

# LOSS OR GAIN ALL THE SAME:



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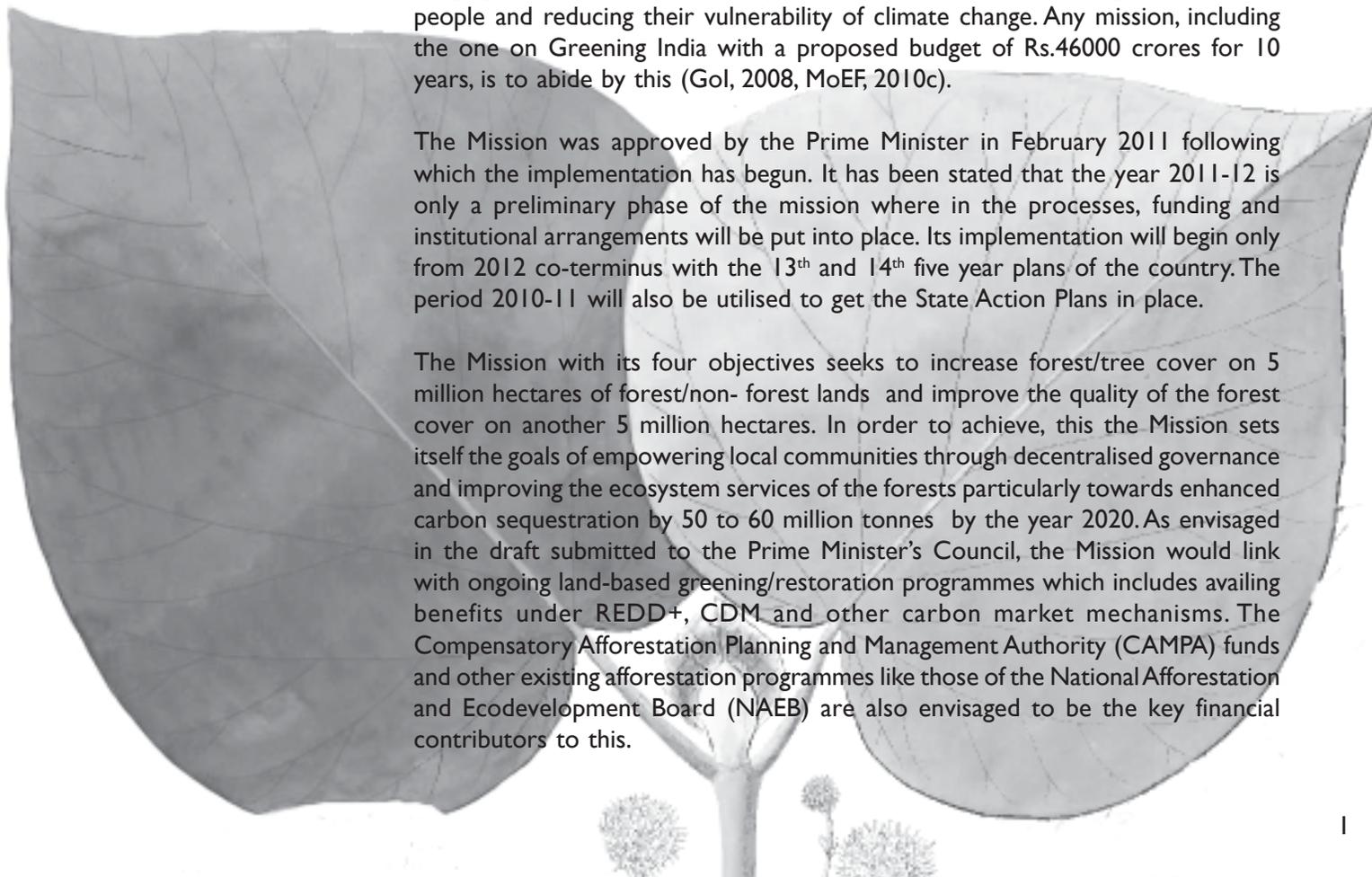
## THE NATIONAL MISSION FOR A GREEN INDIA

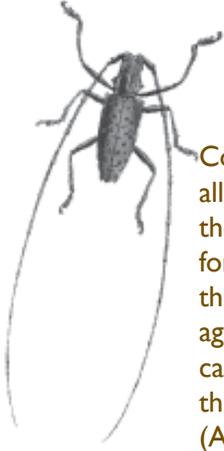
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In September 2010, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) submitted its draft 'National Mission for a Green India' (*from now on referred to as the Green India Mission or GIM*) to the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change. This mission is one of the eight such missions which have been designed as part of India's National Action Plan On Climate Change (NAPCC). It is important to note at the outset that the foremost principle of the NAPCC is that maintaining a high growth rate for the country is essential to increase the living standard of its people and reducing their vulnerability of climate change. Any mission, including the one on Greening India with a proposed budget of Rs.46000 crores for 10 years, is to abide by this (Gol, 2008, MoEF, 2010c).

The Mission was approved by the Prime Minister in February 2011 following which the implementation has begun. It has been stated that the year 2011-12 is only a preliminary phase of the mission where in the processes, funding and institutional arrangements will be put into place. Its implementation will begin only from 2012 co-terminus with the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> five year plans of the country. The period 2010-11 will also be utilised to get the State Action Plans in place.

The Mission with its four objectives seeks to increase forest/tree cover on 5 million hectares of forest/non-forest lands and improve the quality of the forest cover on another 5 million hectares. In order to achieve, this the Mission sets itself the goals of empowering local communities through decentralised governance and improving the ecosystem services of the forests particularly towards enhanced carbon sequestration by 50 to 60 million tonnes by the year 2020. As envisaged in the draft submitted to the Prime Minister's Council, the Mission would link with ongoing land-based greening/restoration programmes which includes availing benefits under REDD+, CDM and other carbon market mechanisms. The Compensatory Afforestation Planning and Management Authority (CAMPA) funds and other existing afforestation programmes like those of the National Afforestation and Ecodevelopment Board (NAEB) are also envisaged to be the key financial contributors to this.





Compensatory Afforestation (CA) is one of the important conditions laid out when forest land is allowed to be diverted for non-forest use under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980. Until the interventions of the Supreme Court on the subject of compensatory afforestation, the money for this exercise was to be deposited with the State Government. The guidelines issued under the FCA allowed the setting up of a special fund for this purpose. The responsibility of a user agency who could be a person or project proponent would end once the amount required to carry out this activity is transferred to the State Forest Department. With the SC's intervention the money is now routed back to the state government through Annual Plan of Operations (APOs) only after it is first deposited with the Ad-hoc Compensatory Afforestation Planning and Management Authority (CAMPA). This authority also accumulates the funds generated related to the payment of Net Present Value (NPV) when a diversion of forest land takes place. (Kohli et al, 2011).

The GIM has set the ball rolling for the MoEF to house a REDD Plus Cell and to formulate “appropriate” projects/strategies to take the objectives of the GIM forward. It is stated that the cell will work within the architecture and rules agreed to under the UNFCCC to develop and implement monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) protocols and fair benefit-sharing mechanisms in the forestry sector. A majority of the interventions under the Mission are understood to have the potential to qualify under REDD / REDD Plus schemes in the future.



The official website of the UN-REDD programme states that it is an “effort to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests, offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.” The REDD+, which countries like India have been arguing for, goes beyond deforestation and forest degradation, and includes conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

REDD+ is the scheme by which money is generated both for maintaining forests (maintaining enclosures) and for generating new forests as new ‘carbon stocks’. In practice, this means creating plantations.

Both REDD and REDD+ work on a dual financing mechanism as of today, with money to be generated both from bilateral or multilateral grants as well as a market based carbon trading mechanism where forest carbon in a different country can be traded for meeting emission targets. As of now, the future of a market based REDD model depends entirely on whether or not there will be a global climate agreement which binds countries with emissions levels.

The REDD Plus Cell is currently in the process of undertaking a carbon assessment of India's forests which is proposed to complement the forest cover assessment that has been done by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) each year. In addition, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru has also undertaken a mapping exercise to identify areas for GIM intervention. This exercise proposes to use composite indices such as critical wildlife habitats, corridors, biodiversity habitats, as well as socio-economic factors (Rathore, 2011).

According to the MoEF, the GIM is not just about numbers. The documented vision of the GIM seeks to integrate the greening agenda into the context of climate change, adaptation and mitigation. The vision of greening, it claims, is different from earlier such exercises undertaken. The Mission is meant to be “holistic” toward enhancing ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and storage. For this, it will consider not just forests but other ecosystems as well. These landscapes and sub-watersheds are to be selected based on their vulnerability to climate change.

The document however does not lay out any details of how carbon sequestration is to be achieved or enhanced in ecosystems other than forests, which is where the global carbon attention is currently fixed. Although other ecosystems like wetlands and grasslands have been seen as critical in the GIM, the Mission's operational focus remains on different kinds

of forest ecosystems such as mangroves and degraded forest lands. Without much elaboration of how, it also simply brings into its ambitious climate action plan, shifting cultivation areas and abandoned mines. Many of these areas are presently under diverse ownership and may resist being brought into the ambit of the Mission.

## IS CARBON ONLY A CO-BENEFIT IN A CARBON-LED DISCOURSE?

The GIM document states its intent to integrate the needs of fuel, fodder, livelihoods from forests and of traditional ecological knowledge into the greening exercise. These aspects have been in conflict with the afforestation programmes of the past in the country. In a presentation made by BMS Rathore, Joint Secretary, MoEF in New Delhi on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2011 highlighted that the Ministry is interested in GIM because it brings together historical experiences of forest management and conservation in India. In order to do this, it aims at linking current forest policies with climate mitigation strategies (Rathore, 2011).

Spoken of as a holistic plan, the GIM has been showcased as one where carbon is only to be seen as a co-benefit. It has been repeated over and over that the Mission includes both the provisioning aspects and regulatory aspects of climate related action. Understanding the regulatory aspect is simpler, as it is carbon which is sought to be regulated through conservation of existing sinks and creation of new ones through greening or afforestation activities. It is for the provisioning aspects that the GIM relies on biodiversity, landscapes, livelihoods and the community empowerment potential.

The question to raise upfront is around the validity of this claim. Even though the Mission uses the right mix of terminologies, it remains clear in its focus largely on forest land and on the creation and use of forest ecosystems. The emphasis of the four Sub-Missions are evidence to the above contention.



The *first* Sub-Mission which is to enhance the quality of forest cover and improve ecosystem services in 4.9 million hectare constitutes the largest area of the Mission's focus. Out of this, 4.5 million hectare of moderately dense forests showing degradation (1.5 million hectare) and the eco-restoration of degraded forests (3 million hectare) will be taken up. In order to achieve this, activities undertaken will include rehabilitation of degraded open forests which will include partial or full closure of grazing activities, scientific forest management practices as well as NTFP provisioning. The remaining 0.4 million hectare is for the restoration of grasslands.

The *second* Sub-Mission relates to ecosystem restoration and increase in forest cover over 1.8 million hectare. The major emphasis of this submission is on shifting cultivation lands (0.6 million hectare) and scrub lands (0.8 million hectare) which are officially classified as highly degraded forest or non forest lands with less than 10% forest density. Shifting cultivation lands known to be areas where the practice of cyclical slash and burn (*jhum*) agriculture has been practised by tribal communities traditionally. These two together constitute 1.4 million hectare of the land being put to increase forest cover.

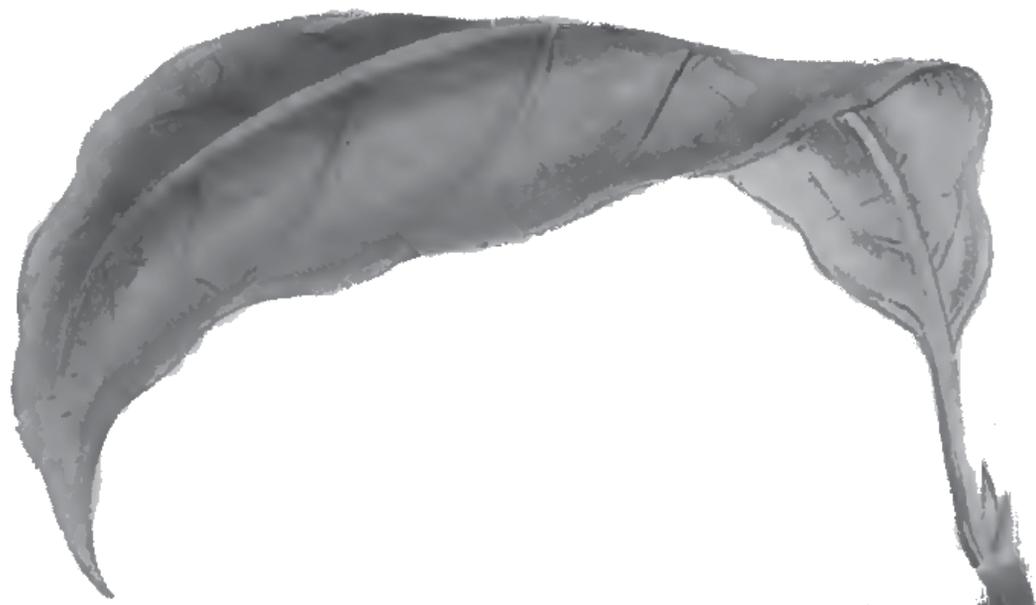
The *third* Sub-Mission is the smallest and relates to enhancing tree cover in urban and peri-urban areas over 0.20 million hectare.

The *fourth* Sub-Mission attends to the areas of agro-forestry and social forestry to be taken up over 3 million hectare. It is here that the GIM actually refers to the creation of carbon sinks. While the first three Sub-Missions aim to cover areas forested land under

government jurisdiction, this fourth Mission will bring both current and permanent fallows under plantations. The explanation here for this is that non-forest lands "provide ample opportunity to increase forest cover, meet the needs for forest produce and create carbon sinks". It is here that the GIM will bring in lands under other multiple uses such as marginal farming lands/ fallow lands, trees on non-agricultural rural lands like homesteads, school yards, compounds of various offices, and private/public establishments, public spaces, roadsides, along canals, etc. This massive programme of forestry on non-forest lands will be carried out with the participation of the community, farmers, NGOs, private sector, institutions, government agencies and the Forest Department. "Productive" agricultural lands will not be touched for this.

Even though it is not explicitly stated in the GIM, the Mission document clearly sets the stage for REDD, REDD+ or any other carbon forestry scheme. It needs to be reinstated that REDD+ and REDD are schemes by which money is generated for maintaining forests (maintaining enclosures) and for generating new forests as 'carbon stocks', which in practice, means plantations. In both these instances like in the case of all the four Missions, the final attempt is to conserve carbon or create carbon sinks.

Thus the GIM is clearly carbon compliant, keeping the doors open to whichever way the climate change negotiations head on the issue of carbon sinks. In this carbon led discourse, the country is ready to receive money through grants, private sector trading as well as other carbon forestry programmes.



# RECREATING SPACE FOR AFFORESTATION PRACTICES

The GIM at no point de-links itself from existing afforestation and forest management practices, though continually seeks to improve its conservation and livelihood potential. Even though the final version of the GIM document talks about its linkages to the National Afforestation and Eco-development Board (NAEB) as only one of the convergences, earlier GIM drafts had explicitly stated that the Mission will be serviced by a Mission Directorate at the MoEF to be housed in the NAEB (MoEF, 2010b). This institution was set up way back in 1992 with a clear purpose of promoting afforestation, tree planting, ecological restoration and eco-development activities in the country. The special emphasis was similar to that of the GIM to improve the state of the degraded forest areas and lands adjoining the forest areas, National Parks, Sanctuaries and other Protected Areas as well as the ecologically fragile areas like the Western Himalayas, Aravallis, Western Ghats, etc.

Interestingly, one of the functions of the NAEB was also the restoration of fuelwood, fodder, timber and other forest produce on degraded forests and adjoining lands in order to meet the local demands. Fostering a peoples' movement for promoting afforestation and eco-development in degraded forest areas through a participatory approach and with the assistance of voluntary agencies, non-government organisations, Panchayati Raj institutions and others, was also one of the objectives of the NAEB. It is significant to also know that the NAEB was involved in implementing a National Afforestation Programme (NAP) with the help Forest Development Agencies (FDA)<sup>1</sup> and Joint Forest Management committees (JFMC)<sup>2</sup> all over the country. This was



formulated by the merger of four centrally sponsored afforestation schemes of the 9<sup>th</sup> five year plan period (1997-2002). This was considered to be a flagship afforestation programme of the MoEF through the NAEB. As on 31st March 2008, the programme was operational in 782 FDAs involving 28,181 village level Joint Forest Management committees (JFMCs). Upto March 2008, under the programme an amount of Rs. 1573.57 crore had been spent and over one million hectare forest lands were said to be regenerated following the prescribed schemes (ICFRE, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Forest Development Agencies (FDAs) are to be registered as Federation of all Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) within a territorial/wildlife forest divisions under the Societies Registration Act, as per the structure prescribed by the NAEB.

<sup>2</sup> As per the provisions of National Forest Policy 1988, the Government of India, vide letter NO.6.21/89-PP dated 1st June, 1990, outlined and conveyed to State Governments a framework for creating massive people's movement through involvement of village committees for the protection, regeneration and development of degraded forest lands. The joint forest management programme in the country is structured on the broad framework provided by the guidelines issued by the Ministry. So far, during the last ten years, 27 State Governments have adopted resolutions for implementing the JFM programme in their respective states. As on 15.8.2001, 14254845.95 ha of forests lands are being managed under JFM programme through 62890 committees. (Source: <http://moef.nic.in/divisions/forprt/jfm/html/strength.htm>, accessed on 8th August 2011)

There are various critiques of both the NAP and JFM practices that have been carried out highlighting a variety of issues related to governance, transparency, financing and assessing the success and failure of participatory forestry as envisaged through the NAP schemes and JFM (Lele et al, 2005, Lele 2001, Khare et al, 2000). While it is important to understand these critiques on their own terms, we mention these here as the emphasis of the National Mission for a Green India appears to merely present existing afforestation and mainstream forest conservation practices as actions to tackle climate change. As the GIM document states, the MoEF primarily puts forward “greening” as the actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation. In doing so, it does not substantially seek to change the practice of participatory forestry.

If the NAP was part of the 9<sup>th</sup> five year plan, the 10<sup>th</sup> five year plan (2002 to 2007) saw a Grants-in-Aid Greening India Scheme. The objectives echoed the earlier visions of increase in tree cover through plantations and with a focus on non-forest lands. It stipulated a fourfold increase in current annual tree planting mostly on lands outside what was called the Recorded Forest Area (RFA). The theme of peoples’ participation was central here and the activities were to be carried out through local bodies, gram sabhas and JFMCs. However, the key implementing agency remained the State Forest Departments.

What the GIM attempts to do is to re-engage with similar practices but this time in the context of increasing forest cover as stocks which can be traded in the carbon markets. The afforestation and conservation related activities are yet again to be carried out along with revamping the Forest Development Agency, JFMCs, Van Panchayats etc. It also seeks to integrate the implementation of the GIM through committees set up under newer legislations like the Biological Diversity Act and Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of *Forest Rights*) Act) or FRA, 2006. It is through the latter that a process of recognition of both individual and community forest rights on forest land which have been officially recorded or are ambiguous, is underway. Therefore collaborating with rights holders for the implementation of any conservation and afforestation schemes is essential. The GIM seeks a strong community involvement where “who decides” is the main issue in the provisioning aspects (like fuel, fodder, NTFP). Interestingly, the fourth Sub-Mission

of the GIM where the process of carbon sink creation is emphasised, is to be backed by the Forest Department or the private sector.

As mentioned in the earlier section the GIM document clearly envisages that a majority of interventions under the Mission have the potential to qualify under REDD / REDD + schemes.

It is important to briefly point out here that since 2009, the State Forest Departments have also been receiving money from the Ad-hoc CAMPA (see chapter 3 for more details). This money has been collected over the years towards compensating for or payment of Net Present Value (NPV) for the diversion of forest land for non-forest use such as mining, industrial or infrastructure expansion in the country.

The experience shows that this money accessed through the Annual Plan of Operations (APOs) is being used for almost exactly the same purposes by the State Forest Departments as has been done through other afforestation schemes and programmes till date. For instance, the state of Uttarakhand has allocated Rs. 62.5 lakhs for plantations through local Joint Forest Management (JFM) committees. Karnataka, in its APO, has also proposed monoculture plantations including commercial plants like biofuels. These plantations are to be taken up in places near the existing JFM committees with a total budget of Rs 1379.25 lakhs under the head of assisted natural regeneration. Similarly Madhya Pradesh has proposed 38.8% and Himachal Pradesh has proposed 28.4% for plantations out of their total proposed NPV budget for 2010-2011 (Kohli et al, 2011).



# FIVE ISSUES AROUND GIM



**1. The commodification question:** It is in the GIM that the various processes which have either treated forests as commodities or conservation enclosures find a place. The financing of the GIM is through the CAMPA, REDD and carbon forest markets all of which treat forests as a mobile, tradable commodity either at the national or the global scale. Each time the unit of measurement changes, it adds more money to the forest coffers, either through the pretext of diversion or conservation. The GIM also works well within a global system where it is possible to show forests as sovereign assets which can be made available, at a cost, to provide carbon forest credits to global players. The money that is generated then essentially takes forward revamped afforestation practices hitherto with the claims to being supportive of the community, traditional knowledge, landscape and biodiversity conservation. For both instances to work successfully requires the support of greater centralisation and institutionalisation of forest management.

**2. The deforestation question:** One of the foremost issues with the GIM is that it completely evades the question of restricting deforestation in the country. India has presented itself internationally in the climate change debates as a country which has stabilised its forest loss. Therefore the GIM document completely misses the goal that the large scale diversion of forest land for non-forest use towards industrial expansion, which is facilitated through domestic legislations, needs to be minimised. The focus in the Mission is not as much about addressing the factors adding to the climate crisis but looking at adaptation and mitigation measures proposed as part of the NAPCC. So while the Mission remains silent on reducing deforestation in the country it speaks of “enhancing carbon sinks in sustainably managed forests and other ecosystems”.

**3. The commons question:** A major area of intervention of the GIM is in semi degraded and degraded forests as well as agricultural and non-agricultural fallows. These lands which the GIM identifies as wastelands are already under multiple yet formally unrecognised community uses, such as for grazing or as part of shifting cultivation cycles. According to Sharad Lele of ATREE, the potential

availability of such wastelands and/or degraded forest lands is overestimated. Since they are already under heavy use, their transfer to afforestation schemes is likely to impact the socio-economic conditions of communities dependent on them. (Lele, 2011). Moreover uncultivated fallows are also areas located in dryland regions which have been rendered unusable due to administrative neglect. It is these lands attributed to be marginal, which have and continue to be cultivated for millets and other rainfed dryland agricultural crops. (Millet Network of India et al, 2009).

**4. The access question:** It has been highlighted by forest peoples’ movements that afforestation programmes on shifting cultivation fallows, village commons and community pasture lands change the nature of these ecosystems as well as directly reduce peoples’ access to forest produce and animal fodder. A critique by Campaign for Survival and Dignity points out that in October 2008, the Standing Committee on Environment and Forests sharply criticised such programs. It said “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.” (Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee, 2008; Campaign for Survival and Dignity, 2011)

**5. The finance question:** The success of the GIM hinges directly on the finances that get generated through the expected sources. For the CAMPA to be a contributor implies that more land would need

to be diverted for non forest use and the Authority procure more money through compensatory afforestation and NPV. It also seeks that all the activities that are carried out under the Mission would, in one way or the other, be linked to a carbon funding or trading mechanism, specifically REDD or REDD+. Even though many other funding sources are envisaged, it is unlikely that a Mission to green India as a climate adaptation strategy would not respond to carbon trading mechanisms in the offing.

The linkage to the REDD Plus cell makes the connection stronger. However, as mentioned in the previous section, whether or not forest carbon offset schemes like REDD will operate through grants or through the market will largely depend on whether there is a globally binding agreement on emissions reductions in the near future. No private sector player is likely to be interested in carbon offsetting if there are no binding targets to reduce emissions.



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