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Minutes of the 2nd Governing Body Meeting of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Phase-II

Date & Time: 25th October 2021; 3:00 PM

Venue: Conference Hall of the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam

The 2nd meeting of the Governing Body of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC), Phase-II, under the Environment & Forest Department of the Government of Assam, was held on 25th October 2021, under the Chairmanship of Shri Jishnu Barua, IAS, Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

At the outset, the Chairman welcomed all the members present. After a brief introduction by the Principal Secretary to the Government of Assam, Environment & Forest Department on the purpose and context of the meeting, the Project Director of the APFBCS was asked to proceed with the agenda of the meeting. Following the same, the Project Director made a brief presentation on the APFBC to start with, and mentioned as follows:

1. The first phase of the project started in February 2012 and ended in May 2019. Evaluation of the Phase I was conducted by an independent agency. The Evaluation report mentioned that:
2. Around 3.74 lakh (@ 30 person-days per ha.) person day employment estimated from the Forest Department plantation.
3. Around 2.54 lakh person days employment estimated from the JFMC plantation.
 - a) Ensured around 40 to 60% of female participation in the community plantation.
 - b) Capacity development of Human Resources.
 - c) Enhanced the forest department's working conditions through better office spaces, equipment.
 - d) Improved mobility of the frontline staff.
 - e) Increased patrolling frequency and reduced the time to reach critical location by 50%.
 - f) Improved livelihood of the communities.
 - g) Enhanced infrastructure, such as construction of roads, improved the overall wellbeing of people in the villages.
4. Major learnings and challenges of Phase-I as discussed in the meeting are as follows:

Learnings:

- a) Livelihood based project design
- b) Enhance technology based monitoring
- c) Multi scale approach to various project components
- d) Strengthen the JFM/EDCs

Challenges:

- a) Institutional gaps
- b) The economic situation of the communities
- c) Vulnerability of forest dependent communities.

AGENDA NO. 1: CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE 1stGB MEETING

The Project Director of the APFBCS informed the Governing Body that the minutes of the 1st Governing Body Meeting of Phase-II, held on 26th June 2020, were circulated to all the members, and no comments were received from any member. It was requested that in this light, that the minutes of the first Governing Body Meeting of Phase-I may be confirmed.

DECISION: The Governing Body, after taking note of the same, confirmed the minutes of the first Governing Body Meeting of Phase-II.

AGENDA NO. 2: ACTION TAKEN ON THE MINUTES OF THE 1st GB MEETING:

Phase-I			
Sl.	Agenda & Clause No.	Agenda	Action Taken
1	Agenda 2, Clause-5 Page No.3	The option of adopting the E-Service Book module created by the NIC has been explored, and it would be made a part of the larger FMIS system to be created under APFBC Phase-II.	Is part of the System Integrator EOI / RFP.
2	Agenda 6, 7 & 8 Page No.4	<p>Interest accrued on Phase-I funds, loans taken from the interest accrued on Phase-1 funds & amounts temporarily adjusted from the interest accrued from Phase-II funds.</p> <p>DECISION:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Interest accrued on the project funds shall NOT be spent for activities outside the scope of the project, and to be spent only for activities within the scope of the project. If any interest accrued on the project funds is found to have been spent for activities outside the scope of the project, the Project Director shall be personally held responsible for the same. All the amounts taken as 'loan' by the O/o. The PCCF & HoFF shall be returned to the A.P.F.B.C Society immediately. The Project Director, A.P.F.B.C Phase-II shall move a proposal to the Government. requesting permission for subsuming the left over interest accrued on Phase-I funds, into state-share due for Phase-II. If approved, the interest amount shall be subsumed into the state-share. If not, the entire interest amount including the 'loans' recouped, shall be surrendered to the State Government. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complied with. Interest of INR 87.19 Lakhs, available with the APFBCS, was refunded to the Government of Assam as per the directions received from the Government. Further, INR 1.80 Crores of Interest Amount utilized for the project activities of Phase-II shall be returned after the receipt of funds under reimbursement mode from the GoA. Not complied with. Awaiting the return of INR 49.49 Lakhs of interest taken as loan by the O/o the PCCF & HoFF, so that the same can be deposited in the Government exchequer. Complied with. Status as above.
Phase-II			
3	Agenda 3 Page No.7	<p>Work Plan of Phase-II of the APFBC & Milestones</p> <p>The Governing Body took note at the milestones in the Work Plan at Phase-II of the APFBC and that the project is in its first year at present. The Governing Body directed the Project Director to complete all the milestones pertaining to the first year of the project without delay.</p>	Administrative Approval of Phase-II was received on 05.11.2020. Major procurements already done.
4	Agenda 5 Page No.7	<p>Approval on floating of EOI / RFP for the project management and monitoring consultant (PMMC) & Auditor.</p> <p>The Governing Body has noted that the Expression at interest (EOI) is already floated on 24th June, 2020 for both PMMC and Auditor pursuant to obtaining an NOC from the AFD, and gave approval to float the Request For Proposal (RFP) as per the due process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMMC is on- board since 22.01.2021. Auditor is on-board since 07.07.2021.
5	Agenda 7 Page No.8	<p>NOCs to be received on EOIs / RFPs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EOI & RFP of 'Project Implementation Support Agency' (PISA) - Revision as per AFD's suggestions dated 15th May, 2020 and 18th May, 2020 is going on. After the revision, the EOI/ RFP will be sent to the AFD for an NOC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EOI process already completed. Technical Evaluation Report (TER) sent to AFD on 04.09.2021 for NOC.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EOI & RFP of "Implementation of Forest Rehabilitation and Productivity Enhancement" sent to AFD for NOC on 18.04.2020. AFD's comments in this regard are awaited. • EOI & RFP of System Integrator for Technology Solutions for Forest and Biodiversity Conservation have been prepared. However, the AFD advised the P'MU. APFBCS to firm up the requirement in the EOI / RFP only after a pilot study is done by the PMMC on technological requirements of the department. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For 2 Lots- Contract Signed on 04.05.2021. For remaining 4 Lots, contracts awarded on 16.09.2021. • Pilot Study completed. Draft EOIs of System Integrator for Technology Solutions was sent to AFD for NOC on 30.06.2021.
6	Other Observations of the Governing Body, Page-9	In all cases where cheque-countersigning is involved, the corresponding file will be sent to the Government F.A, posted at the O/o. The PCCF & HoFF. The Project F.A. who is engaged on contractual basis will manage all other protect related financial matters, such as preparing and sending the proposals tor Financial Sanction to the Government of Assam, preparing and sending reimbursement proposals to the CAAA and AFD, assisting the Project Director in the Loan Meetings / Tripartite Portfolio Meetings, monitoring the financial progress of the 27+ procurement packages under the project etc.	Complied with.

AGENDA NO.3: PARK AND BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

The Project Director of the APFBC informed the Governing Body that the Preliminary Project Report (PPR) of the Park and Biodiversity Partnership has been approved on the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) portal. The Project Director appraised the Governing Body that the parks selected for the study tours and thematic areas of mutual learning are Kruger National Park in South Africa, and Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, have been selected in the international context, while in the national context, Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park in Assam have been selected.

Vidal De La Blache Clemence, Deputy Director, AFD-India, added that the PPR was pending for an approval from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. She also added that in December 2020, AFD had granted a grant in-aid of Rs.2.70Cr. to facilitate partnerships throughout the Indo Pacific Zone and with the French Experts was arranged. She requested the Governing Body's support to conduct the exposure visits as soon as possible since the grant in-aid shall lapse unless utilised before the end of calendar year i.e. 31st December 2021.

DECISION: The Head of Forest Force, Assam and the Principle Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Wildlife and the Project Director APFBCS were asked to visit the MoEFCC in Delhi and do the needful for the approval and conduct the exposure visits at the earliest.

AGENDA NO. 4: PHYSICAL PROGRESS

(A) CONTRACTS AWARDED

The Governing body took note of the total of five contracts awarded, valued at Rs.183.48 Cr., under APFBC Phase-II. The details are of which are given below:

Sl.	Description	Status	Value (In Cr)
1	"Implementation of Forest Rehabilitation and Productivity Enhancement under Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation- Phase II" for Lot 2 & 4	On Board. (Contract signed for Lot2 & 4 in May 2021)	63.48
2	Project Management and Monitoring Consultant (PMMC) under Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation- Phase II	On Board. (Contract signed on Jan 2021).	23.25
3	Selection of Financial Audit of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Phase II	On Board. (Contract signed on July 2021).	0.63

4	Selection of Consultant for preparation of Environmental and Social Management System and Gender Action Plan (GAP)	On Board. (Contract signed on Jan 2020).	0.20
5	"Implementation of Forest Rehabilitation and Productivity Enhancement under Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation- Phase II" for lot 1, 3, 5 & 6	Letter of Acceptance to the successful bidders issued on 16 th Sep 2021.	95.92
Total			183.48

The Governing body also took note that the Technical Evaluation Report for the Project Implementation Support Agency (PISA) for micro planning and enhancing livelihood opportunities, valued at Rs.89.40 Cr. is under evaluation and an no objection certificate (NOC) is awaited from the AFD on the same.

DECISION: The Deputy Director, AFD-India, New Delhi informed the GB that the NOC would be shared with the Project Director of the APFBC Phase-II in a week's time from AFD.

(b) PROCUREMENT UNDER PROCESS

The Governing Body took note of the procurement of the consultancy/services, goods and works under process. The table below shows the status of the procurement to be done by March 2022 with a contract value of Rs.74.12 Cr. in detail:

Procurements by March 2022			
Sl.	Description	Value (In Cr.)	Remarks
CONSULTANCY/ SERVICES			
1	Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies	3.00	EOI advertised on 08/10/2021
2	Strengthening and piloting of ABS guidelines and Capacity Building of BMCs	3.65	EOI advertised on 08/10/2021
3	System Integrator for Technology Solutions for Forest and Biodiversity Conservation	14.00	EOI Advertised on 25/10/2021
4	Landscape Management Plan, Protected Area Management Plan, Species Management Plan and Landscape-level assessment of the Asian Elephant Habitat and its populations	4.75	EOI has been sent to the AFD for an NOC
5	Design and implementation of Multimedia Communication Plan and Content Creation for Outreach Facility	15.00	
GOODS			
6	Procurement of Vehicles & equipment including for protected area management	10.50	The tender document is being sent to AFD
WORKS			
7	Buildings (Aranya Bhawan Annexe Building and HQ residence)	8.92	To be undertaken in November 2021
8	Construction of various forest department buildings	14.30	
Total		74.12	

The Governing Body also took note of the procurement of the consultancy/services, goods and works planned from April to December 2022 with a contract value of Rs.39 Cr. The table below shows the procurement value of the contracts in detail:

Procurement April to December 2022		
Sl.	Description	Value (In Cr.)
CONSULTANCY/ SERVICES		
1	Selection of Agency for Evaluation	2.00
2	Selection of agency for site selection and DPR preparation for Eco-Development Facilities, DPR for Veterinary & Rescue Facilities, Silviculture Research Facilities, preparation of Standard Building Designs for departmental buildings and DPR for Kaziranga Outreach Facility	2.00
3	Selection of Agency for Development of Wildlife Veterinary Course	0.40
GOODS		
4	Procurement of equipment and supplies for Rapid Response Teams (RRT) and Community Response Team (CRT)	7.45
5	Procurement of Equipment and Goods including those recommended by the System Integrator	14.00
6	Procurement of Drones	1.80

WORKS		
7	Selection of Contractor(s) for construction and upgradation of veterinary and rescue support infrastructure, construction of Leopard Rescue Centre and construction of Kaziranga Outreach Facility	9.65
8	Selection of contractors for Upgradation of Arboretum, development of lab for endemic species, rare and endangered flora, and development of a tissue culture lab	0.70
9	Improvement of infrastructure in forest schools including works and goods for improving physical infrastructure	1.00
Total		39.00

(C) IMPORTANT NON-PROCUREMENT ACTIVITIES:

The Governing Body also took note of the non-procurement activities with a contract value of Rs.114.00 Cr. The table below shows the details of the important non-procurement activities:

Important non-procurement activities		
Sl.	Description	Value (In Cr.)
1	Recruitment of Staff for HQ GIS Cell	2.00
2	Plantation through JFMC	31.22
3	Grassland Management	0.92
4	Artificial Water Holes	0.24
5	Wetland Management	3.31
6	Preparation of People's Biodiversity Register (PBR)	0.75
7	Implementation of BMP	3.15
8	Planning and implementation of conservation projects of important endangered and endemic floral and faunal species	0.95
9	Implementation translocation program to transfer Eastern Swamp Deer	0.85
10	Participation in national conferences	0.33
11	Participation in international conferences	0.50
12	Course revision for frontline staff	0.02
13	General trainings for frontline staff on revised course	0.50
14	Specialized trainings/workshops	0.58
15	Project Management Unit	31.60
16	Rehabari Residential Complex	4.08
17	Workshops	1.00
18	Contingency	32.00
Total		114.00

The Project Director sought the approval from the Chairman of the Governing Body on the procurement of the services, goods and works listed above.

DECISION: The Governing Body concurred the current contracts awarded, procurement plan for consultancy/services, goods and works till March 2022 and procurement plan till December 2022 and the non-procurement plan as presented in the meeting and informed the Project Director to ensure that all the procurements are completed within the time frame.

AGENDA NO. 5: FINANCIAL PROGRESS (A) BUDGET PROPOSAL AND ALLOCATION AND (B) EXPENDITURE INCURRED (C) COMMITTED LIABILITY

(A) BUDGET PROPOSAL AND ALLOCATION

The Governing Body took note of the following facts with regards to the budget proposal and allocation:

1. Phase II of the APFBC had commenced with a budget of €62.5 million (Rs.500 crore), where AFD's contribution is 80% of the budget at €50 million (Rs.400 crore), and the Government of Assam's is 20% of the budget at €12.5 million (Rs.100 crore).
2. The AFD has so far released an advance of Rs.31.0867Cr. (Rs.27.9780 Cr + Rs.3.1087 Cr) of which only Rs.27.978 Cr. has been releases by the Government of Assam to APFBCS, so far.
3. For the FY 2021-22 the Financial Sanction for an amount of Rs.57.240 Cr. was received on 07/09/2021.

(B) EXPENDITURE INCURRED

The Governing Body took note of the fact that the project has done 52% expenditure of the total fund available as of September 2021, the total expenditure incurred is in the tune of Rs.17,38,06,158.92. The expenditure incurred is Rs.11,06,68,899.34 from AFD's Share, and Rs.6,31,37,259.58 from State share.

(C) COMMITTED LIABILITY

The Governing Body took note of the fact that the immediate financial liability of APFBCS is Rs.49.14 Crore. In view of the above mentioned immediate financial liabilities, it was requested to make the funds available in the project account such that the immediate financial liabilities are met.

The details are mentioned below in the table below:

Sl.	Description	Value (In Cr.)
1	PMMC - Quarterly payments (2 Nos)	1.66
2	Plantation advance (Lot 1,3,5 & 6)	31.00
3	PISA Community	9.00
4	Vehicles, equipment, and goods	1.05
5	Building construction	1.43
6	Other consultancies	4.00
7	PMU expenditure	1.00
	Total	49.14

DECISION: Governing Body noted the urgency of the situation, and decided to pursue with the Government for timely release of funds to the project.

AGENDA NO. 6 & 7: UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND MISCELLANEOUS

The Governing Body also took note of the easily achievable activities under the APFBC Phase II, namely Ecotourism, construction of field buildings, artificial water holes, invasive weed management, Wildlife veterinary courses and Kaziranga interpretation centre. The Governing Body sought the cost estimates of the activities mentioned above. The Project Director informed that about Rs.28.81 Cr is budgeted for the said activities. The table below shows the details of the budget:

Sl.	Components/ Sub-components/ Activities	Total (INR in Cr.)
1A.4.1	Field buildings	14.32
1B.1.3e	Artificial water holes	0.24
1B.1.3g	Invasive weed management	1.11
1B.2.4	Development of wildlife veterinary course	0.4
1B.3.3	Establishment of information dissemination and interpretation/learning centers	5.21
2.4.2	Establishment of eco-development facilities & services	7.53
	Total	28.81

OTHER DISCUSSION:

The Chairman of the Governing Body suggested a few sites with potential for ecotourism and suggested the project team to study the feasibility of the sites.

The suggested sites are: Lakhimpur district, Kakojana Reserved Forest, Nam Phake Village, Margherita and Bhairabkunda. The Chairman also suggested studying the Mechuka ecotourism model in Arunachal Pradesh and explore the possibilities of replicating the same in the state wherein the local community are participating in promoting the ecotourism in Assam. Additionally, the Chairman was informed that the project team is currently identifying the sites for potential ecotourism activities. The Chairman of the Governing Body suggested the Project Director, APFBCS and his team members to attend important national as well as international conferences and bring back the learning.

a) CHALLENGES IN PHASE-II

The Governing body took note of the challenges of Phase-II. They include:

1. The AFD had disbursed an amount of EUR 4 million and it took more than 11 months to credit the amount into the APFBCS's account.
2. Critical tenders and activities are running on the reimbursement mode. An amount of Rs57.240Crore has been sanctioned but the amount is not credited to the APFBCS's account.
3. Two waves of Covid-19 and the state assembly election have impacted the pace of the project.

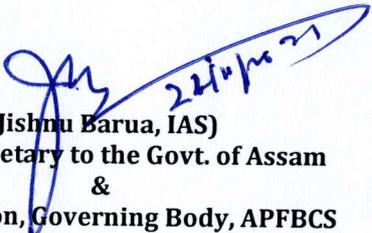
b) WAY FORWARD

The Governing Body took note of the physical and financial progress of the project and the actions to be taken at the earliest, which are as follows:

1. Early release of committed funds on the reimbursement mode
2. A mechanism to fast-track transfer of released advance to APFBCS's account
3. APFBCS to fast-track procurement and expedite actions on low hanging fruits
4. Increase the visibility of the Phase II activities at the national and international levels

One of the Governing body members suggested an interactive dashboard on the APFBC website to showcase the progress of the project vis-à-vis the milestones to cover in future.

The meeting ended with extending thanks to the Chair.


(Jishnu Barua, IAS)
Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam
&
Chairperson, Governing Body, APFBCS