

Proceedings

National Consultation - “Public Private Partnership and Forest Conservation in India”

Organized by Bombay Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI) and USAID Forest-PLUS Program
August 28, 2014; BCCI Office, Dadar (W), Mumbai

Foreword

Forests play a crucial role in climate change mitigation and adaptation and are an essential source of food, fuel, fiber and other commercial raw materials in India. With more than 300 million people in the country dependent directly on forests for subsistence, managing and improving India’s natural resources is one of the top priorities of the country.

USAID Forest-PLUS Program

Recognizing the need for co-creating innovative practices in forest management, the Government of India signed an MOU with USAID in 2010, creating the Forest-PLUS program. Forest-PLUS is a 5-year program funded by the USAID with an investment in excess of USD 17 Million. The program brings together world experts in forest management from economic, scientific, cultural, governance and community management backgrounds to identify and develop systemic approaches for forest conservation in India.

The program supports a broad range of activities at the national and local landscape level, piloted across 4 states of India: Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. The goal of the program is to demonstrate novel approaches for forest management and conservation at the overlap of public and private sector participation and build readiness for REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) in India. USAID and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change envision scaling up of demonstrated successes of this program across India.

Keynote Addresses

The consultation started with a welcome note by Mr. Nehal Sanghvi (Senior Advisor for Innovation and Partnership, USAID), followed by an introduction to the objectives of the event by Dr. Christopher Kerner (Chief of Party, Forest-PLUS Program). Dr. Kerner mentioned the tremendous carbon stocking potential in India’s forests through regeneration and afforestation and how there is a possibility to create a business case to support this.

Chief dignitaries Mr. Tom L. Vajda (US Consul General in Mumbai), Mr. R. Mukundan (Vice President, BCCI & MD, TATA Chemicals Ltd.) and Mr. Subhash Chandra (Deputy Inspector General of Forests, MoEF&CC) presided over the inaugural session and delivered key messages highlighting the importance of the event.

In his speech, Mr. Vajda reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to conserve forests through programs such as the Forest-PLUS. He encouraged the corporate leaders to explore opportunities in forest conservation for a sustainable future.

Mr. Chandra discussed the importance of forest conservation in achieving political, social and economic stability and sustained growth in India. He elaborated on various initiatives of the government and forms of support available from the ministry to various organizations. He further suggested that private companies partner with the Forest-PLUS program and invest in their landscapes to pilot innovative PPP models.

Mr. Mukundan stated the importance of public private partnership approaches to forest conservation and how they will be mutually beneficial for the industry and government.

Launch of the Corporate Forest Responsibility (CFR) Charter

After the inaugural speeches, Mr. Tom L. Vajda, in presence of Mr. R. Mukundan and Mr. Subhash Chandra launched the Corporate Forest Responsibility (CFR) charter. The charter gives a framework for companies to value, assess and reduce their impacts on forests while contributing to national and global goals of forest conservation. The Charter also aims to promote forestry as an activity under the CSR aegis of signatory companies.

Mr. Swapan Mehra, (CEO, IORA Ecological Solutions (Implementation Partner of Forest-PLUS)), made a presentation focused on alternatives to create a business case for investing in India's Forests. The presentation cited the importance of forests and how degradation of the forest resources affects businesses directly and indirectly. He presented new and emerging business models that make investments in forests profitable and bankable. He highlighted how the Forest-PLUS program innovations provide tools, techniques and platforms to pilot and establish emerging business models in India. He elaborated on the CFR engagement process and also how Forest-PLUS will support this engagement through its lifetime.

Panel Discussion

Further to this presentation, there was a panel discussion, moderated by Mr. Mark Newton (Environment Officer, USAID). The panelists included Mr. K. N. Rao (Head, Energy & Environment, ACC), Mr. Raghunath Mahapatra (VP, Energy, Welspun), Mr. Suneel Pandey (VP, Plantations and Raw Material, ITC) and Ms. Gina Green (Forest-PLUS, Tetra Tech ARD).

The panel discussed different forestry related initiatives driven by their company and their experiences. The panelists also highlighted challenges faced by large corporations in engaging meaningfully with multiple stakeholders and the government while invest in conservation and promotion of forests. Some of the issues that were brought up included the need to gain more clarity about the national policies & role of business and assurances that investments in forests are either directly or indirectly bankable. The panelists highlighted collaborative efforts by government and businesses to develop holistic forestry based strategies that are "measurable, monitorable and auditable."

Dr. Christopher Kernen commented on the special emphasis of Forest-PLUS on developing various tools and techniques to allow cost-effective and rapid monitoring and reporting of forest resources at a national, provisional or landscape level. He stressed that since forests are a common resources, engagement of all stakeholders, especially forest communities is necessary for PPP models to succeed.

Open House

Mr. Nehal Sanghvi then called the attention of the house to the CFR Charter and Mr. Swapan Mehra took the audience through the content and various objectives of the charter. Mr. Mehra also informed the audience of the launch of the website www.cfrindia.in where interested companies can express interest to adopt the charter.

Vote of Thanks

The event was concluded by Mr. Varghese Paul (Senior Forestry Specialist, USAID/ India) who delivered the Vote of Thanks and encouraged all companies to sign the CFR charter and become a "Forest Champion".