



## **The Odisha Community-REDD Project: A Brief Report on the Accomplishments**

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*Compiled by:*



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## Introduction:

Regional Centre for Development Cooperation (RCDC) evolved as a civil society organization primarily with an objective of consolidating community stake in forest governance. Since its inception in 1993 it has seen many dynamics on the CFM (community forest management) front, and has pioneered initiatives that have been necessary for strengthening CFM activities with the need of changing times. The Odisha community-REDD project was one of the latest in such initiative, but it was a bit different in the sense that RCDC took up this project on a pilot basis for experimental purpose so as to see how far REDD+ appears to be feasible under the local circumstances and also to what extent it can actually help the CFM. The pilot project was more of a kind of learning-cum-preparatory activity rather than an actual implementation (because RCDC could not have taken the chance of implementing any action plan, in this case REDD+. that has been apprehended for causing possible impairment to the community stake), and after it was over the learning as well as the impact of the project on local CFM dynamics was found to be remarkable.

## The red REDD:

Reducing Emission from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) was supposed to be one of the key strategies for combating climate change. Stopping deforestation was the objective. Later on, the scope of this intervention was extended to conservation, management and development of existing forests and these additional activities made it REDD+. International funding support was arranged to provide incentives for such activities, particularly to enable the concerned stakeholders to take preparatory steps to this effect. Once the deforestation is stopped and/or the forest conservation/management/development activity gets itself established in a standard manner, the 'owner' of such forest is supposed to be eligible for selling the carbon-absorbing capacity of the forest in the carbon credit market.

However, worldwide concerns against the mechanism of REDD+ pointed out several red facets of this scheme. On the technical ground, the definition of terms like 'forest' and 'afforestation' were hardly satisfying from ecological point of view. From socio-economic perspective the ownership was a debatable issue as it was understood that the resources

of indigenous communities had been tactfully/forcefully taken over by the government, and the restrictions imposed in the name of forest conservation and management are likely to affect the livelihood of the forest-dependent communities. Making CFM a marketable commodity was another possible risk involved. The most fundamental issue was: why should the conservation efforts of our communities be sold for benefit of the environmental culprits of the developed countries? This is why the civil society debate on REDD and REDD+ continues even today.???

However, international governments did not pay much attention to such debates and agreed on promoting REDD+ with logic that the forest conserving communities will receive an additional financial gain from this scheme which would be encouraging for them. The Government of India launched five pilot projects across the country one of which happens to be in the Angul district of Odisha. This government project is implemented on a joint forest management (JFM) mode in which the government shares the stake with the communities in forest management and resource sharing though the REDD benefit is supposed to be for the protecting community only.

Months before this government REDD project was launched, the community REDD project was launched in India as an outcome of the collaboration between Plan Vivo (PV) and Community Forestry International(CFI). CFI worked as a facilitator in helping the local communities in the pilot areas of India to set up the necessary standards at field level that would make them eligible for entry in the carbon credit market. This was called community REDD because it made some special endeavour to make the whole mechanism community-friendly claiming the community stake to be foremost. The community-friendly standards were determined by Plan Vivo which maintained a lot of flexibility for community-level compliances.

### **RCDC as a CFI partner:**

RCDC's long standing contribution in the field of CFM made the Regional Representative of CFI interested in approaching the former for a consideration of the pilot project on community REDD. RCDC has an understanding that with changing times and generations the CFM dynamics requires some new mechanism so as to sustain the effort. This was particularly in context of the newer generation focusing more on urban livelihood and losing interest in village resources. As CFI assured that the community-REDD project would be a community friendly mechanism that could help sustain the CFM activity with several advantages, RCDC decided to experiment with it in one of its intervention areas: the

Balangir district. It is very much noteworthy here that PV insisted on Payment for Ecosystem Services(PES) to the communities, and saw REDD+ as one of the potential options for PES. That is to say, PV and CFI claimed to actually promote PES and not exactly REDD. While RCDC has been against commoditisation and commercialization of ecosystem services, particularly when corporate agencies and/or the government make attempts to this effect with vested interest. Rural communities have been known in some cases to have adopted PES within their own limitations and local feasibility, such as charging a nominal fee on timber and bamboo collected from the forests under their protection; and this not only helps them in village development but also discourages the lackadaisical attitude in accessing forest products that could have prevailed under free pass. That way a global linkage on PES doesn't sound like an anti-community initiative. But when there is an apprehension of the innocence of the communities being taken advantage of for corporate purposes or any other purpose that the communities themselves would not have liked on moral grounds atleast, and/or with the business approach taking over the traditional community sense of fraternity leading to a damage of the societal values in community resource management, all system includes PES that have such risks come under our scrutiny. RCDC therefore remained cautious in attempting this experiment.

The project period was initially for six months(January-June 2012), but understanding the difficulty in implementing it so quickly it was later extended later to December 2012 without any additional financial provision.

### **The project area:**

The pilot project area selected for the community-REDD preparatory activities was in the Saintala Forest Range of Balangir district where a cluster of 33 villages was taken covering



**Community initiatives successfully regenerated and conserved forests in some parts of the district.**  
Photo from Katapalli.



**Forest degradation is rampant in many areas of the district.** Photo from Dumdumi.

a forest area of about 10000 hectares. Some of these villages were pure CFM communities having no affiliation to the Forest Department, some were JFM villages, and some were JFM in pen & paper but CFM in practice. However, not all of the forests protecting committees were active. Some committees were quite established in community forest management while some were almost defunct or inactive. The forest is basically of peninsular Sal type, but mixed Sal forest is also found. The forest area was more or less good in condition. The social groups were heterogeneous in nature, tribals and non-tribals shared the habitat.

### **Project interventions:**

As a part of the project intervention strategy, RCDC organized a state-level multi-stakeholders' workshop on community forestry and REDD+, at Bhubaneswar on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012 which brought in representatives of various important stakeholder groups on a common platform so as to discuss REDD+. RCDC expected that the inputs received through this consultation would be useful in making the intervention strategy more proper and effective. The event however resulted in the realization that there was a communication gap between the various stakeholder groups, and that there was a critical need of sincere sharing of relevant information with each other, more particularly for the communities.

The project approach was essentially participatory. When it was observed that although the forest area was more or less in good condition, there was some localised degradation; the participatory assessment led to the identification of the following drivers of deforestation:

- Urban pressure(from the Saintala township and adjoining areas)
- Unsustainable harvesting
- Nexus between smugglers and some Forest Department (FD) staff.

This degradation and deforestation activity was to be stopped while the existing resources were to be managed and developed properly. As such the following mitigation measures were decided:

- Strengthening community governance initiatives of natural resources
- Skill building of forest dwelling communities on sustainable harvesting and other scientific approach of forest management
- Enhancing livelihood option
- Increasing awareness
- Assisted Natural Regeneration
- Increasing interaction with FD, urban people, etc.
- Networking/ exposure

The strategy for livelihood security included the following:

- Identification of viable forest base livelihood
- Building entrepreneurial mindset
- Scoping of alternative livelihood
- Leveraging with government scheme

Considering the financial limitations of the project itself, RCDC took up the most immediately feasible activity first: activating and strengthening the CFM activity. This included all kinds of community initiatives including JFM. Village meeting were organized and people were sensitized for the relevant aspects of forest management. Discussions on the scope in, threats to, and limitations of community-based forest management were made with them, and the objective of REDD+ was also shared with in a way comfortable to their psychology. This helped in activating and strengthening the local CFM activities.

Regarding REDD+ and carbon market the communities had a clear say: they would support only those who are sincere in protecting the environment, and not those who are actually culprits. That is to say, they would not sell their carbon offset (if any) to any notorious individual or agency. It may be mentioned here that Plan Vivo created this scope for the communities so that they could chose the buyers.

It is interesting to note here that a critical analysis of the preliminary findings of study(outsourced<sup>1</sup>) on the perception of pilot communities on forest, livelihood and REDD+, followed by RCDC's own direct interactions with the communities clearly revealed that the communities were susceptible to any kind of external/biased influence on REDD+ as they had now understanding of their own in this matter. They see forest as a part of their life, and not as a commodity. Their life and livelihood has a symbiotic relationship with the forest and monetizing this forest has never been their priority. Moreover, they lacked the capacity to understand REDD+ as a technical concept. Hence, RCDC adopted a community-friendly approach to explain the concept which led them to frankly tell that they were



A follow up field interaction by RCDC in Jhankarmunda village after the perception study done by the consultant.

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<sup>1</sup> The consultant however did not complete the study and RCDC had to terminate the agreement.

ready to share the benefits of their good initiatives for the cause of humanity provided it should not be misused in any way. That means, their objective was not money but goodwill. It was obvious for RCDC to make all possible/feasible efforts to protect such innocence from the vested interest dynamics, be it local or global.

The next step was to facilitate the CFR claims under the Forest Rights Act as without clear tenurial rights the eligibility for carbon marketing would not arise. RCDC however did it as a part of the larger commitment for facilitating the implementation of FRA, as it has been doing long before the community REDD project was launched. CFR applications were filed for almost all the villages excepting one or two because of some intra-village issues or other limitations.

Networking was strengthened in the area under the aegis of the District Forestry Forum, Balangir.

As a parallel initiative the forest resources were assessed technically through an ecological survey by an expert. Dr. Debal Dev, noted ecologist, made this assessment and his findings can be summarized as under:

- The forest under study constitutes is rich in floral diversity, most of which are Class A and Class B timber trees. About 30% of the forest is well-stocked, frequently with old growth trees and old lianas, which indicates relatively low levels of perturbation in these patches. The overall density of trees above 15 cm GBH marks the forest patches to be moderately dense, interspersed with low density patches, where removal and slow regeneration of trees are noticed. Trees are frequently harvested for meeting the needs of village households. A majority of the trees are below 40 cm GBH.
- Tree density and basal area was found to be inversely correlated with the distance from the village to the forest locations. The density of stumps was positively correlated with distance. This is plausibly because the villagers customarily protect the forest patches adjacent to their villages, while going deeper into the forest for collecting NTFP. People from distant villages from the other end of the forest also visit the same patches to collect fuel wood from bordering locations.
- Despite the large impact of disturbance on tree densities and basal area, the density of cut stumps and the distance from the village had no significant correlation with tree species richness ( $S$ ). This indicates that human disturbance,

although it affected species composition, does not seem to affect species richness in the forests under study.

- The analysis of the current status of the forest architecture and floral composition does not indicate any proximate threat to the forest biodiversity.
- The villagers' method of bamboo harvesting has been detrimental to the growth of bamboo.
- At several sites other than the five sites under study, removal of old trees (with GBH > 15 cm) is frequent. People from neighbouring villages frequently visit the forest site Runimahul to steal poles on bicycles, with the result that the forest is severely depleted of older trees.
- Following the conversion equation given in Sharma et al. (2010)<sup>2</sup>, the amount of carbon stored in the forest wood biomass is estimated at approximately 26042.30 Mg<sup>3</sup> over the entire forest area, comprised by the five study sites. Continuation of the prevailing process of wood removal and deceleration of the natural rate of regeneration will invariably lead to a gross deficit in the environmental carbon sequestration.

Some other activities such as assisted natural regeneration (ANR) could not be taken up due to project limitations though an appraisal regarding ANR was made outsourcing the expertise of a retired forester Mr. Raghunath Padhee.

### **Carbon credit potential:**

Based on the analysis of the forest cover change in the district(annexure-3),CFI estimated the carbon credit potential the Saintala project area as under:

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<sup>2</sup> Sharma, C M, N P Baduni, S Gairola, S K Ghildiyal & S Suyal 2010. Tree diversity and carbon stocks of some major forest types of Garhwal Himalaya. *Forest Ecology and Management* 260: 2170-2179.

<sup>3</sup> Million gram

Forest Carbon Credit Category	Basic Calculation used for Estimate	Carbon Credits Generated during Years 1 to 10 (2012-2021)
REDD+ - Avoided Deforestation of Dense Forests	2,439 ha dense forests (reduced forest loss from 4% to 1%) = 73 ha avoided loss per year at 60 t C/ya. X 3.67	Year 1 - 16,075 tCO <sub>2</sub> e Year 10 - 16,075 tCO <sub>2</sub> e
Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) in Open Forests	1 to 1.5 tCO <sub>2</sub> e per year /ha. (total 6893 ha. open forests) at 689 ha./year	Year 1 - 700 tCO <sub>2</sub> e Year 10 - 10,000 t CO <sub>2</sub> e

(Courtesy: Mark Poffenberger, CFI)

## Conclusion:

This project ended even before the experiment was complete. Apart from the limitation of the project itself, the following factors also had some adverse impact on the programme:

- Local system not quite favourable at present to be compatible with the requirements of REDD+. People are more comfortable with their informal systems and limited focus.
- There are some internal problems among the target communities (like, inter-village or inter-hamlet conflicts)
- REDD+ as a concept is not very well known/understood among CSOs, and the community, etc.

The techno - bureaucratic aspect of the REDD+ project was also another difficult factor. CFR claims were made but the bureaucratic system did not allow for its easy and early settlement which is why the claims still remain to be approved.

A major learning of the project was that the success of any REDD project critically required a case of substantial degradation or deforestation. Although such cases are very much there and a visit to the neighbourhood of Saintala area revealed that a considerable forest area in the neighbouring region was severely degraded, RCDC was not comfortable with an approach that would prioritize the case



Women of Bagartipada asserted equal stake in forest protection

of degradation and not the existing successful conservation. At the same time, the work initiated to strengthen the local CFM activities and network created public enthusiasm and people now need this activity to be continued. RCDC sensitized the forest-protecting villages not only on the societal value addition (such as gender & equity concerns) but also on technical value addition (such as NTFP/biodiversity/wildlife management). The CFR claim filed for the project villages was another major breakthrough. While RCDC will continue working for the cause of CFM in future, the experiment on REDD could not be carried out to a conclusive accomplishment because of constraint of funds.

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## Annexure-1

### Technical dimensions of the project area

- Geo-references of the core intervention area(Saintala Range, Balangir district): 20°26'29.59" N, 83°20'35.43" E (Elevation:184 m)
- Forest type: mixed peninsular sal(*Shorea robusta*) forests with lot of scope for Assisted Natural Regeneration.
- About 91 community forestry groups with 45 fully active and 31 inactive committees.
- About 20000 hectares of forest under community projection.
- Approx. 50% of these forests are 'open forests' with a high scope of community-based ANR.
- Legal tenure virtually secured under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Application for tenurial rights of the communities submitted under the Act.
- Proposed to be certified under Plan Vivo Standards.
- Proposed methodology for monitoring of benefits: participatory, technical (remote sensing/GIS/ground survey).
- Approx. carbon credit to be generated through avoided deforestation in dense forests(2439 ha) from 4% to 1%: Year 1 - 16,075 tCO<sub>2</sub>e
- Approx. carbon credit to be generated through ANR in open forests(6893 ha) @ 1 to 1.5 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per year /ha : Year 1 - 700 tCO<sub>2</sub>e.

(Note: The estimations of open forest area are based on the observation of Mr.S. Palit, IFS(retd.), Regional Representative, CFI whereas the approximate carbon estimations are courtesy Mark Poffenberger, Executive Director, CFI.)

## Annexure-2

### Some details of the project area

SL NO	Name of the Village	Total No of House hold	Forest area under community management (in arce)			in hectare (approx)	Forest management system prevailing		
			Revenue Forest	Reserve Forest	Total		CFM	JFM	Other
1	Patamara	112	1050.82		1050.82		JFM		
2	Lathakend	91	45.64		45.64		CFM		
3	Jhimanpali	99	118.46		118.46			JFM	
4	Rengali bahal	78	1183.83		1183.83			JFM	
5	Dabjor	256	2664.30		2664.30		CFM		
6	Ekagudi	56	269.55		269.55			JFM	
7	Talbahal`	107	108.26		108.26			JFM	
8	Saledamak	105	329.49		329.49				
9	Suliamal	43	592.68		592.68			JFM	
10	Kharlikani	57	59.38		59.38		CFM		
11	Bagjor	65	614.08		614.08			JFM	
12	Runimahul	63	519.03		519.03			JFM	
13	Manumunda	24	97.39		97.39				
14	Badmunda	65	23.61		23.61		CFM		
15	Kandhkelgaon	333	138.08		138.08		CFM		
16	Jaliadarah	166	25.67		25.67			JFM	
17	Gurlamal	35	22.62		22.62		CFM		
18	Dangarpara	36	185.18		185.18			JFM	
19	Junanimal	24	533.04		533.04			JFM	
20	Sandasmunda	106	84.75		84.75			JFM	
21	Kermeli	86	60.74		60.74		CFM		
22	Karlabahali	18	234.36		234.36			JFM	

23	Burda	221	202.18		202.18		CFM		
24	Bijapadar	38	12.31		12.31		CFM		
25	Dhunkeda	85	30.57		30.57			JFM	
26	Lamkani	89	148.23		148.23			JFM	
27	Dumermunda	164	232.93		232.93			JFM	
28	Kumbhari		321.06		321.06			JFM	
29	Kareldhua	72	101.20		101.20			JFM	
30	Saintala	30	67.08		67.08			JFM	
31	Saintala	42	90.00		90.00			JFM	
32	Saintala	52	100.00		100.00			JFM	
33	Bramhani	294	86.50		86.50			JFM	
	Total	3112	10353.02	0	10353.02	4141.2			

**Details of Reserve Forest (RF) to be covered under the proposed project (area in hectares)**

1	Sulia RF	2907.2
2	Samara RF	609.08
3	Jogijhula Rf	340.45
4	Barghati RF (Partial)	700
5	Khusa RF (Partial)	1400
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10097.93</b>

(As on 12-2-2012)

## Index:

	Villages having JFM but functioning like CFM	5 villages
	Under CFM mode	9 villages
	under JFM mode	22 villages
	FRA claim submitted	11 villages
	Having strong forest management	22 villages
	Having moderate forest management	4 villages
	Having weak forest management	5 villages
	Not having any kind of forest management mechanism	2 villages

### Annexure-3

Forest Cover Change in Balangir District (Area in km<sup>2</sup>)

Year	Dense	Open Forest	Total Forest Cover	Percentage of GA
2001	504	488	992	15.09
2003	352	600	952	14.48
2005	340	611	951	14.46
2007	294	640	934	14.20
2011	293	644	937	14.25
2001-2011	Annual Dense Forest Loss = 4.2%			

Sources: State of Forest Report, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011.

Note: Gross area(GA) of the district is 6575 sq. km.

([http://www.ordistricts.nic.in/district\\_profile/dist\\_glance.php](http://www.ordistricts.nic.in/district_profile/dist_glance.php))