html> for the amazing story of carbon cowboys and the carbon gold rush in the Amazonian rainforests of Peru.

8. See *Mausam*, the Indian climate magazine, issues 2-5, 2009: [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/mausam-issues-2-5](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/mausam-issues-2-5)

9. Apparently, debris coming from the mining and quarrying in the catchment areas of the Umiyam River turned the dam water red. The Public Health Engineering (PHE) department of Meghalaya held rampant sandstone mining and presence of stone quarries at Umtyngnar (Myllem) and Mawjrong in East Khasi Hills responsible for the water pollution: "Rampant digging of sandstones and presence of stone quarries at the site of the Wah Umtyngnar has diluted the water as the wastes flow to the Wah Umtyngnar which connects the Wah Umiew," PHE Additional Chief Engineer SK Sunn said. Sunn said that it is difficult to stop this because of the land tenure system. See *Shillong Times*, August 7th, 2011

10. The figures are from the *Project Idea Note* (hereafter PIN) Community Forestry International (hereafter CFI) and others submitted to Plan Vivo:



see [www.planvivo.org/.../Khasi-Hills-Community-REDD-ProjectIdeanote](http://www.planvivo.org/.../Khasi-Hills-Community-REDD-ProjectIdeanote)

11. *Khasi Hills Community Forestry REDD Project*, Community Forestry International (hereafter, 2011)

12. *Payment for Environmental Services: A Case Study from Meghalaya, NE India*, CFI, [www.communityforestryinternational.org/.../PES\\_flyer-Mawphlang](http://www.communityforestryinternational.org/.../PES_flyer-Mawphlang)

13. The so-called PES can easily be used for wrong purposes. See Baltodano, J, *Plunging over the climate crisis cliff*, in *No Redd, A Reader*, supra note 1, for experiences from Costa Rica

14. See note 10

15. One wonders how exactly the Community Forestry Federation and Community Forestry Alliance were formed and what role they will play in the REDD+ project.

16. <http://nahduh.tripod.com/id3.html>. See Dutta, R, *Community Managed Forests: Laws, Problems and Alternatives*, EHRLI, New Delhi, 2001, for a discussion on the customary practices and forest tenures of Khasi Hills. See also, Hynniewta, T.M, Botanical Survey of India, *LAW LYNGDOH (sacred grove) in Mawphlong, Meghalaya*, [www.ias.ac.in/currsci/nov252007/1338.pdf](http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/nov252007/1338.pdf) for more analysis of Khasi forest tenures. <http://nahduh.tripod.com/id3.html> also contains exhaustive information on the tenural system.

17. Attempts to write down the customary laws happened sporadically in the past: The Khasi National Durbar met on 6th, 7th and 8th November, 1929 and formulated and published a sort of white paper explaining about the land system. The Durbar explained in detail the rules and regulations about land holdings, sale and purchase. The Durbar also explained about the power of the village: Raid, Hima over land holdings. *U Khasi mynta bad ki Riti Tynrai*, a book by J. M. Phira, IAS, 1991, lists 14 types of tenures classified by the Durbar. There's also *The Notes on Khasi Law*, by Keith Cantlie, Deputy Commissioner Khasi and Jaintia Hills from 1930-34. See <http://nahduh.tripod.com/id3.html>. The only law in the independent India that recognizes traditional Khasi forest tenures is the United Khasi Hills Autonomous District (management of control of forest) Act, 1958. See Dutta, R, *ibid*.

18. *Appendix 1: Governance Structure: Early Implementation*, PIN, supra note 10.

19. See Hynniewta, T.M and <http://nahduh.tripod.com/id3.html>, supra note 16.

20. *Memorandum of Understanding Between Department of Forest and Environment, Government of Meghalaya and Community Forestry International*, Appendix 4, PIN, *ibid*. Though this MoU appears with the REDD project note, it was signed long ago in 2006 (or 2005? There are two dates in the document).

21. *Appendix 7: Letter of Project Approval from the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council*, PIN, *ibid*

22. see note 16

23. PIN, *ibid*

24. *Ibid*

25. Peters-Stanley, M et al, *Back to the Future: State of the Voluntary Carbon Markets 2011*, [http://www.forest-trends.org/~foresttr/publication\\_details.php?publicationID=2828](http://www.forest-trends.org/~foresttr/publication_details.php?publicationID=2828).

26. Mark Poffenberger, the Coordinator of the Mawphlong project on behalf of the CFI, is an acknowledged expert on JFM, and his organisation CFI was associated with two similar pilot carbon forestry projects in JFM model in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh and Harda in Madhya Pradesh. For his work on JFM, see Poffenberger, M, *The Struggle for Forest Control in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal* in *Village Voices, Forest Choices*, 1996, Delhi, and *Resurgence of Community Forest Management in the Jungle Mahals* in *Nature, Culture, Imperialism*, Delhi, 1995

27. World Bank, *India: Unlocking Opportunities for Forest-Dependent People in India, Volume I: Main Report, 2005*. See also, Springate Baginski, O and Blaikie, P (ed), *Forests, People and Power: The Political Ecology of reform in South Asia*, London, 2007 for more recent critique of JFM. See also *Broken Promises: How World Bank group policies fail to protect forests and forest people's rights*, by World Rainforest Movement, CDM Watch, Forest People's Programme and others, 2005, for more on the JFM swindle.

28. Dutta R, supra note 16



## A Formula for More Land and Resource Grabbing: Dangers of the Green India Mission

### **Joint Statement by Forest Movements in India**

As national platforms of forest dwellers' movements and struggle organizations, we strongly oppose the 'Green India Mission' as part of the National Action Plan for Climate Change recently announced by the MoEF (Ministry of Environment and Forests). **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 in any way genuinely responding to the burning problem of climate change.**

**India's forests and forest lands are the homelands of millions of people** the adivasis and other forest dwellers. Huge areas of land officially classified as 'forest' are in fact being lived in, cultivated or otherwise used, and depended upon by large number of forest communities. Despite the Forest Rights Act of 2006, however, their community rights to common forests, lands, etc., are still being trampled upon and ignored.

The Forest Department's main 'green' activity is tree plantations. Such 'afforestation' programmes often take place on cultivated lands (including shifting cultivation fallows), village commons, community pasture lands, etc., that actually belong to people; they also destroy biodiversity-rich natural open forests and grasslands, reducing people's access to forest produce and animal fodder. In October 2008, the Standing Committee on Environment and Forests sharply criticized such programmes, saying 'afforestation ... deprives forest dwellers and adivasis of some or all of their lands and impacts their livelihoods and basic needs, for which they are neither informed, nor consulted, nor compensated.'

*This is what the Green India Mission seeks to promote, despite lip service to the contrary. The true impact of any policy is shaped not by its rhetoric but by its institutional structure.*

1. Despite much talk of gram sabha and village-based management, all the Mission's bodies above the village the Division and State Forest Development Agencies and the like are controlled by the Forest Department (Paragraph E). How is the gram sabha to

manage anything if funds, policies, and coordination are controlled by the Forest Department?

2. Within the village, the non-statutory JFM (joint forest management) committee is slipped in as a 'sub-committee of the gram sabha', when it is, once again, controlled by the Forest Department and not accountable to the village. There is even talk of twisting the Forest Rights Act which explicitly provides for gram sabha control over forests to legitimize JFM committees and vest them with legal status (Paragraph 5.4.1.(b)). Thus, the undermining of local control begins in the policy text itself. Instead of replacing JFM, the document is promoting it.
3. So-called 'community agents' are to be hired and trained, but once again we find that they are to be under the Forest Department, and the document even says they can be used to 'augment Forest Department staff' (that is, presumably serve as departmental contract labour). This appears to be a further extension of the Forest Department's control over village decision-making, thereby undermining the decision-making authority of the gram sabha.
4. The Forest Department has neither the expertise nor the skill to implement 'restoration of ecosystems and habitat diversity', nor does it have space for such expertise. Within the document itself, the old department line shows through: forest restoration is almost equated with plantations (Para 5.2.2) and grassland restoration with grazing reduction (5.2.3). The document totally ignores indigenous and local knowledge about ecosystems and eco-restoration.
5. The only really measurable targets given are for plantations and some schemes such as stove distribution. As funding is largely target-driven in the government system, this indicates where the money will go. The draft talks of 20-million hectares being afforested, but this is effectively impossible, since such a huge area of land will have myriad existing uses and rights. The draft also refers to 44,000-crore rupees being spent. Such enormous targets, with such an institutional structure, will only result in more land grabbing and corruption.

*What will this actually lead to? We can expect the following consequences.*

1. Industrial monocultures as a result of plantation programmes: While expressing the point that 'monoculture plantations are more vulnerable', the draft document nowhere rules them out, and they would be the natural result of this process. These would be harmful to the environment and dangerous for people's rights and livelihoods (lip service on these issues notwithstanding).
2. Commoditization of forests, converting people's homelands and livelihood resources, without even consulting them, into tradable commodities through the system of carbon trading: This will likely involve private companies as well, triggering even more land grabbing. The carbon storage figures that are given are clearly aimed at establishing a basis for such a system. In reality, such figures are usually hogwash. Forests do not consist of just standing trees; trees grow, fires and other disasters take place, people and wildlife consume non-timber forest produce, and so on. Forests are constantly changing. An obsession with carbon storage and incentives in the form of trading will lead companies and the government to shut off forests from all use by

people on the one hand, and, on the other, will encourage fictional carbon storage figures.

3. Conversion of areas such as pastures, grazing areas, shifting cultivation fallows, and other common lands into plantations for the purpose of meeting targets and earning profits through carbon trading.

The true threats to the climate and India's environment arise from resource grabbing, unequal resource use, and expropriation by corporations and elites. These are not being addressed at all, and instead such sham programmes whose benefits are grossly exaggerated and almost impossible to actually calculate are being proposed as eyewash. **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, dis-empowers the Forest Department and creates the space for genuine people's empowerment. This document does the opposite. Hence, we oppose this programme and instead call 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.

## ON REDD CLIMATE SCHEME

### *Joint statement by Indian forest movements*

We, the undersigned, the people's movements from across India who are deeply concerned at the manner and intent in which the Government of India is approaching international climate change negotiations. In particular, we wish to expose and condemn the attempt of government and corporate interests to use climate change negotiations to illegally enhance their control over forests and forest dwellers' resources in this country. This is being done through a new scheme called *REDD: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests*.

As people's movements, we condemn the Government of India's position and call upon it to withdraw its submissions in favour of REDD or any REDD-type scheme and carbon trading in India's forests. Such schemes merely make way for private capital to grab the resources of the people, without in fact truly addressing climate change.

### **What is REDD?**

Climate change is caused by the release of greenhouse gases especially carbon dioxide which trap heat, resulting in a gradual warming of the temperature of the Earth. Gases like these are mainly released when fuels like coal and petrol are burnt, but they are also released when forests are felled; estimates say, 20% of global emissions result from deforestation. Standing forests can store carbon dioxide, and growing trees absorb it.

Therefore, the World Bank and some other IFIs (international financial organizations), corporations and a few large NGOs are promoting the idea that protecting forests will reduce climate change. The scheme that is being negotiated now which is called 'REDD' says that rich countries and their companies, instead of reducing the amount of carbon dioxide they emit, can pay developing countries to preserve forests and 'capture' carbon in these 'carbon sinks'. Before REDD, large plantations in various countries were raised ostensibly to mitigate effects of climate change and, one after another, the so-called new 'carbon sinks' were created, destroying precious ecosystems and people's livelihoods. This was

done both through UN-approved mechanisms (such as the CDM or clean development mechanism) and also through the so-called 'voluntary offsets', which allow any agency to raise a plantation somewhere and claim credits for storing carbon.

The REDD scheme differs from these earlier schemes mainly in its inclusion of existing natural forests and the fact that it says 'conserved' forests can also sell their stored carbon. As in earlier schemes, private companies will be able to engage in 'carbon trading' in the new one, i.e., buying and selling credits earned by 'absorbing carbon' through forest preservation. Both the UN and the World Bank strongly support this.

### **The First Danger: REDD as a way to deny people's rights**

One of the many problems with this approach is that forests are not just trees that can be 'preserved' indefinitely for their carbon absorption capacity; people use and depend on forests, forest produce, forest land, and other resources for livelihoods. In India, the government has not recognized most forest dwellers' rights to forest resources and their common lands. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 is being violated on a daily basis, and, in particular, the provisions of community rights enshrined in it are not being implemented at all. In such a scenario, if money is 'invested' for 'protecting' forests, there will clearly be attempts to grab these lands and forests in order to claim 'returns'.

Moreover, there is no easy or accepted way to measure how much carbon is actually being absorbed by a forest, and to establish that carbon would not have been absorbed without the 'investment' under REDD. As a result as is already happening in carbon forestry projects in Brazil and other countries the concerned company or agency makes every effort to preserve every single tree, bush, etc., on the land it has put in its money on in order to claim that it has stopped 'deforestation'. This clearly points to a kind land-grabbing at work in which REDD forests will be jealously guarded as 'financial assets' and not as people's livelihood resource.

If the government's intentions are noble, it would



have clearly stated that any REDD programme must be subject to ensuring people's rights. But, in fact, in all the government statements on REDD, there is not a single reference to people's rights over the forests or even the Forest Rights Act. Even the 'technical paper' released by the MoEF (Ministry of Environment and Forests) in August 2009 does not at all utter a word about people's rights. It is clear that the government will use REDD as an instrument for maintaining and intensifying its control over people's forests and lands and, at the same time, for roping in private players in the name of publicprivate partnerships.

## **The Second Danger: government promoting JFM through REDD**

Instead of respecting people's legal forest rights, the government is saying that it will implement REDD through the 'participatory' system of JFM (joint forest management). But, given that forest officials by default become secretaries and joint account holders of JFM committees (known as *van suraksha samitis*), it makes it impossible for the community to have any control over these bodies and thereby the given forest resources, ensuring that only contractors, traders, and others cronies of the Forest Department reap the benefits.

If the government is truly interested in 'participation', why is it not respecting people's rights to protect and manage their forests under the Forest Rights Act? The Act has superseded JFM, which has no statutory basis. But, instead of shutting down JFM and genuinely respecting forest communities' rights and powers, the government is attempting to expand it on a large scale precisely at a time when people are claiming rights under the Forest Rights Act. REDD will become another instrument in this expansion, using JFM as a 'participatory' model, which is downright treacherous. The consequences as are the intents will be even more intense resource grabbing.

## **The Third Danger: REDD and land-grabbing in the name of afforestation**

Unlike many other governments, which want money only for preserving forests, the Government of India wants REDD investment to include afforestation and tree planting (a system called 'REDD plus'). Indeed, aside from resisting Western pressure to undertake emissions cuts, the Indian government says only one thing in its

international statements on climate change: 'we' in India have already done a great service to the world by 'maintaining and expanding' our forests, which is our great contribution to climate change. Environment minister Jairam Ramesh informed the visiting US Secretary of State in 2009 that 'Sustainable forestry management is of profound importance to us. We are just embarking on close to a 3-billion-dollar programme [and 3-billion dollars to begin with] to regenerate our natural forests that already cover some 67-million hectares...' It is notable that this was the only national programme or initiative that Ramesh referred to in any detail, with all his other references being vague. Shortly afterward, the environment ministry released a 'technical paper' claiming that India's forest cover absorbs more than 11% of our emissions and again referring to the potential of afforestation. It is clear that the government is riding on forestry projects as the thrust of its international position.

## **Plantation programmes, or land-grabbing?**

Ask any forest community and they will ascertain that the government's plantation programmes have often been a cover for massive land-grabbing. Such afforestation programmes usually take place on forest land classified as 'degraded forest' (or on revenue 'wasteland'). However, the Forest Department classifies all land that has less than a certain percentage of tree cover as 'degraded forest'. Thus:

- Plantations frequently take place on common lands and customary community lands on which people's rights are poorly recorded. People are displaced from their lands and denied access to non-timber forest produce, grazing areas, and other livelihood uses.
- As the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Forests said in 2008, 'afforestation ... deprives forest dwellers and tribals/adivasis of some or all of their lands and adversely impacts their livelihoods and basic needs, for which they are neither informed, nor consulted, nor compensated.'
- The Forest Rights Act 2006 recognizes the rights and the power of communities to protect, manage, and sustainably use their customary forests, water bodies, wildlife, and biodiversity. As such, under the law, afforestation should be decided and controlled by the local community. Till date, India's plantation programmes do not even provide for consultation, let alone control

by the people.

- Plantations often destroy grasslands, open scrub jungles, and other natural ecosystems that people rely on for forest produce and other needs. In the process, they cause major environmental damage, drain groundwater, and may even end up releasing extra carbon.

Yet none of the plantation guidelines of the environment ministry till date have made any reference to forest rights, despite the glaring illegality of these actions. Attacks on people and their livelihoods will greatly increase if there is an additional financial incentive for grabbing people's lands through plantations.

#### **The Fourth Danger: bringing in private companies**

In its submission on REDD, the Government of India has said that afforestation programmes should be supported by a 'market-based' approach, i.e., carbon trading. Indeed, India's National Action Plan on the Clean Development Mechanism (2003) estimated that plantations could take up 5-million tonnes of carbon, earning 125-million dollars in five years.

For years, paper/pulp companies have been seeking to get forest land for afforestation. If this approach is adopted, they will have a perfect pretext to take over forest land for their own purposes and, indeed, earn huge 'profits' in the process. The only legal constraint that faces such projects the legal bar against private afforestation of forest lands, contained in the Forest (Conservation) Act will almost certainly be removed immediately. Given that people do not have recorded rights to their lands and forests, huge areas can easily be handed over to private companies for these purposes. The plantation programmes will expand enormously, backed by private speculators aiming to trade on the carbon

markets. The results can only be imagined.

#### **People's rights vs corporate and government resource-grabbing**

Thus, the government of India is pushing a regressive, anti-people and antidemocratic programme of resource-grabbing in forests, which will serve neither the people of this country nor the cause of truly curbing climate change.

The forests and forest lands of this country are not the private property of the government, to be agreed upon, bought, and sold as it wishes. They are the homelands and territories of adivasis and other forest dwellers who have, for centuries, lived in and lived with them. We will not stand by and watch as forests are once again grabbed from us by the rapacious greed of private capital masquerading as 'eco-friendly' projects.

*In light of the above, we demand the following:*

- The Government of India must withdraw its submissions in support of REDD, oppose any agreement on REDD, and not join any REDD-type scheme;
- Private companies should be barred from any role in and benefits from forest protection, and forests and other natural resources should not be subjected to carbon trading in any form;
- The Forest Rights Act 2006 must be implemented in letter and spirit, community rights and powers enshrined in it recognized fully, and all plantation and other forestry programmes brought under local community control;
- The government must recognize and respect democratic control over resources, stop facilitating corporate deforestation, and take steps to reduce emissions from private automobile transport, excessive electricity and metal consumption, and other genuine sources of environmental destruction.

**CAMPAIGN FOR SURVIVAL AND DIGNITY(CSD)  
NATIONAL FORUM OF FOREST PEOPLES AND FOREST WORKERS(NFFPFW)**

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