Himachal Pradesh Forest Ecosystem Services (HP-FES)

Situation

Forests, home to 80 per cent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity, are essential for life on earth. The Indian forests play a vital role in harbouring more than 45,000 floral and 81,000 faunal species, many of which are endemic. Mountain forests are crucial, not only for the people residing in the mountains, but also for the large population of the adjacent plains. They offer a number of ecosystem services like water and climate regulation, soil conservation, provision of resources critical for local livelihoods and abundant recreational values.

By understanding the significance of forest ecosystems, their value for humans and the planet at large; local communities have the potential to play a significant role in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into developmental planning. This Forest Ecosystem Services (FES) approach is expected to result in improved biodiversity and enhanced flow of forest ecosystem services.

It also provides a long-term development potential for the rural population.

Himachal Pradesh (HP) is one of the mountain states of India. With around 3,300 plant species and more than 5,700 animal species, the state is rich in biodiversity, which is key to the important services that the state's forests provide.

Objective

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Ecosystem Services (HP-FES) project aimed at enabling the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD) to introduce the FES approach into the state's forest management system to improve the living conditions of the communities residing in the pilot areas reached by these FES methods. In a second step, other Western Himalayan states shall test and use Himachal Pradesh's implementation experiences on FES.

Approach

To introduce the FES approach in the state's forest management the project sensitised the Forest Department and the local communities in the pilot areas on the FES approach.

Forest Management aims at a **sustainable** provision of a set of **prioritised ecosystem services** based on stakeholder choice.

It focused on three core areas:

- Preparation of one FES based Divisional Forest Working Plan
- Establishment and implementation of FES Forest Management Plans in selected demonstration sites, addressing the core ecosystem services provided by forests in Himachal Pradesh
- Development and institutionalisation of a Long-Term Ecological Monitoring (LTEM) that allows the monitoring of the forest biodiversity and ecosystem services provided by forests at state level.

Achievements

- **Policy and institutionalisation of FES**

  Recommendations and operational guidelines for the policy on Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) will be finalised.

- **Micro plans**

  Micro plans focusing on zone-wise management of FES that were prioritised by the local communities and HPFD were developed for all 9 demonstration sites: Alha, Bohal, Loharlari, Cheola, Kharota, Ghanduri, Shangarh, Hamta and Pathrevi.

- **Working plan**

  Solan forest divisional working plan targeting to integrate the FES approach as per the new National Working Plan code, 2014 is in progress.

- **LTEM**

  An LTEM framework has been developed with HPFD to understand the dynamics of forest ecosystem for developing appropriate management strategies to ensure a sustained flow of ecosystem services for society. To sustain LTEM, the HPFD has institutionalised the system with the working plan division.

- **Capacity building and livelihood improvement**

  Training sessions for the front-line staff of HPFD focused on assessing FES for the working plan; LTEM; monitoring and evaluation (M&E); forest fire management and nursery raising. Livelihood training sessions for village communities focused on pine-needle artefact-making; processing non-timber forest products (NTFPs); solid waste management; birdwatching and homestays operation and management.

Contribution to 2030 Agenda

The project contributes to SDG. 15: Life on Land. It promotes sustainable management of forests (target 15.2), ensures conservation of mountain ecosystems (target 15.4) and integrates ecosystem and biodiversity values in both state and local planning (target 15.9).

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