

## **Minutes of 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Governing Body (GB) of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Society (APFBC Society) held on 11 September, 2012**

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In chair: - The Chief Secretary, Government of Assam and Chairperson GB, APFBC Society.

Members Present: - List of members present is enclosed and marked Annexure-I.

### Proceedings of the Meeting:

On behalf of the Chairperson, the Project Director and Member Secretary welcomed all the members to the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the GB. After a brief round of introduction by members, items listed on agenda were taken up for consideration of members of the GB.

### **Agenda Item No.1**

The PD and Member Secretary made a brief presentation on the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) highlighting the justification for the APFBC, its objectives, approach, various components and share of each component in the project budget, activities to be undertaken in each component etc.

Members made following observations:

- a. The Principal Secretary, Panchayat and Rural Development Department suggested convergence of project activities with similar activities under taken by other departments.
- b. The Principal Secretary, Environment and Forest Department and vice chairperson, APFBC Society stated that communities living in forest villages and at forest fringes are often left out of the normal government development programmes and therefore, convergence, though essentially necessary, may not work on the ground in certain areas of the project where other department have no reach .
- c. The Principal Secretary, Finance Department wanted clarification on “zero date” of the project. The Regional Director, French Development Agency

(AFD) stated that as per Credit Facility Agreement (CFA), the zero date for this project is 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2012 when the CFA was signed between the DEA and the AFD.

- d. The IGF(EAP) , MoEF opined that;
  - i. The Project should aim for directional convergence particularly with National Rural Livelihood Mission.
  - ii. Enough space should be provided for NTFP and fodder species in the afforestation activities as per NAP guidelines.
  - iii. Grasslands should not be taken up for afforestation, their extent and character should be maintained.
  - iv. To make landscape level planning more effective it should take root right from the stage of framing of Micro Planes.
- e. The Principal Secretary, Finance Department further opined that the project should also take into its fold the communities living around forest fringe to minimize occupation of forest land for livelihood sustenance.

## **Agenda Item No. 2**

- A. The Member Secretary presented the Feasibility Budget of the APFBC before the GB. He informed that the GoA had already consented to the Feasibility Budget. He further stated that the Governing Body, has the powers to cause changes in the activities and budget earmarked under any component of the APFBC as deemed fit and necessary after proper review for effective implementation of activities. However, the changes proposed and approved by the G.B. should essentially conform to the monetary cap fixed for each component in the Feasibility budget and should be intimated to the AFD.

The Feasibility Budget of the APFBC was approved by the GB.

- B. The Member Secretary next presented; for approval of the GB; the budget breakdown and time line for all activities proposed to be undertaken by the APFBC under all the components of the APFBC. The following points were emphasized during the presentation;
  - a. the APFBC strives to make convergence an effective tool in execution of its activities and monetary provision is made for holding regular dialogue at all levels with line departments to achieve synergy between APFBC and activities of other line departments.

b. Raising of NTFP and fodder species form integral part of afforestation measures proposed under the APFBC.

The following observations were made by members;

- a. The Chairperson observed that orders of the Supreme Court of India should be taken into account while developing ecotourism sites.
- b. The PCCF(WL) and CWLW, Assam assured the GB that during implementation of activities under APFBC no violation of order of the Supreme Court of India and/or any act or rule applicable and in force in Assam will be strictly ensured.

The GB gave its nod to the Budget breakdown and timeline of the APFBC.

### **Agenda Item No.3**

The Work Plan for the remaining period of the FY 2012-13 was presented before the GB for approval.

Following observations were made by members in the matter:

- a. The Principal Secretary, Finance Department, GoA wanted to know the extent of fund required for implementation of proposed Work Plan. The GB was appraised that the fund requirement will be approximately to the tune of INR 28,14,00,000.00 (Rs. Two thousand eight hundred and fourteen lakhs)
- b. The Principal Secretary, Environment and Forest Department wanted to know how much fund should be released by the Finance Department in the FY 2012-13.

The GB was appraised by the Member Secretary that as per Financial Management Manual the yearly budget allocation shall have to be released in one installment in the beginning of the first FY of the project and in the subsequent years the release may be made adjusted to the balance of the previous year remaining unspent with the Society. Accordingly the entire budgetary allocation made in the budget for the APFBC for the FY 2012-13 may be released as it will facilitate continuation of on going activities particularly those related to plantations till the money in the next FY is released.

- c. It was opined by the Principal Secretary, Finance Department that the budgetary allocation made for the project in the financial year 2012-13 far

exceeds the projected requirement of fund for implementation of activities in the remaining months in this FY. Thus, releasing entire budgetary allocation made for the APFBC for the FY 2012-13 to the Society does not appear reasonable.

- d. The Chairperson expressed that the society must have enough fund in hand to implement ongoing activities before next installment is released by the Finance Department.
- e. The P.C.C.F. & HoFF also emphasized that ongoing schemes particularly plantation related activities need to be implemented in time bound manner to ensure success and thus, the society must have sufficient fund to meet the expenditure for implementation of its activities.

After deliberation, it was agreed that over and above the projected fund requirement of INR 28.14 crores for the FY 2012-13 a sum of INR 10,0000000.00 (ten hundred lakhs) shall be released by the Finance Department to the APFBC Society during current financial year.

In subsequent financial years, the fund allotted in the state budget for the APFBC shall be released preferably in one installment in the beginning of the FY. In case; fund is not released in one installment, the PMU will initiate necessary action for release of next tranche of fund as soon as the balance available with the Society reaches a threshold of INR 10,0000000.00( Ten hundred lakhs).

The work Plan for the remaining period in the financial year 2012-13 was accorded approval by the GB

The Member Secretary brought to the notice of the GB that for effecting first Drawdown a request was made to the CAAA for payment of cost of a THAR JEEP, excluding VAT, directly by the AFD. This was done in accordance with the directive of the Administrative Department following suggestion made by the AFD in the matter.

The Regional Director, AFD wanted clarification if the purchase of the vehicle for which direct payment is to be made is included in the work Plan and she was informed that it is included in the work plan.

The Member Secretary requested the GB to accord post-facto approval for purchase of the aforesaid vehicle and the request of the Member Secretary was consented by the GB.

#### **Agenda Item No.4**

The By-laws of the APFBC Society was next presented before the GB. The By-laws deal, besides other issues, with the matter of delegation of financial power, sanctioning of expenditure and release of fund etc.

The suggestion made by the Principal Secretary, Environment and Forest Department and vice Chairperson, to incorporate necessary changes in fund release procedure in the By-laws as agreed was accepted by the GB. The Member Secretary was directed to introduce modifications in the relevant section of the By-laws regarding release of fund.

It was further agreed to make necessary modification in the Financial Management Manual of the Society too in the section dealing with release of fund as suggested by the Regional Director, AFD.

After brief deliberation further the By-laws got approval of the GB subject to incorporation of any suggestion made by the chairperson or vice-chairperson subsequently.

#### **Agenda Item No. 5**

Presentation on various operating Manuals prepared jointly by the Forest Department, Assam and TA provided by the AFD was next on agenda. The vice-chairperson appraised the GB that these manuals basically follow World Bank Manuals and Procedures and were prepared jointly by the FD, Assam and TA team of the AFD and were validated. Also, the GB is empowered to effect necessary changes in these Manuals with intimation to the AFD to suit needs of the project, if required.

He, therefore, suggested that these manuals be adopted by the GB and the GB consented to the suggestion of the vice-chairperson.

## **Agenda Item No. 6**

The GB next perused the Panel of Officer for deployment of officers to the Project Management Unit of the APFBC Society from amongst the panel.

The Chairperson wanted to know if the panel has been vetted by the Administrative Department.

The Principal Secretary, Environment and forest Department informed the GB that the panel has been vetted.

The GB gave its consent to the Panel of Officers and requested that the State Government may issue order deploying officers to the PMU so that follow up action on implementation of project activities for this financial year by the PMU gets initiated within short time

## **Agenda Item No. 7**

The HR Management Policy of the APFBC Society was presented by the Member Secretary for perusal and approval of the GB.

Following suggestions were made by the Principal Secretary, Finance Department:

- a. The monthly remuneration showed be consolidated and no allowance should be shown separately i.e. it should be a package.
- b. The age limit for various categories of contractual staff other than daily wages staff should be prescribed.  
The GB agreed that the upper age limit for Superintendent, should be fixed at 65 years.
- c. Educational and professional qualification for Computer Data operators/ Computer Account Assistant should be mentioned.

The chairperson further opined that monthly remuneration should be appropriately fixed to attract talented manpower.

The Member Secretary was directed by the chair to make modification in the HR Policy in light of the suggestions made.

The HR Policy of the APFBC Society, subject to insertion of modifications suggested, received approval of the GB.

### **Agenda Item No. 8**

The issue of opening bank account was next taken up for deliberation by the GB. The Member Secretary appraised GB that five banks- State Bank of India, Indian bank, Allahabad bank, Punjab National bank and Axis bank were sent letters to provide information for taking decision by the GB in the matter. Only Indian bank and Axis Bank responded. The following points were deliberated.

a. Whether to open a Current Account or Savings Bank account:

After deliberation the GB consented that the society should open a Current Account.

b. Whether account can be opened in a scheduled commercial Bank:

The Principal Secretary, Finance Department opined that account should be opened in a Nationalized bank only.

The chairperson endorsed the opinion and the GB approved opening of APFBC Society's account in a Nationalized Bank only.

c. As no interest accrues to the society against money kept in current account, the Member Secretary proposed that the Banker of the APFBC Society should extend concessional finance to the SHGs, individual beneficiaries/ community to carry on their activities successfully beyond the support extended by the project

The chairperson and members opined that since it's a policy decision to be taken by a bank, the Member secretary may obtain view of Nationalized Bank and appraise chairperson, EC of any positive outcome in the matter.

### **Agenda Item No. 9**

With respect to engagement of Sh. T. Ekande as consultant for three months, the GB was appraised by the Member Secretary that Sh. Ekande was part of the TA team, which worked with FD officials. His services are required to support the PMU of the APFBC Society in procurement, capacity building of PMU and FIU staff etc.

The GB gave its consent to engagement of Sh. Ekande and the Member Secretary was directed to obtain EOI as well as fees to be paid from Sh. Ekande for perusal of the Chairperson.

#### **Agenda Item No. 10**

The GB gave its consent to provide copies of all project related documents to the AG (A & E), Assam and directed the Member Secretary to establish contact and request the AG(A&E), Assam to undertake regular audit of accounts of the APFBC Society .

#### **Agenda Item No. 11**

With permission of the chair the Member Secretary brought following issues for consideration of the GB.

a. As the PMU will be located in the premises of the Assam Forest School at Jalukbari reimbursement of fuel for vehicles allotted to officers deployed to the PMU at enhanced rate is necessary considering the distance to be travelled. The GB approved reimbursement for actual quantity of fuel consumed subject to a maximum of 90 liters of fuel to each allotted vehicle.

b. Payment of telephone bills for officers in PMU and FIU. The Principal Secretary, Environment and Forest Department suggested that a slab should be fixed for each rank and put up for approval of the chairperson. The PD and Member Secretary was directed to do the needful.

c. Since, considerable part of the FY 2012-13 has elapsed many activities proposed for this FY can not be undertaken and this affects the time line proposed in the budget break down. The Member Secretary made a submission for revision of timeline of the project.

The GB was of the opinion that the matter can be discussed in the next meeting and the PD should present a proposal in the matter prepared in consultation with the P.C.C.F. & HoFF and FIUs.



Cheik Dia, Deputy Director, AFD with permission of chair made following observations:

- i. One reputed NGO should be made member of the GB.

The Principal Secretary, Finance Department was of the opinion that making any NGO a member of the GB will again require compliance with legal provisions of the Society's Registration Act, 1860. Thus, a panel of NGOs may be drawn and in rotation NGOs may be invited with the approval of the chairperson as Special Invitees as and when considered necessary.

The Member Secretary was directed by the Chairperson to take necessary action in the matter.

- ii. Monitoring indicators should be measurable.

The GB was informed by the Member Secretary that M & E Manual prepared for the APFBC Society proposes base line survey and measurable activity indicators for effective monitoring. Further these manuals can be modified to make them more effective based on experiences gained as the project implementation progresses.

The meeting ended with thanks from the chair to members for their participation and valuable suggestion made on various issues.

(N.K. Das, IAS)  
Chief Secretary, Assam  
&  
Chairperson, APFBC Society