

**Himalayan Forest Research Institute
Conifer Campus, Panthaghathi
SHIMLA – 171 013 (HP)**

**Report of Online Stakeholders Consultation for Himachal Pradesh and,
Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh Union Territories on
“Safeguards Information System for REDD+ Implementation in India”**

09th October 2020

As per the guidelines of *Indian Council of Forestry Research & Education (ICFRE)*, Dehradun an Online Stakeholders’ Consultation on “Safeguards Information System (SIS) for REDD+ Implementation in India” for the Northern State of **Himachal Pradesh** and the Union Territories of **Jammu & Kashmir** and **Ladakh** was organized by *Himalayan Forest Research Institute (HFRI)* Shimla on 09th October 2020 via Google Meet.

Dr. Vaneet Jishtu, Scientist D from Forest Ecology & Climate Change Division, HFRI initiated the programme and also moderated the virtual meet. **Dr. S. S. Samant**, Director HFRI, Shimla welcomed the Director General ICFRE, **Shri. A.S. Rawat** and the PCCF and HoFF of Himachal Pradesh, **Dr. Savita** besides the ICFRE-nominated external members of Expert Committee for drafting SIS for REDD+. Dr. Samant also extended a warm welcome to other participants/officials of SFDs and other Government Line Departments such as Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural Development, Social Welfare, Renewable Energy, Soil and Water Conservation, Research and Academic Institutions, NGOs and Progressive Farmers to the meeting. He provided a brief about the efforts of the Drafting Committee Members on the draft Safeguard Information System for REDD+ and spelled out the agenda of the meeting. Dr. Samant further invited all the stakeholders enunciating the objective of the meeting to provide their valuable suggestions and comments on the draft Safeguards Information System (SIS) for REDD+ Implementation in India as prepared by the ICFRE, Dehradun.

Shri A. S. Rawat, IFS, **Director General**, ICFRE, Dehradun in his opening remarks extended a pleasure and welcomed Dr. Savita, PCCF and HoFF, Himachal Pradesh and other eminent members participating from different parts of the region. Briefing about the role of ICFRE in implementation of UN-REDD+ in the country, he informed the house about the Meeting and its follow-up role in the proposed National REDD+ strategy. He spoke about the need to address various issues to develop clarity about the implementation of REDD+ by various states and requested concerned PCCFs to nominate Nodal Officers to implement REDD+ activities in their respective States. He further elaborated that formulation of SIS tools should encompass National needs, safely implementable on the field and should be within the existing legal and institutional framework. He spoke on the importance of SIS for risk reduction in order to generate an implementable REDD+ strategy for improved livelihood and biodiversity conservation. To end his remarks, he informed about the utmost care adopted to draft safeguards system by the ICFRE constituted Expert Committee and appealed to the stakeholders to actively participate and provide good suggestions for its improvement. He congratulated Director HFRI, Shimla and his team for organising the Consultative Workshop in such a short time.

After that, Dr. Vaneet Jishtu, Coordinator of the online stakeholders meeting cordially invited **Dr. Savita, PCCF and HoFF, Himachal Pradesh** for providing the valuable insight about this important meeting. Dr. Savita expressed her gratitude and appreciated the approach of the Director General, ICFRE' to move forward with the REDD+ strategy. At the onset, Dr. Savita, appreciated the efforts of ICFRE for formulating the comprehensive draft document on REDD⁺ Safeguard Systems and informed the participants that process for devising the strategies of REDD⁺ was initiated while she was serving ICFRE as **Director FRI** and it has been prepared after lot of consultative processes across various stakeholders. She also congratulated Director, HFRI and his team for holding the online stakeholders meeting on such a topical subject related to contemporary issues. Dr. Savita concisely highlighted the different projects of the HPSFD, being funded by various agencies like JAICA, CAMPA, KfW, etc. presently going on in the mountainous state of Himachal Pradesh. She asserted the commitment of the HP Forest Department to augment the forest cover and informed that the multifarious activities implemented in the State are targeted to achieve the twin objectives of increasing the forest cover and also the forest density. Dr. Savita also reiterated the fact that Himachal Pradesh is required to have 33% area under the forest cover by 2030 and the REDD + activities are going to play a significant role to meet this ambitious target. She further added that coordination and association with local communities is very important and insisted that there should be a workable mechanism for sensitization of stakeholders at the grass root levels.

Technical Session

Dr. V.R.S. Rawat, Former ADG (BCC) and Member, Expert Committee delivered a detailed presentation on REDD+ readiness in India and shared various IPCC and assessments reports. He touched upon the role of CDM and its lacunae in not providing credits to standing forest and only stating about afforestation and reforestation activities. Hence, to provide incentives from deforestation and degradation, concept started in 2003, COP 9 and REDD in 2005, COP 11. He elaborated on the efforts of India and ICFRE contribution in bringing concept of biodiversity conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stock in REDD+. He further informed about importance of Cancun Safeguards to implement it in phased manner to achieve result based Measureable, Reportable and Verifiable (MRV) actions. He discussed the elements of National REDD+ strategy and National progress of the same and updated about development and approval of the National strategy, availability of National Forest Monitoring system in India in accordance to UNFCCC and submission of Forest Reference Level (FRL) by FSI. Lastly, he highlighted the importance of SIS in reducing risks of REDD+, seven safeguards that are to be addressed for formulation of SIS which is yet to be submitted to UNFCCC. He briefed about the expected actions of various agencies in future and concluded by appreciating development of PES i.e., Payment for Ecosystem Services.

Dr. R.S. Rawat, Scientist-D, BCC Division, ICFRE presented the Draft Safeguards Information System for REDD+. He informed that REDD+ has potential to yield carbon and non-carbon benefits, but its implementation may have some environmental and social risks. A set of seven safeguards agreed under UNFCCC should be taken into consideration, needs to be discussed for the country. He discussed the process followed by ICFRE for developing SIS and stressed the importance of regional stakeholders meet for consultation as a step to analyse and finalise the document. He further elaborated on the SIS including information of existing policies and agreements addressing Cancun Safeguards, objectives of SIS,

institutional framework of National REDD+ strategy. He updated that action plans have already been developed for the states of Mizoram and Uttarakhand and plans are under progress for Himachal Pradesh and other states. He further presented about the institutional agreements for SIS with ICFRE, FSI, NBA, State REDD+ cells, State Biodiversity Boards and their roles. Detailing about 16 criteria and their underlying 40 indicators for all the seven safeguards, he concluded by informing about Grievance Redressal Mechanism related to safeguards and outline of web-based application for SIS.

Shri. Anurag Bharadwaj, IFS, Director, International Cooperation, ICFRE interrupted Dr. Rawat during his presentation and clarified certain basic points regarding the SIS. He explained that SIS is a reporting system to check risks and negative impacts of REDD+ implementation. He was very critical of the exotic species and said that these exotic and fast-growing species should be checked and indigenous species should be encouraged. Ground staff should be made aware about the indicators and such issues to be explained in local vernacular language. He requested the participants to assess the criteria and indicators from the perspective of the lowest functionary in respective departments.

Discussion on draft SIS and remarks by Stakeholders

After the presentations, the document was taken up for detailed discussion. The feedback of stakeholders was sought in regard to the safeguards presented.

Dr. S.S. Samant, Director HFRI, Shimla emphasised that there is need to assess the status of forests, identify the degraded forests across the horizontal and vertical gradients, and also identify the suitable native species for plantation in the degraded forests. He further stated that there is a need to involve the Forest Department and local communities for the restoration of degraded forests. He emphasised for a strong network of Forest Departments, other Line Departments of the Government, NGOs and local institutions for achieving REDD+ goals.

Dr. Suresh Atri, Principal Scientific Officer, Department of Environment, Science & Technology (DEST) HP, specifically touched upon the issue of Peoples Biodiversity Report (PBR) preparation. He said that the role of State Biodiversity Boards has been included to prepare PBRs and other related activities at the same time. He was sceptical about the sanctity of the PBRs being prepared by research scholars and that too with a low budget. He further said that it would be necessary to assess the capacities and the capabilities with the resources of the State Biodiversity Boards; failing which the qualitative outputs would be surely comprised.

Shri Sandeep Khanwalkar, Senior Programme Director, Development Alternatives, New Delhi suggested that the JFMC and community should be consulted while developing any REDD+ plan document including voluntary carbon market and CDM. He asserted that the plan should be prepared on a landscape basis including farmland and water bodies. Khanwalkar said that the REDD+ plan document should also propose technology-based solutions and activities which could also reduce pressure on the forests. He recommended regular and timely training of JFMC and community on REDD+ to keep them updated on the

latest information/ happenings. He also suggested that the plan document should be prepared in simple language and before finalising the plan it should be shared with the stakeholder.

Shri Mritunjay Madhav, DFO Una, commented that as per his thinking REDD+ framework seems easy to implement, but the same requires institutional strengthening, not just regionally but it is much required across pan India. He also suggested for best practices to be incorporated for making it a success.

Shri R. R. Bhalaik, representing an NGO, *Sulej Bachao Jiwan Bachao Smiti* wanted to know how damaging it's going to be for the fragile ecology which is taking its toll in the form of various kinds of pollution and environmental degradation due to large number of HEPs in Satluj basin. He termed the exploitation of rivers and their tributaries in Himachal for hydro-electric power to be shocking. According to him the indigenous communities of the Satluj valley felt deceived and cheated due to over execution of various HEPs as they failed to restore the damage it has caused to local eco system/biodiversity. The fertile land has turned barren due to project activities as the EIAs system failed to do justice. He expected the Safeguards Information System for REDD+ to do justice to the damage done to the native biodiversity and also put up a suggestion to prepare a technical environment assessment report to minimise community hardships and check the farce of compensatory afforestation. He desired the social service projects to be modified on need based and bearing sound protocols.

Dr. Rajesh Sharma, Group Coordinator Research, HFRI Shimla also stressed on the need to promote indigenous and lesser known species to be taken up in the afforestation programmes for better adaptability and their socio-economic relevance.

Dr. R. K. Verma, Head of Office/Forest Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation emphasised on the use of native species for afforestation programmes. He also stated that the local communities need to be taken aboard during the consultative programmes under REDD+.

Closing Remarks

Shri. Anurag Bhardwaj, Director (International Cooperation), ICFRE in his closing remarks conveyed his gratitude to DG, ICFRE and the PCCFs and HOFF of Himachal Pradesh, core committee members and other participants for attending and providing their inputs in the meeting. He duly acknowledged the efforts of the Director, HFRI and his team in organising the meeting in such short time. He requested all the States and Union Territories for early constitution of REDD+ cells and also emphasised that the ICFRE would help them, if required, in developing capacities related to REDD+ plans and SIS. He also assured that the comments of all the stakeholders will be duly considered and ICFRE will come up with a template, much coherent to all.

Vote of Thanks

Dr. Rajesh Sharma, Group Coordinator Research HFRI, conveyed his gratitude to DG, ICFRE, who despite his busy schedule attended the meet and provided the opening impetus to ignite the discussion. for sparing his valuable time for addressing the meet and the PCCFs and HOFF of Himachal Pradesh, core committee members and other participants for attending and providing their inputs in the meeting.

Participation

The meeting was attended by more than 74 participants from ICFRE, HFRI, Forest Departments of HP, J&K and Ladakh UTs, representatives of Line Departments such as Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural Development, HIMCOSTE, DEST, SKUAST, NIRSR-Leh, Social Welfare, Renewable Energy, Soil and Water Conservation, Research and Academic Institutions, Progressive farmers and NGOs.

GLIMPSES OF THE CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP



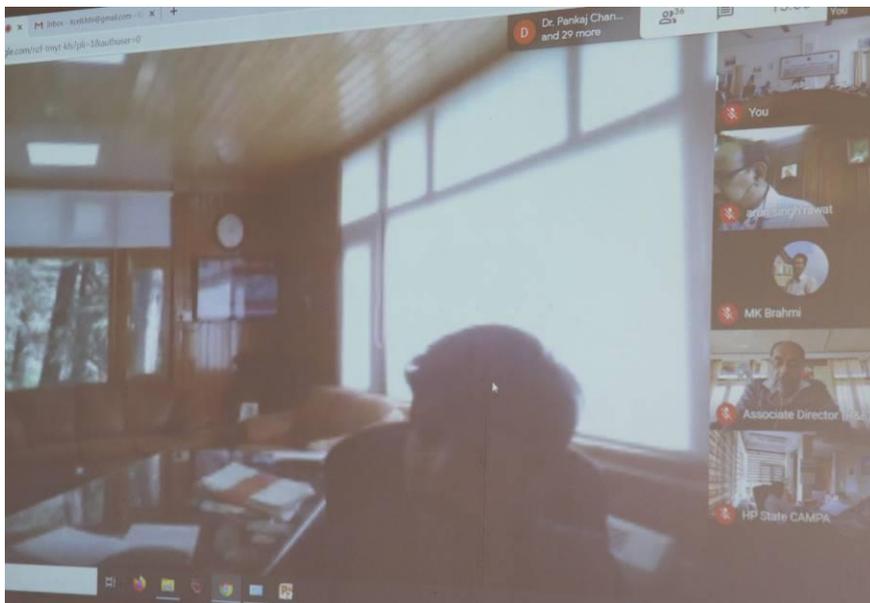
A screenshot of Google meet platform on which the Consultation Workshop was held.



Director, HFRI along with Scientists of HFRI organising the Consultative Workshop.

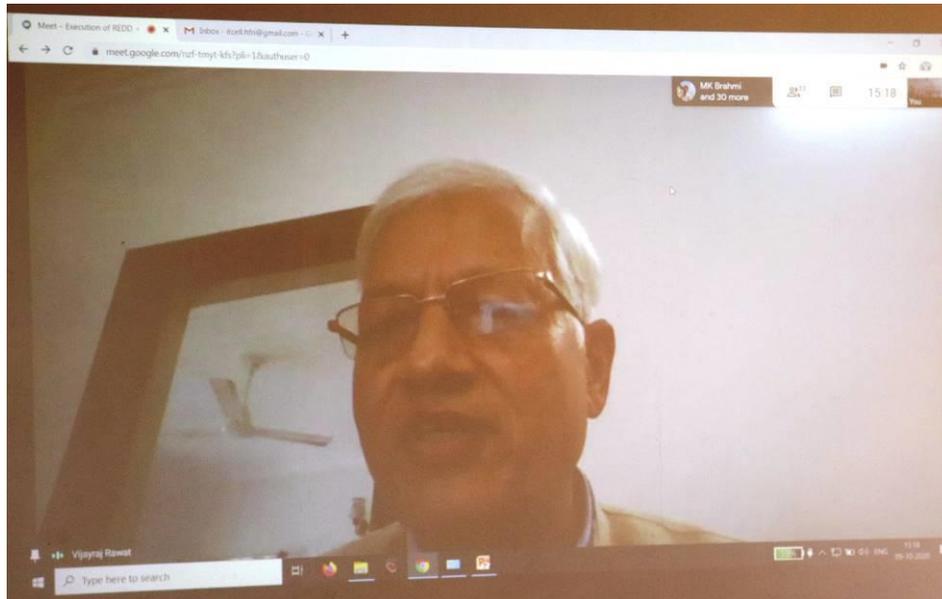


Shri A. S. Rawat, Director General, ICFRE giving his opening remarks in the Workshop.

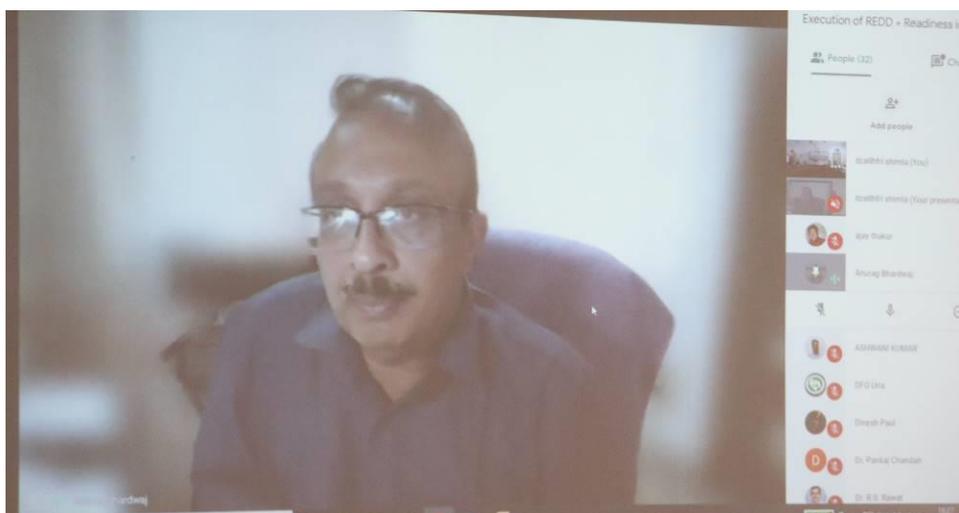


Dr. Savita, PCCF and HoFF, Himachal Pradesh SFD, giving her remarks in the Workshop





Shri V.R.S. Rawat, Former ADG (BCC), ICFRE giving his presentation on REDD+



Shri Anurag Bhardwaj, Director (International Cooperation), ICFRE giving closing remarks.