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**Minutes of the 6th Meeting of Governing Body of
Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Society
24th August, 2015 :: Dispur**

The 6th Meeting of the Governing Body of the APFBC Society was held on 24th of August, 2015 at 5.30 PM in the Conference Hall of the Chief Secretary, Assam. Shri V. K. Pipersenia, IAS, Chief Secretary, Government of Assam and Chairperson, Governing Body, APFBC Society presided over the meeting. A list of the Members / Invitees who attended the Meeting is at **Annexure-1**

The Chairman welcomed all the Members to the meeting. With the permission of the Chair, Shri A. K. Johari, IFS, Member Secretary and Project Director, APFBC Society made an introductory presentation on the Project. Thereafter, Agenda-wise discussions were initiated and following observations made /decisions taken:

- I. **Agenda-1: Confirmation of the Minutes of the 5th GB Meeting:** Minutes were confirmed.
- II. **Agenda-2: Action Taken Report:**
 - a. The update on receipt of NOC from the French Development Agency (AfD) was noted.
 - b. Proposal for shifting of site for establishment of Bambusetum to Assam State Zoo and Botanical Garden was approved with following suggestion:
 - i. The Bambusetum shall be so designed as to offer complete information about the characteristic features, habitat, uses and special properties for each of the bamboo species.
 - ii. The Assam State Zoo shall be responsible for its management and up-keep after the project period
 - iii. The National Bamboo Mission shall assist in the activity.
 - c. Update on releases of funds for maintenance of plantations was noted.
 - d. Initiation of fuel-wood plantations on 8573 ha. with the involvement of 156 Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) was noted with following observation:
 - i. A study shall be carried out to find out scope of providing LPG facility to villagers for weaning away their dependence on fuel-wood
 - ii. If required, initial subsidy for LPG, smoke-less *challah*, can be provided to the JFMCs as entry-point-activity.
 - iii. The fuel-wood plantations shall have multi-purpose species as well.
 - e. For the road works an assessment shall be made to ensure that:

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- i. There is no violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act in taking up of this activity
 - ii. The road works shall not be counter-productive to the purpose of forest protection.

III. **Agenda-3: Review of Physical & Financial Progress:**

a. **Physical Progress:**

i. **Component-1: Institutional Strengthening & Legal Reforms**

1. Proposal for a General-Purpose Interim Consultant and the ToR for his engagement for 90 days, on need basis, as cleared by the AfD, was approved.
2. Selection of site for construction of H.Q. Residential Building at PCCF's Office Complex at Rehabari was endorsed.
3. Update on finalization of proposals for office and residential buildings of FIUs was noted.
4. Proposal for purchase of remaining vehicles (including 2-Buses and 25-Boats) was approved with following modifications:
 - a. Instead of Thar vehicles, Bolero may be provided to Range Offices as the Thar vehicles are high on maintenance and fuel-consumption. The next higher version of Bolero may be provided to the Divisional Offices.
 - b. All Pick-up Trucks as originally planned must be procured.
 - c. Twenty Bolero to be procured for Forest Divisions.
 - d. Purchase of 12 additional Motorcycles in lieu of bicycles was approved.
 - e. Two field vehicles for APCCF (LAZ and UAZ)
5. Procurement of Computers was put on hold till the strategy for e-office and MIS support was put in place.
6. Update on scheduling of Training Programs and exposure visits was noted.

ii. **Component -2: Multi-level Strategic Planning**

A presentation was made on the approach for launch of this component. It was decided that detailed scheduling of activities of this component be done immediately and those activities that have to follow from the outcome of this component, e.g. preparation of Working Plans, may be put on hold.



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It was also suggested that while doing landscape planning, convergence amongst all institutions existing in a matrix, such as JFMCs, EDCs, BMCs, shall be aimed.

iii. **Component-3 –Sustainable Forest Management**

1. While discussing the matter of plantation activities with involvement of local communities, the GB observed that Assam has the experience of implementing a World Bank aided multi-sectoral Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural Services (ARIAS) Society Project. This project had a forestry component under which participatory approach was adopted for meeting twin objectives of forest conservation and peoples' livelihood improvement.
2. Therefore, under Sustainable Forest Management through peoples' participation, NGO support for strengthening and capacity building of JFMCs & EDCs for preparation of Micro-plans, the ARIAS model may be adopted for similar activities under Components-2, 3 and 4.
3. Re-appropriation for working plan support was not agreed to in view of the decision at Para 3.a.ii above.

iv. **Component-4: Adding Value &opening Market Opportunities:**

The GB was of the opinion that a Pert Chart of all the remaining activities in the Project shall be made clearly outlining parallel activities and linier activities with time-lines.

v. **Component-5: Project Management Unit**

1. Progress in audit of previous three financial years was noted and it was suggested to finalize the first re-imbursement proposal at the earliest.
2. As regards placement of a regular Auditor, the GB advised to engage one of the CAG empanelled auditors on the basis of prescribed rates. The selection may be done by a Committee by adopting the same criteria given in the RFP document.
3. The PMU contractual staffing was noted with the observation about the necessity for an Architect. Matter to be reviewed by the PD.

- b. **Financial Progress:** The GB noted with concern the slow financial progress in the project and asked for expediency.



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IV. **Agenda-4: Approval of Annual Work Plan, 2015-16:** The revised AWP for 2015-16 was approved by the GB.

V. **Agenda-5: Specific Proposal for consideration and approval:**

- a. Regarding staffing it was decided that the PCCF&HoFF may issue necessary instructions for deployment of Guwahati-based officers with PMU, and for the others he may send proposal to the government.
- b. The GB authorized the PD to engage additional contractual manpower, young or retired personnel, as per need with PMU.
- c. As regards plantation under the Project, following decisions were taken:
 - i. Fencing, wherever necessary, shall be provided for protection of plantations as per the existing norms of CAMPA Scheme.
 - ii. The norms for plantation creation and maintenance shall be brought on par with CAMPA Scheme.
 - iii. Provision for watch-and-ward shall be made for plantation under the project.
 - iv. Delegation of Financial powers to the Project Finance Officer was not agreed to. However following proposals were approved:
 1. The CF-PMU may be designated as the Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO). A proposal may be sent to government for approval.
 2. Maintenance of an *Imprest Account* upto a maximum of Rs 50,000/- (fifty thousand) with Office Superintendent.
- d. Provision for TA and DA to Contractual staff on official tours as per Govt. of Assam Rules was approved as per the Agenda.

VI. **Agenda-6: Any other Issue with the permission of the Chair.**

- a. The General Body observed that Assam being a biodiversity hotspot should have in-house facility for capacity building of forest department, JFMCs and Biodiversity Management Committees for sustainable management of forest and wildlife. It was agreed to set up a State Training Centre with mandate like that of Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun but with focus on state/regional challenges. It was suggested that a DPR be prepared at the earliest.
- b. The General Body suggested that under this project support may be provided to all the Protected Areas for preparation and improvement of Management Plans. For ensuring that these Management Plans capture modern approaches, methods and use of modern technology, consultations with Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun may be held and their support be taken.

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- c. The GB also suggested that all the Protected Areas of the State shall create Societies on the lines of Kaziranga Tiger Conservation Foundation for tapping the opportunities that exist with various government and non-government institutions for strengthening management. Initial support may be provided from the project to these Societies.
 - d. It was suggested that all the Manuals of the Project may be printed in the form of handy booklets and distributed to all FIU. Also a Handbook on the project clearly outlining objectives, expectations distribution of roles and responsibilities be prepared and distributed to all implementing partners.
 - e. With a view to reducing dependency on wood as fuel, distribution of LPG connections to the forest-dependent communities may be planned. Promotion of alternate energy sources and use of energy efficient devices may also be included as an entry-point-activities for JFMCs/EDCs. Discussions may be held with various oil companies for collaborations.
 - f. The matter of raising forest department capacity for research in contemporary issues was raised. It was suggested that instead of creating separate research infrastructure, the existing strengths of Universities / Colleges may be made use of. With this view 'Forest Chair' may be setup in the Central and State Universities, Colleges of repute in Assam and thereafter funds may be earmarked for these institutes for sponsored research on priority areas.
 - g. With a view to bringing expediency in the project, the GB requested the PCCF to make arrangements for placement of officers with PMU and allowed PD to engagement contractual manpower on need basis.

The meeting ended with thanks from the Chair to everyone present.

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(Vinod Kumar Pipersenia)IAS.

Chief Secretary, Assam / Chairman-APFBC-Society


26/08/2015
(A. K. Johari), IFS

Member Secretary & Project Director-APFBC Society