

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management

The National Task Force on Sustainable Forest Management appointed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, in its report submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests in July 2000, recommended the creation of a Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Cell in the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The report also recommended the creation of similar SFM cells in each of the Indian States and Union Territories.

The concept of sustainability originated from the World Conservation Strategy (1980) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). In order to meet the objectives of both conservation and development at the same time, the concept of sustainability as a strategic approach was recommended to meet the goals of: (1) sustainable utilisation of resources; and (2) conservation of the ecosystem and biodiversity. Broadly speaking, SFM refers to the use and conservation of forests for the benefit of the present and future generations, whereas Criteria and Indicators (C&I) are used to define, assess and monitor the progress towards SFM.

Subsequent to the report of the National Task Force, the Ministry of Environment and Forests issued a circular in 2000 to the Forest Secretaries and Principal Chief Conservators of Forests of all the States and Union Territories, requiring them to operationalise the C&I approach for SFM. Sustainable Forest Management, thus, focuses on the C&I system to assess and fulfill the objectives of managing the forests on a sustainable basis.

The Inter-Governmental processes generally prescribe the use of seven thematic elements as a framework for monitoring, assessing, and reporting on progress towards SFM. The Bhopal - India process (1999), coordinated by IIFM, Bhopal, was aimed at setting up the National level Criteria and Indicators to assess SFM in India. The deliberations under the Bhopal - India Process led to the identification of eight national level criteria and 43 indicators, applicable at the national level, to adopt Indian forest management in a three-tier hierarchical structure.

The C&I approach was also discussed during the meeting of Forest Secretaries, PCCFs and CWLWS in January, 2006 and it was decided to undertake further follow up action by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the State/ UT Forest Departments.

Terms of Reference (ToR) for the SFM Cell

- To act as the nodal point for all matters related to SFM in India and to encourage the development of national programmes aimed at sustainable utilisation, conservation of forests and maintaining their ecological balance
- To facilitate the common understanding of concepts, terms and definitions related to C&I and to strengthen their process and inter-process cooperation
- To develop the mechanism for implementation of C&I for SFM and to strengthen the related communication and information management systems

- To integrate the broad framework of the SFM principles into the working plan code of the ministry
- To create a synergy between the C&I developed through the Bhopal - India Process and that developed by other agencies at the international level
- To facilitate the setting up of similar SFM Cells in all the State / UT forest departments

Main Functions of the SFM Cell

- Enable political and administrative environment toward C&I approach for SFM
- Institutionalise the C&I approach through incorporation in the National Working Plan Code and its application in the states
- Apply C&I approach in the light of the ITTO Objective 2000 - certification of forest products, particularly NWFPs
- Encourage research and development on various aspects of C&I such as the development of sets of C&I at state levels, determining the standard values (Minimum Acceptable Standard - MAS) for the indicators at National/State/FMU levels
- Facilitate information/data collection on C&I and exchange from different State / UT Forest Departments in India

First Meeting of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Cell: July 26 - 27, 2007

The Deputy Inspector General of forests (Survey and Utilisation Division) made a detailed presentation on the Criteria and Indicators for SFM and certification. Describing the ITTO, C&I and its comparison with Bhopal - India Process, he emphasised on the need for early improvement of national C&I on the basis of their experiences with the FMUs in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The DIG (SU) also specified that such C&I should address all the parameters for SFM so that the certification mechanism developed for the certification of forests on their basis can be universally accepted. He further described and highlighted the role of certification in achieving SFM, the various documents in this respect, and the available funding opportunities for operationalising C&I in the field by the State Governments. He went on to briefly mention the detailed observations of the State Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh on the basis of their experiences in operationalising C&I in the FMUs.

The eight Criteria and 43 Indicators developed under the Bhopal - India Process were discussed at length against the background of DIG (SU) and States of MP, Chhattisgarh and IIFM presentations. Each Criteria and Indicator was discussed vis-a-vis annotations / norms, visualising the International approaches for the same, including ITTO. The two-day meeting of the SFM Cell was very useful and a detailed matrix of modified / improved C&I was developed along with major recommendations with the active participation and contribution of all the members and special invitees (Details can be browsed at <http://envfor.nic.in>). □