

Minutes of the 1st Executive Committee Meeting of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Phase II

The first EC meeting was held under the chairmanship of Shri Ravi S. Prasad, Additional Chief Secretary Environment & Forest and chairman of Executive Committee on 22 December, 2022 at 3:30 PM in the Conference Hall of Additional Chief Secretary, Dispur.

Present:

1. Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment & Forest Department, Govt. of Assam and Chairperson of EC, APFBC.
 2. Dr. M. Ariz Ahammed, IAS, Principal Secretary to Govt. of Assam, T&D Department.
 3. Shri Manabendra Medhi, ACS, Joint Secretary to Govt. of Assam, Panchayat and Rural Development Department.
 4. Shri Swapneel Paul, IAS, Joint Secretary to Govt. of Assam, Finance Department.
 5. Shri B. C. Das, ACS, Joint Secretary to Govt. of Assam, WPT & BC Department.
 6. Shri Sandeep Kumar, IFS, Addl. PCCF (Biodiversity) & Project Director, APFBC.
 7. Dr. Amiya Kr. Sharma, Executive Director, Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi (RGVN),
 8. Shri Ajai Kumar Singh, MD, Vision ESI (Lead Partner of PISA)
 9. Shri Tirtha Lochan Ray, President, Dahikata Joint Forest Management Committee.
 10. Shri Jyoti P. Borah, President, Ouguri Eco Development Committee.
 11. Shri Janmoni Doloi, President, Mimang Mohila Atmosahayok Gut.
- (copy of attendance sheet enclosed)

Absent: Secretary, Agriculture Department, Govt. of Assam.

The 1st meeting of the Executive Committee (EC) of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) Society, Phase II, under the Environment and Forest Department, Govt. of Assam, was held on 22nd December 2022, under the Chairmanship of Shri. Ravi Shankar Prasad, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam.

At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed all the members present and asked the members of the EC to introduce themselves. The Chairperson briefly introduced the purpose of the meeting and asked the Project Director (PD), Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) Society, Phase II, to proceed with the agenda of the 1st EC meeting.

Agenda 1: SALENT FEATURES OF THE PROJECT

This being the 1st EC Meeting, the Project Director, APFBC Society informed the members about the salient features of the APFBC Phase II, its vision, goal, components, aim and the budget.

The Project Director informed the Committee about the project budget which is of €62.5 Million or INR 500 Cr comprising of AFD Share and State Share of Rs. 400 Cr (80%) and Rs.100 Cr (20%) respectively. He also informed the Committee that the Loan Agreement between AFD & DEA (Govt. of India) was signed on 19 Aug 2019, the Project Agreement between AFD & Govt. of Assam was signed on 4 Nov 2019 and the Administrative Approval was received on 5 Nov 2020.

Decisions:

1. The EC expressed its displeasure regarding non-holding of the EC meeting regularly. The Committee suggested that EC meetings and the Governing Body (GB) meetings should be held on time and regular interval as laid down.
2. The Evaluation Report of Phase - I should be uploaded on the website of the project.

Agenda 2: ACHIEVEMENTS (PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL)

The Project Director (PD) presented component-wise physical and financial progress made under the project (as of 30 November 2022) through a presentation which was circulated in hard copy to the members present. The presentation highlighted the component-wise progress and the achievements of the project till date along with the ongoing activities and status of the funds.

The PD also apprised the EC about the current challenges the project is facing. Members were informed that out of the fund received to the tune of Rs.91.17Cr, total funds disbursed till 30th November'22 is Rs.91.90 Cr. Utilization of Rs.62.82Cr. (68.9%) is received till 30th November'22 and as such the project is running with no fund currently. Moreover, in the FY 2020-21, against the Central Share release of Rs.31.09Cr. by AFD, the project received only Rs.27.98Cr. and Rs.3.11Cr. is still pending with Government of Assam.

The Chairman highlighted the importance of timely release and utilization of the funds.

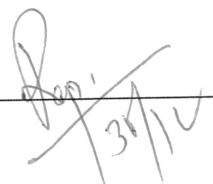
Decisions:

1. The EC noted that there has been considerable delay in releasing the fund for the project. The Committee requested the Finance Department, Government of Assam to release the project funds (AFD and State shares) at the earliest.
2. The EC advised that notices should be given to the respective forest Divisions by the first week of Jan 2023 asking for an explanation on non-utilisation of the funds and fixing 15th January, 2023 for submitting all U.Cs.
3. The Committee recommended that the society's website should be populated with the approved documents, strategies, progress and the monitoring reports, along with videos and photographs of the project activities.
4. EC suggested Project Management Committee (PMC) team & PISA (Project Implementation Support Agency), should convert all relevant documents, including the microlevel plans, in Assamese and upload on the project website for easy access by the community and to apprise the community of the project components, activities and the action points. In addition to this, PISA was advised to explore the convergence with the One District One Product (ODOP) Scheme along with other schemes of P&RD Department. Also, Banashristi as a brand of the Forest Department should be further promoted.

Agenda 3: PLANS AHEAD INCLUDING REWORKING THE SCOPE UNDER THE PROJECT AS APPROPRIATE TO MEET FOREST DEPARTMENT'S REQUIREMENT.

The updated procurement plan (Annexure-I) was shared with the EC by PD for EC's concurrence. The Plan was discussed in detail. PD informed that all major contractors would be onboarded by June, 2023.

The PD apprised the EC that there is an informal proposal from the PCCF &HoFF, Assam to procure more vehicles and infrastructure for the department for better protection of forests and wildlife by modifying the scope of the works and some of the contracts, as feasible and appropriate, under the project.



Decisions:

1. EC approved the procurement plan till December, 2022.
2. The EC observed that as the project has been conceived under an agreement between the Department of Economic Affairs, Govt. of India and AFD; as well as that between Govt. of Assam and AFD; and as the project is functioning under a legal and technical framework which is binding on the parties concerned, any modifications in the scope of the project has to be moved through proper channels of EC, GB and AFD and Finance department for approval. Savings, if any, would be an option for additions.
3. EC also observed that approved contracts should deliver as per agreed terms and conditions and any modification or cancellation may invite legal complications. Therefore, it should be avoided.
4. It was also observed that AFD Procurement Guidelines and Credit Facility Agreement (CFA) with the AFD must be strictly observed for all activities.
5. Procurement notices should be uploaded on the State Public Procurement Portal to ensure wider dissemination and better transparency.

Agenda 4: ANY OTHER MATTER WITH PERMISSION OF CHAIR

After discussion, EC took following decisions on the points raised:

1. PCCF HoFF and Activity Directors may be invited to the EC meeting as special invitees.
2. PD to send a letter to the Finance Department for release of pending payments.
3. All activities to be done as per timelines and AFD's evaluation team should also be given a timeline for according of NOC.
4. PMMC to upload Monitoring reports (component wise- plantation, QPR, Annual Report) in the websites.
5. PMMC to look into the status of all non-procurement activities including departmental buildings and follow up for the timely submission of utilization certificates.
6. The agenda note must be prepared well in advance and it is to be shared with members (EC/GB) before the meeting.
7. Approval and decisions required from the EC must be clearly presented. PMMC must have a clear understanding of the requirement from the EC.
8. PMU to follow up with Finance Department for the amount of Rs. 3.11 crore (approx.) (Central share) part of the 1st tranche lying with the Finance Department, GoA.
9. EC highlighted the importance of the project for the state and timely release of funds for successful completion of the project.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the chair.


(Ravi Shankar Prasad, IAS)

Additional Chief Secretary, Environment & Forest
&
Chairperson, Executive Committee, APFBC Society