

GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR THROUGH INVOLVEMENT OF NGOs & FOREST DEPARTMENT IN AFFORESTATION/REHABILITATION OF DEGRADED FOREST

PREAMBLE

Our National Forest Policy of 1988 envisages that one third of the geographical area of country should be under forest/tree cover. The total recorded forest area in the country is about 23% of the geographical area. According to the State of Forest Report, 1997, the actual forest cover in the country is only about 19.27 %. It has been further estimated by Forest Survey of India that out this 19.27 % only 11.17 % is dense forest i.e. having density less than 10%. This degraded forest needs urgent attention and sufficient open forest i.e. having density less than 10%. This degraded forest needs urgent attention and sufficient monetary input so that it is rehabilitated and fully covered. These forest areas were endowed with rich biological diversity and should be our immediate concern to rejuvenate at the earliest.

The Ministry is greatly concerned over the slow rate of afforestation owing to financial and other constraints. The afforestation has gone down from about 89,000 sq. km in the VII Five-Year Plan to about 70,000 sq. km in the VII Plan. Even if it is presumed that there will be no further degradation of forest areas it will take more than 25 years to restock the degraded forest areas. Even if we take a conservative norm of Rs. 20,000 per hectare cost it will require a budgetary allocation of more than Rs. 600 billions to rehabilitate them.

It is, therefore clear that Ministry is not in a position even to restore the existing degraded forest from the available resources, leaving aside the goal of increasing the forest cover to 33% of the geographical area by afforestation.

It therefore requires some innovative policy decision wherein without compromising the basic provisions of our forest policy we can attain the goal. One of the proposals received from the Govt. of Maharashtra under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 appears to be aimed in that direction. It has been proposed by the Govt. that about 100 ha of degraded forest land near thane will be afforested/rehabilitated by BAIF as NGO through funding from NOCIL in consultation/guidance of the local Forest Department. It will be done through an agreement signed between BAIF-NOCIL, and the State Govt. BAIF-NOCIL will have no rights over the land or usufruct at anytime thereafter whatsoever.

It has been observed that a large number of like minded industrial houses are willing to join hands in this green movement through NGOs and under the supervision and guidance of the Forest Department voluntarily without any rights whatsoever on the forest land or the usufruct. The executing NGO will work over the land for a time till the plantations/tree cover gets established.

Guidelines

The Ministry, therefore after due consideration has taken a decision to encourage this joint participation of Industrial houses, NGOs and Forest Department in order to rehabilitate/reforest the vast degraded forest in the country. This will not only result in greening of the nation but will also result in employment generation. However, in order to have a clarity on the method and procedures, Ministry is issuing following guidelines.

1. There must be tri-partite agreement between the industrial house, an acceptable NGO of repute and the local Forest Department.

2. The agreement must have the commitment of the industrial house to bear the cost of the scheme, of the NGO to faithfully implement the scheme under the supervision and direction of the Forest Department.
3. The industrial house and the NGO will not claim any right whatsoever over the forest land or the produce anytime thereafter.
4. The rights of local people if any, over the forest land will not be affected by this agreement.
5. The agreement will be for a period of say 5 to 7 years during which the area is likely to be tackled including maintenance.
6. The scheme should be prepared in such a way so that naturally occurring species should be given priority in the rehabilitation and even plantations should be of local native species.
7. Only such forest lands that are less than 0.4 density and that cannot be regenerated with naturally regeneration should be taken up under this scheme.
8. Any other condition that State Forest Department considers essential to fulfill objectives and preamble of these guidelines.
