

# DownToEarth

## How can India overcome policy and institutional gaps in forest management

27 April 2020



The National Forest Policy, 1988, emphasises on social and ecological needs of the people and discourages the use of forest resources for commercial purposes. The present policy also encourages the substitution of wood and prohibits the private entrepreneur from forestry operation and development activities.

The objectives of forest management defined informally by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) are growing and using more wood, drawing linkages between forests and water conservation, and improving the livelihoods of Forest Dependent Communities (FDCs).

These are the need of the hour, considering the urgency for climate change mitigation, combating land degradation and biodiversity conservation.

India is a part of the United Nations Framework Convention Climate Change, United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

It has set a voluntary target of sequestering 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide by 2030 through additional forest and tree cover, achieving 12 National Biodiversity Targets (NBTs) as well as achieving land degradation neutrality in 26 million hectares of land respectively.

However, there are policy, institutional and financial gaps to achieve these targets at the moment.

At the national level, forest and livelihood objectives are being dealt by the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), which is also the nodal ministry for minor forest produce and implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.

The implementation of the activities for improving livelihood is with the state forest departments. At the ground level, the Community Forest Resource (CFR) has to be managed by Gram Sabhas.

Most of the Gram Sabhas are not aware of these provisions and hence are not empowered in totality. In addition, they also lack capacity to manage CFR in the absence of any guidelines issued by the nodal ministry.

In order to overcome these gaps, the recognition of Gram Sabha as empowered by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and FRA is a must for managing CFR sustainably and also for improving their livelihood.

Currently, there is no [harmony](#) between MoEF&CC and MoTA for the implementation of FRA that looks at sustainability of forests along with improving the livelihood of FDCs.

Hence the solution to address this gap would be to keep forests, wildlife and tribal affairs under one ministry to resolve the domain issue of the respective ministries and implement sustainable forest management.

Another major gap in order to achieve the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target of sequestering 2.5-3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> by 2030 through additional forest cover is that the MoEF&CC being the nodal ministry, has not yet decided the baseline year to achieve it.

In addition, the nodal ministry has also not decided whether the target will be business as usual (BAU) or over and above the BAU. Two-thirds of the potential of this target lies with trees grown outside forests which is termed as agroforestry but its domain is with Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).

However, in reality, the policy decisions and other technical issues are being dealt by MoEF&CC.

Apart from this, there are many other policy and financial gaps to achieve the target. However, if the gaps are addressed and if the target is achieved, by default, we will be achieving sustainable forest management objectives and improving the income of FDCs.

Article 21 of the Constitution of India calls for providing a clean and healthy environment to every person residing in the country. The apex court of the country has also established the concept of Polluter Pay Principle in various judgments.

Hence, one of the best solutions to achieve the NDC, NBT and land degradation neutrality targets would be to come up with the policy of carbon neutrality by the Government of India.

In addition, some other good solutions to achieve these targets would comprise of Gram Sabha-based forest governance, enhancing livelihood of FDCs under the principle of sustainability, Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) of bio resource to the community, policy interventions and bridging the institutional gaps for achieving voluntary targets along with improving income of rural India, particularly tribal.

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/forests/how-can-india-overcome-policy-and-institutional-gaps-in-forest-management-70718>