



Forest Governance Strategy Group

Draft Concept Paper

Introduction and Rationale for constituting FGSG:

The Forest Governance Strategy Group (FGSG) is an attempt to take forward the Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG), an initiative supported by International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), U.K. During the course of FGLG discussions, the members realized and agreed that forest administration in India is currently stuck in a vicious circle where it is the lowest priority in the political spectrum. The members stressed on the need for taking forth the focussed group discussion forum to pioneer legal and administrative solutions to change the status quo in forestry in India. Accordingly, following the successful completion of FGLG in March 2013, IIED and Enviro Legal Defence Firm (ELDF) decided to build on the discussions and lessons learnt from FGLG with a newly formulated national level peer group, team to be known as “Forest Governance Strategy Group” (FGSG), on sustainable forestry in India and South Asia.

Proposed Approach and Objectives of FGSG

The FGSG’s primary objectives would be to:

- *Constitute a ‘think-tank’ to strengthen forest governance in India and South Asia;*
- *Build an all encompassing platform of forestry experts for an ongoing dialogue on the challenges, knowledge exchange, potential solutions, and dissemination of information with the stakeholders;*
- *Bridge the huge communication gap between the executive and the legislature and amongst the executive also, as far as forest governance is concerned.*

The FGSG would build upon the completed activities and accumulated experience of FGLG India. Each of the members of the FGSG would use their expertise on different aspects of forest governance, to contribute to what is already acknowledged as a useful platform for responding to new policy developments, bringing emerging issues to the attention of policymakers and ensuring that national level proposals affecting forest governance are well-



informed by field-level reality. Further, a new website dedicated to FGSG discussed was launched on the second meeting (June 29, 2015) linking FGLG website to the signal the new entity and approach. FGSG website would be further developed into a storehouse of South Asian forest law and policy -related data and discourse for the rest of the world.

Key Working Themes for the Group: (revised after the first FGSG meeting)

The proposed key working themes that are decided by the group are:

- *Forest & People: Participatory Forest Management, Livelihoods & Forest Settlements*
- *Law, Policy, Regulatory & Institutions on Forests (including International laws)*
- *Climate, REDD+ & PES*
- *Markets & Private Sector: Agroforestry and Forest-based Enterprises*

Plans for the Group Meetings:

ELDF proposes to conduct two meetings in Delhi with FGLG members along with several special invitees for discussion and charting out the road map for FGSG. These meetings will bring together FGLG members along with other potential members in order to further discuss and develop ongoing plans for the formation and structure of the FGSG. Efforts shall also be made to provide a legal recognition to the group which would give it the required impetus and would probably make it relevant to the governments across nations. The FGSG vision, biannual targets as well as the long-term objectives of the group would be decided in these meetings. The group meetings would also plan the specific activities to be undertaken in the upcoming 6 months period from April to October 2015.

The upcoming FGSG meetings would set out the themes and immediate activities such as producing an academic paper, article, or a blog on forest governance issues in India and other South Asian countries by the end of March 2015. The policy inputs by the various members would be published on the IIED and FGSG website.



Logistical Support for the Group:

Currently, the coordination and administrative support is being provided by ELDF. The existing members of FGLG and the network developed by ELDF through its USAID supported project on 'Strengthening Participatory Forest Management in India' (SPFMI) could also be invited to formally join the group. Due to initial paucity of funds, part of the funds is being borne by ELDF partly through IIED and partly through USAID project. Some funds would be required particularly from those members based outside Delhi, and for general meeting costs such as room hire and other logistics. We all need to put our heads together for the same.

Membership & Collaborations:

Based on the discussions at the first FGSG meeting held on March 24th, 2015 at ELDF Nizamuddin East office, the participating members decided that the membership of FGSG would be interest-based. Individual membership would be preferred over institutional collaborations to avoid bureaucratic barriers. For the same reason, the government officials can be members of FGSG in their individual capacity. The members would be involved in proactive advising and critical response to new and emergent forest issues. Members are encouraged to create sub-themes under the key identified themes of FGSG based on their interest and/ or need-assessment. In the upcoming meetings, the participating members are encouraged to sign-up to take up activities related to the sub-theme of their interest.

Larger Vision for FGSG:

It is our hope and belief that the FGLG India group as well as the proposed national peer group on forest governance under the SPFMI would result in strengthening the proposed Forest Governance Strategy Group in India. In the process, we hope to widen the group membership with more experts in the forest related sector as well as generate financial support both from within the group and from external donors. We also hope to integrate the lessons learnt, leverage the synergies created in our professional networks of forest sector experts from all across India and other South Asian countries in order provide policy and



legal support to government and non government stakeholders as well as local communities on matters related to effective forest governance.

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