

**To: Dr. Manmohan Singh**  
Prime Minister of India  
New Delhi

9 June 2006

**Sub: GEF/World Bank Project on Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihoods**

Dear Dr. Singh,

Pl. find attached a critique of a proposed GEF/ World Bank project that India is considering, for Biodiversity Conservation and Rural Livelihoods Improvement. I believe that the current design of the project does not respect India's efforts at decentralizing decision-making through panchayat raj institutions, or at securing the rights of forest and other ecosystem dwellers while ensuring sustainable use of resources. While it uses the right words regarding "participatory conservation", its operational parts hardly encourage what would be a truly decentralized mode of planning and implementation. In so doing, it is unlikely to secure conservation of biodiversity itself in any long-term perspective.

I would urge the Government of India to intervene at this stage, before the final approval of the project, to ensure that the project is truly oriented towards participatory conservation. For this, it is also crucial to review the existing forest and wildlife related laws, to make them stronger against destructive forces, as also to integrate into them strong mechanisms of local community participation in decision-making and receiving benefits. We have separately written to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), regarding the need to review the Wild Life (Protection) Act from these perspectives, but as in the case of several such letters written to it in the last 2-3 years, received no response.

Finally, we would urge that GOI and state governments find adequate money for these kinds of projects from within indigenous resources, rather than have to go to agencies like the World Bank and subjecting ourselves to all kinds of conditionalities, pulls and pressures. In any case the more important changes needed are structural and policy ones, which do not require huge amounts of money. The kind of money required for projects and processes like this is easily available within India itself, provided the priorities of various rural and tribal development schemes, and projects with line departments already active in landscapes such as the ones being targeted under this project, are re-oriented towards conservation and livelihood security.

We request your kind attention in this matter,

Thank you,  
Regards,

**(Ashish Kothari)**