

Background Note for the Talk at IIC, Delhi on 17.02.2021 (16.00 to 17.00 Hrs IST)

“Targeting Sustainability of Forests through Certification and NCCF Standards”

by

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Sustainability of Forests is Important:

Forests play a critical role in amelioration of the global environment, alleviating effects of climate change and natural disasters, are an integral part of water and carbon cycles, conserve biodiversity, provide food, medicine, wood and renewable raw materials for our diverse requirements. It is one of the primary sectors that contribute significantly to our economy, providing a large variety of tangible and intangible benefits for the people at large and are a prime source of livelihood for millions of poor people. Significance of forests on a global scale reinforces the need to manage forests in a sustainable manner and ensure benefits from forests for the present and future generations.

Forests cover 31% of earth's surface area (~4.06 billion hectares). The World's forest area has shrunk by 178 million hectares since 1990, as per Global Forest Resource Assessment 2020 of FAO. Around 30% of forests are used primarily for production of wood and Non -Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) and only 50% of world forests have management plans. Due to the rising demand and unsustainable utilization of the forest resources there has been a decline in forest area leading to a decrease in total forest carbon stocks.

India is blessed with rich and varied wealth of forests and wildlife, which are being managed on scientific lines for the last more than 150 years. It ranks 10th in terms of forest area in the world, accounting for 2% of total forest cover of the world. India has 16 major forest types and is one of the 17 mega-diverse countries with four global biodiversity hotspots. As per India State of Forest Report, 2019, total forest and tree cover constitute 80.72 mha (24.56% of the geographical area).

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in International Dialogue:

Forest management is a long-term process. There has been a paradigm shift from timber primacy to ecological and stakeholders-oriented forestry, focus being on sustainable forest management (SFM), an approach that balances environmental, socio-cultural and economic objectives of forest management. Of late, SFM has been in focus in various international dialogues.

Sustainable Development Goals: SDGs are major drivers in efforts to halt deforestation and forest degradation worldwide. We have to strengthen the positive contributions that forests play in achieving SDGs, particularly no poverty, zero hunger, climate action, life on land and combating desertification.

Article 5 of Paris Agreement recognizes REDD+ as a fundamental element, for tackling climate change as well as to conserve and enhance Biological Carbon Reservoir of forests and other ecosystems.

India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), submitted to UNFCCC, seeks to create additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tonnes CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover (increase of about 680-817 million tonnes of carbon stock).

Bonn Challenge: Restoring 21 mha of degraded and deforested land by 2030 (this was enhanced to 26 mha by Hon'ble Prime Minister during COP14 of UNCCD held at New Delhi in 2019).

Forest Certification is increasingly recognized as an important tool and enabler of sustainability in forest management and meeting our international commitments under the SDGs, UNFCCC, UNCBD and UNCCD.

About Forest Certification:

Forest certification, an emerging global movement, is sustainability based, voluntary, non-regulatory, facilitative, conservation and marketing tool that promotes sustainable management of forests/trees outside forests. It includes forest monitoring, tracing and labelling of timber and non-timber forest products. It brings in enhanced credibility to our forest governance with international recognition and improves market accessibility of our forest products. It helps us in verifying the missing but desirable components in management plan and practices and in ascertaining the mechanisms to strengthen the management.

Forest certification helps increase domestic availability of certified raw material, reduce trade of illegal wood/wood based products, promote domestic industries and MSMEs and encourages robust linkage with domestic markets, at par with the international markets. It essentially acknowledges a country's dedication to responsible forest management and its efforts to maintain a sustainable supply of forest products and services from healthy, diverse, and productive ecosystems.

Certification evaluations/audits are conducted by independent third party certification bodies (conformity assessment bodies), based on some pre-set parameters (standards), that are internationally benchmarked and covering environmental, economic, social and management aspects. With a view to provide accreditation to the competent certification bodies (CBs), NCCF has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Board for Accreditation of Certification Bodies (NABCB), a constituent Board of the Quality Council of India (QCI) and a member of International Accreditation Forum (IAF), thus facilitating international equivalence to India's certifications.

Forest Certification Schemes:

The Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are the two leading internationally recognised certification organizations. Many Asian countries like Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, China, Korea, Thailand, and recently India have also developed their national forest certification schemes that have been endorsed for international recognition. NCCF Forest Management Certification Standard is the first ever Indian scheme of forest certification that is endorsed

by PEFC, giving it global recognition. This brings India into the club of Asian nations with their own indigenous forest certification scheme.

Numerous case stories on certification are available that clearly establish how certification strengthens sustainability of forests, community benefits and access to domestic, regional and international markets at a price generally higher than what is obtained through trade of 'normal' timber products.

About PEFC:

PEFC, established in 1999, is an international non-profit, non-governmental organisation promoting Sustainable forest management through third-party certification. It is an umbrella organization that works by endorsing nationally developed forest certification schemes, following the PEFC Benchmark Standards, under a mutual recognition system. PEFC is now a leading global alliance of 53 national members, with 46 endorsed national forest certification systems, accounting for around 325 million hectares of certified forests.

About the Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests:

NCCF is a registered society, comprising experts, professionals and stakeholders, engaged in development of India specific and globally benchmarked sustainability standards for various constituents of our natural resource base, as its core working area, apart from working for policy advocacy, training and capacity building through multi-stakeholder engagement.

Our primary focus has been on sustainable management of forests and trees outside forests through indigenous certification schemes. India has got multiple forests types and a diversity of scientific and traditional forest management practices. A country specific certification system ensures the required flexibility and adaptability in addressing sustainable management needs of such a diverse forests. Many State Forest Departments in India have initiated action for certification of a few forest divisions.

Recently, Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation (UPFC) has taken up certification of 41 forest divisions, extending over an area of around 4.5 lakh hectares using NCCF; PEFC Forest Management Certification Scheme. PEFC General Assembly of 2020, has awarded three countries Certificates of Appreciation for gaining the greatest increase in PEFC certified forest area in the world during the period Sept. 2019 to Sept. 2020, the first being Malaysia, second NCCF India and Korea stood third in ranking for the same period.

NCCF is also simultaneously developing standards for Non-Wood Forest Products, Protected Areas and Wetlands, Ecotourism, Quality Planting Material, Biofuel and Biomass, Land Degradation Neutrality and Safeboards (*safe emission levels of formaldehyde from the composite wood products*).

NCCF's efforts are fully in sync with the objectives of the Indian National Strategy for Standardization (INSS), propounded by the Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, to provide direction for India's political and executive leadership on how to best use standardization, technical regulations, quality infrastructure and related activities to advance the interests and well-being of the Indians in a global economy.

NCCF is setting up a Carbon Registry-India , which is a major endeavour to provide a carbon trading and tracking platform for verified net Green House Gases emissions reductions and removals enhancement with Sustainable Development Contributions.

Natural and renewable forest fibres have a huge potential to make the fashion industry more sustainable. PEFC has launched a campaign ‘Fashions Change, Forests Stay’ to raise awareness amongst the textiles/fashion industry to source forest based fibres from sustainably managed forests. NCCF is contemplating to initiate this campaign in collaboration with associated and allied stakeholders of the fashion industry- fashion brands, manufacturers, retailers, packaging, raw material suppliers, fashion and design institutes, experts and government departments and ministries.

NCCF's Sustainability Standards have a great potential to contribute towards achieving SDG goals, sustainable forest management, our international commitments for climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation and land restoration.

“Grow more wood-use more wood” is Good for Environment:

In the context of ongoing global dialogues on Climate Change, use of wood products is emerging as a versatile renewable alternative to its competing non-wood products, that have higher embedded energy with adverse environmental implications. Trees sequester atmospheric carbon in the growth process and the carbon continues to remain locked in the wood products. It is therefore necessary to increase the use of wood and wood products in construction, furnishing and interiors, paper and packaging, handicrafts, agricultural implements and fuel for household needs etc.

A High Level Expert Group constituted by the XV finance Commission its report submitted in July 2020, mentioned that in 2017 total consumption of wood was 65 million cum of which 3 million cum (about 5%) was produced from forests, around 47 Million cum (72%) was produced from plantations (mainly agroforestry systems), and balance 15 million cum (23%) was imported.

The wood used for manufacturing products for exports and even for domestic consumption should ideally come from the certified forests/ToF in view of the rising concerns about sustainability and legality of wood. Wood based industries should adopt voluntary certification for domestic markets by making certification as a requirement in public procurement policies. Recently the Prime Minister of India in his talk ‘Man ki Baat’ has impressed that India should adopt global standards. Large scale adoption of certification by Wood Based Industries will contribute to doubling the farmers’ income and facilitate implementation of ‘Make in India Programme’ and ‘Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’(self -reliant India). As a country we need to integrate the concept of “*Grow more wood-use more wood*” in our developmental and environmental priorities.

Way Forward to promote Certification:

- Mainstreaming forest certification should be on top of the sustainability agenda- globally, nationally and locally.
- Need of a strong policy guideline or legislative arrangement for forest certification.
- Voluntary schemes should influence National/ International legislation.
- Promote certification in collaboration with central ministries, state governments, industry, civil society organizations and forest-based stakeholders.
- Promoting “green public procurement” by focusing on due diligence, responsible sourcing and certification in public/ private sector’s procurement policies.
- Increase domestic production of wood through production forestry and agroforestry and gradually reduce imports
- ***“Grow More Wood and Use More Wood” is Good for Environment.***
