

REDD+ Working Group Meeting for Preparation of Road Map for Implementation of REDD+ initiatives in North Eastern States of India

A REDD+ Working Group Meeting for preparation of Road Map for implementation of REDD+ initiatives in North Eastern States of India was organized at Rain Forest Research Institute (RFRI) on 6th September 2018 under the Chairmanship of Dr. R.S.C Jayaraj, IFS, Director, RFRI and Chair of the REDD+ Working Group. The REDD+ Working Group for North-Eastern States has been formed to facilitate REDD+ actions in North-Eastern States under the aegis of the 'REDD+ Himalayas Project', implemented by Indian Council of Forestry research and Education (ICFRE) in collaboration with International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). The main focus is to initiate and scale up REDD+ actions in the North-Eastern States of India, for providing guidance, knowledge sharing and support for implementation of REDD+ initiatives/ actions in these States. Following are the list of participants for REDD+ Working Group Meeting:

Sl. No. Name of participants

1. Dr. R.S.C. Jayaraj, IFS, Director and Chairman, REDD+ Working Group (RFRI, Jorhat)
2. Prof. B.K. Tiwari, Member (North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong)
3. Shri V.R.S. Rawat, REDD+ Consultant (Dehradun)
4. Dr. Lokho Puni, IFS, Member (representative from Manipur)
5. Shri Supongnukshi, IFS (representative from Nagaland)
6. Shri W.S. Manner, IFS, Member (representative from Meghalaya)
7. Shri Ravi Kumar, IFS (representative from Sikkim)
8. Shri S. Soorya Narayan, IFS, Member (representative from Tripura)
9. Smt. Davinder Suman, IFS (representative from Assam)
10. Dr. R.S. Rawat, Scientist D (ICFRE, Dehradun)
11. Shri Tambor Lyngdoh, Member (Khasi Hills REDD+ project)
12. Shri Gautam Baruah, Member (representative from NE based NGO)
13. Shri M.Z. Singson, Head, Forest Research Centre–Bamboo and Rattan
14. Dr. Dhruva J. Das, Scientist E and Member Secretary (RFRI, Jorhat)

The, following Scientists/ Officers also participated in the meeting

1. Shri R.K. Kalita, Scientist E (RFRI)
2. Smt. Lhinghoikim Touthang, IFS (Nagaland)
3. Shri Ajay Kumar, Scientist C (RFRI)
4. Shri Dinesh Kr. Meena, Scientist C (RFRI)
5. Dr. Kuntala Neog Barua, Assistant Chief Technical Officer (RFRI)

At the outset, Dr. Dhruva J. Das, Head, Forest Ecology & Climate Change (FE&CC) Division, RFRI and Member-Secretary of REDD+ Working Group introduced all the participants;

apart from highlighting the broad theme and purpose of the meeting. Dr. R. S. C. Jayaraj, Director, RFRI and Chair of the REDD+ Working Group welcomed all the members and participants of the meeting. Focusing on the recent developments in the national scenario, he stressed on creation of State REDD+ Cells and implementation of at least one project in each State. He informed the participants that the REDD+ Secretariat of the Working Group established under REDD+ Himalayas Project at RFRI would provide necessary technical support, updated information on REDD+, guidance and knowledge sharing/ dissemination to the States. The State REDD+ Cell would implement the REDD+ actions in accordance with the National REDD+ Strategy as well as the need of the respective States and community. He wound up with the message that the States would have to act at large for developing projects for REDD+ and harness technical know-how from the Secretariat.

After the inaugural session of the meeting, a “REDD+ Secretariat for North Eastern States of India” was inaugurated at RFRI, Jorhat jointly by Prof. B. K. Tiwari, North Eastern Hill University and Shri V. R. S. Rawat, Expert Consultant REDD+ Himalayas Project, ICFRE.

The Technical Session-I began with presentation of Dr. R. S. Rawat, Scientist-in-charge, Biodiversity & Climate Change Division, ICFRE and he made a presentation on ‘REDD+ Working Group for North Eastern States and Future Road Map’. Prof. B.K. Tewari deliberated on ‘Prospects of REDD+ Projects in North East India’. Shri M. Z. Singson made a presentation on the activities done under REDD+ pilot project in Mizoram and briefed about the preparation of SRAP in the State of Mizoram. Shri Tambor Lyngdoh, Chief Community Facilitator, Mawphlang Khasi Hills Community REDD+ project, Meghalaya made a presentation on ‘Experience of Mawphlang Khasi Hills Community REDD+ Project’.

Representatives of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of the North-Eastern States expressed their views on the problem, prospects and scope of REDD+ in their respective States. Dr. Lokho Puni, IFS, Member (Manipur) elaborated about the forest scenario in Manipur apart from detailing on future plans of the state forest department involving REDD+. Shri W.S. Manner, IFS, Member (Meghalaya) elaborated on Umket REDD+ Project, which was focused on identification and address of drivers of deforestation & degradation. Shri Ravi Kumar, IFS (Sikkim) highlighted the progress made in Sikkim so far regarding REDD+ that include staff training, canopy monitoring, canopy density based forest classification, development of an application based carbon stock measurement through m-forest etc. He informed that till date, 22 REDD+ interventions (e.g. bio briquettes with NABARD) were planned in Sikkim apart from inter-departmental convergence. Shri Gautam Baruah, Member (representative of NGOs) briefed about the role of NGOs in REDD+ projects in North East India and appreciated the efforts of ICFRE in this regard.

The Technical Session II began with discussion and brainstorming amongst the participants. Some important points that came out during the discussion of REDD+ Working Group for Preparation of Road Map for Implementation of REDD+ Initiatives in North-Eastern States of India are as follows:

- Two States, viz. – Assam & Sikkim already have State REDD+ Cells and other States are required to constitute the same. Assam has to examine the composition of the Cell, whether it is conforming to the constitution mentioned in the National REDD+ Strategy. The REDD+ networking shall be quite amenable for implementation of REDD+ activities in each State of North-East India.
- Safeguard Information System (SIS) still needs to be developed in India.
- The decision making powers should be vested with the communities. Clustering of villages can be done to increase the area and make it feasible for REDD+ consideration. Meghalaya has ample scope and thus, negotiations with the communities shall surely yield results. In Nagaland, several village councils can come together and form a viable REDD+ project
- A bottom-up policy starting with district council will be more feasible.
- The financial reward of the project is not the only component and should be looked into as an additional benefit. On a given landscape, carbon stock and sequestration is not the only reward; ecosystem services such as edaphic, hydrological, aesthetic improvements of landscape etc. are also of great importance. Therefore, the benefits reaped from a fertile land and a resurrected ecosystem far outweighs the benefits returned in terms of currency. All the members were of the opinion that REDD+ has a broader aspect beyond Carbon which needs to be assessed as well as addressed.
- Knowledge and experience sharing is very vital for the implementation and advancement of REDD+ and the REDD+ Secretariat at RFRI may play a significant role in this regard.
- Research and academic institutions like RFRI, NEHU etc shall play an important role in knowledge sharing, capacity building and safeguard implementation.

Dr. R.S.C. Jayaraj, Director, RFRI and Chairman of the Working Group emphasized the following issues in his concluding remark:

- States of North-East India are at varied levels of preparedness in terms of REDD+. The States that are already in a State of preparedness to implement REDD+ projects or already implementing pilot projects should help other States of the region in development of the projects, through experience-sharing.

- Projects for capacity building and awareness can also be prepared, for REDD+ funding.
- By next year, it is hoped that at least one REDD+ project would begin or implemented in each of the North-Eastern States.
- Once in six-months, a meeting of the Working Group including all the stake holders should be conducted, for sharing of information.
- A webpage for the REDD+ Working Group is to be developed for providing a common platform, which needs to be developed by the Biodiversity and Climate Change Division of ICFRE and RFRI, Jorhat for hosting on the ICFRE website.

The following decisions were taken in the Working Group meeting:

- (a) The National REDD+ Strategy has already been released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, and all the States may take action to constitute the State REDD+ Cell as per the details given in National REDD+ Strategy, on getting further guidelines/ intimations from Government of India.
- (b) Biodiversity and Climate Change Division at ICFRE shall develop a webpage for the REDD+ Working Group for knowledge sharing and host it on the ICFRE / RFRI website.
- (c) The States that already have ongoing REDD+ projects, though not registered with The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or with other standards, may share the details with the Working Group, so that it can be used for capacity building in other States.
- (d) Secretariat of REDD+ Working Group at RFRI may collect all the relevant literature on REDD+, make a compilation of the same and share with all the members of the Working Group.
- (e) Regular communication mechanism of REDD+ Working Group need to be developed

An RFRI publication entitled "*Toona ciliata* (Toon Trees) Volume, Biomass and Carbon Tables for Meghalaya" authored by Giri et al. (2018) was released by Prof. B.K. Tiwari and Shri V.R.S. Rawat in this Concluding Session of the meeting.

The meeting ended with Vote of thanks proposed by Dr. Dhruba J. Das, Head, FE&CC division and Member Secretary, REDD+ Working Group.

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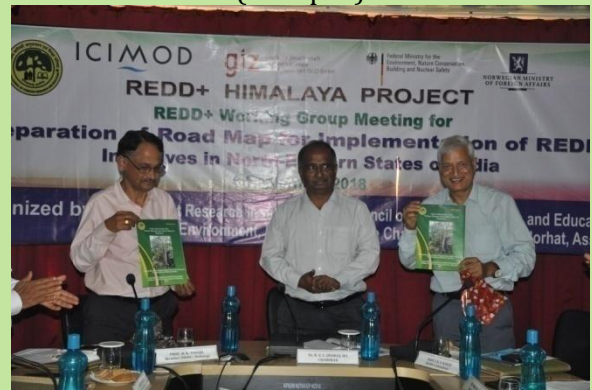
Dr. B.K. Tiwari, NEHU explaining the prospects of REDD+ projects in North-East India



Sharing of views by Dr. Lokho Puni, IFS, Member (Manipur)



Sharing of views by Shri Ravi Kumar, Member (Sikkim)



Release of RFRI Booklet on *Toona ciliata*



Group Photograph of Members and Participants of the REDD+ Working Group Meeting