

Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation

Estimation of Potential Value of Ecosystem Services and Development of REDD+ Project for Assam (TA -9)

Finalizing a potential landscape for a pilot REDD+ project in Assam

Introduction and Background

Visible changes in climatic patterns the world over have raised concern over the present and future impacts of climate change on the various parameters affecting humans and biodiversity at large. Around 25% emissions are from agriculture, forestry and other land uses making it the largest emitter after the energy sector. Hence it is imperative that a landscape approach for project planning and implementation is taken up. Further mitigation actions in the land sector, viz conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of degraded forests, will not only reduce emissions, but also open up cost effective ways to build resilient livelihoods to help communities adapt to impacts of climate change. This has become an imperative under Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) which was agreed to in the Paris negotiations. Hence it has been decided to plan and execute a jurisdictional REDD+ project in Assam as Component 4.3 of the Assam Project for Forest and Biodiversity Conservation. IORA Ecological Solutions, New Delhi has been engaged as the consultant to assist in developing and launching a REDD+ project at the Landscape level for the state of Assam.

One of the first tasks is to finalize the project landscape to implement the REDD+ project. A project area selection matrix was developed to find potential districts for the pilot REDD+ project which is annexed.

Potential landscape for a pilot REDD+ project

Potential areas where REDD+ can be implemented was shortlisted following an exercise wherein all the districts in Assam was given a score as per the priorities of the REDD+ project and instrument mandates. The final outcome is presented in Figure 1. From the project area selection matrix, it was found that Nagaon scored the highest and Dibrugarh came second among potential districts where REDD+ can be implemented.

Consultation

Assam Forest Department convened a preliminary inter-departmental meeting held on 4th August 2016 to ascertain the views of other departments on feasibility and suitability of these potential landscapes and the role they could play in design and implementation. The minutes of the meeting is submitted as annexure-I to the document.

Discussions and Results

Nagaon revenue district is suggested as the jurisdictional boundary for the pilot REDD+ project. This may perhaps not include Hojai district which was carved out from erstwhile Nagaon district in 2015. The consideration is the following:

- Potential area for afforestation and enhancement of carbon stocks

- Potential for convergence with other departments for arresting land use change as well as improve the living conditions of the local communities.
- Involvement of community in conservation as well as increasing productivity of non-forest areas – agriculture/ horticulture/ agroforestry, etc.
- Intervention activities not solely focused on forest villages but in revenue lands also.
- Access and benefit sharing with the communities
- A win-win situation for biodiversity and communities

Next steps including funding mechanism

A REDD+ roadmap shall be prepared including a calendar of step-by-step actions. Baseline development shall be taken-up immediately, which includes field data collection, socio-economic survey, focus group discussions and remote sensing/GIS analysis. Consultations on Access Benefit Sharing (ABS) mechanism and Safeguards Information System (SIS) both for community and biodiversity. A Monitoring Plan shall be taken up after the completion of the field activities.

Appropriate funding mechanism for the REDD+ project also needs to be finalized. International climate change financial instruments such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) can be explored for financial assistance in implementation of the interventions designed in the REDD+ project. Availing multilateral (such as the Biocarbon fund under the World Bank) and bilateral funds (eg: Norway, Japan etc.) also can be explored. The REDD+ project also can be linked to Voluntary carbon markets, but in this case the credits generated cannot be used for meeting India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets. The REDD+ documentation and the details of information to be presented will hence eventually depend on the final financial instrument selected.

Annexure-1

Sl. No.	Criteria	Districts																																				
		Barpeta	Baksa	Biswanath	Bongalgaon	Cachar	Chirang	Charaideo	Darrang	Dima Hasao	Dhemaji	Dhubri	Dibrugarh	East Kamrup	Goalpara	Golaghat	Hailakandi	Hojai	Jorhat	Karbi Anglong	Kamrup	Kamrup Metropolitan	Karimganj	Kokrajhar	Majuli	Lakhimpur	Morigaon	Nagaon	Nalbari	Sivasagar	Sonitpur	South Kamrup	South Salmara-Mankachar	Tinsukia	West Karbi Anglong	Udalguri		
1	Reconciled boundaries; ranges boundaries	5	3	5	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	3	5	5	3	5	3	5	4	5	3	4	4	5	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	3	3	
2	Total forest cover	2	3		3	5	2		3	4	2	3	3		2	3	4		3	5	5		4	3	2	2	2	4	2	4	4			5	3	3		
2	Less chances of political turmoil, not small in area	5	3	4	5	5	3	3	4	3	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	3	5	4	2	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	5	3	3	
3	Land tenure: Preferable all forest lands should have uniform land tenure	2	3		3	5	3		3	2	2	3	4		2	3	4	3	3	2	5		4	3	3	2	2	4	2	3.5	4			5	2	3		
4	Prevalence of high rate of conversion of forest lands to other land use, degradation of forests observed in the landscape. Similarly, availability of areas of good forest cover which we shall specifically bring under the REDD regime within the same jurisdiction	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	
6	Presence of any iconic species or place in the landscape that can give mileage to the project.	3	4	3	4	3		2	4	4	4	3	5	2	3	3	3	3	5	4	3	2	3	4	3	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	2	3	4	4	4	
9	Not close to any areas that have high potential of conversion of forest land to other land use.	5	3	3	5	4	3	5	5	3	5	5	3	3	5	5	5	5	4	3	3	3	5	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	4	3	3	3	
10	Whether any forestry related institutes are there in the selected landscape	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Availability of existing data based on working plans or other projects	0	3	0	0	4	3	0	4	3	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	2	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	0	5	3	3	3	
12	Functional VFCs/JFMCs	2	3	2	4	5	2	0	5	2	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	3	4	3	5	4	2	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	0	5	3	3	3		
13	Drivers should be addressable	3	3	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	4	3	5	4	4	2	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	5	3	4	2	5	3	3	3	
14	Potential in convergence of various schemes and projects and activities of Agriculture dept, horticulture dept., water and soil conservation activities etc.	3	3	4	4	5	3	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	3	4	5	5	4	5	5	0	5	4	4	4	
	Total score	34	34	27	40	51	28	25	44	34	46	45	52	32	44	43	49	42	51	37	46	36	46	40	31	43	45	54	42	47	50	34	20	51	34	35		
	Note 1:- New districts have been given an orange colour code																																					
	Note 2:- Unavailability of data will be a deterrent for development of REDD+ project. Scoring reflects this.																																					

Figure 1: Potential area selection matrix with scoring of 35 districts