

JOINT STATEMENT ON REDD CLIMATE SCHEME (REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM DEFORESTATION AND DEGRADATION OF FORESTS)

We, the undersigned, the people's movements from across India who are deeply concerned at the manner in which the Government of India is approaching international climate change negotiations. In particular, we wish to expose and condemn the attempt of government and corporate interests to use climate change negotiations to illegally and unjustly enhance their control over forests and forest dwellers' resources in this country. This is being done through a new scheme called REDD: **Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests.**

As people's movements, we condemn the Government of India's position and call upon it to withdraw its submissions in favour of REDD and carbon trading in forests. India must not join REDD or any REDD-type scheme. This scheme merely makes way for the government and private capital to grab the resources of the people, without in fact truly addressing climate change.

What is REDD?

Climate change is caused by the release of certain gases – especially carbon dioxide – which trap heat, resulting in a gradual warming of the temperature of the Earth. Gases like these are mainly released when fuels like coal and petrol are burnt, but they are also released when forests are felled; estimates say 20% of global emissions result from deforestation. Standing forests can store carbon dioxide, and growing trees also absorb it.

Therefore, the World Bank and some other international organisations, corporations and a few large NGOs are promoting the idea that protecting forests will reduce climate change. The scheme that is being negotiated now – which is called 'REDD' - says that rich countries and their companies, instead of reducing the amount of carbon dioxide they emit, can pay developing countries to preserve forests and “capture” carbon in these “carbon sinks.” Before REDD, large plantations in various countries were raised ostensibly to mitigate effects of climate change, and one after another so-called new ‘carbon sinks’ was created, destroying precious ecosystems and people’s livelihoods. The concept was that the carbon supposedly stored in these plantations will be sold to corporations in the developed Northern countries, who, instead of reducing the amount of carbon dioxide they emit, can pay developing countries to preserve forests and “capture” carbon in these “carbon sinks.” This was done both through UN-approved mechanisms (such as the Clean Development Mechanism) and also through so-called voluntary offsets, which allows any agency to raise a plantation somewhere and claim credits for that.

The REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) scheme differs from these earlier schemes mainly in its inclusion of existing natural forests and the fact that it says ‘conserved’ forests can also sell their stored carbon. As in earlier schemes, private companies will be able to engage in “carbon trading”, i.e. buying and selling credits earned by “absorbing carbon” through forest preservation. Both the UN and the World Bank strongly support this.

The First Danger: REDD as a Way to Deny People's Rights

One of the many problems with this approach is that forests are not just trees that can be “preserved” indefinitely for their carbon absorption capacity; people use and depend on forests, forest produce, forest land and other resources for livelihoods. In India, the government has not recognised most forest dwellers' rights to forest resources and their common lands. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 is

being violated daily, and in particular its community rights provisions are not being implemented at all. In such a scenario, if money is provided for “protecting” forests, there will clearly be attempts to grab these lands and forests in order to claim this money.

Moreover, there is no easy or agreed way to measure how much carbon is actually being absorbed by a forest, and to establish that that carbon would not have been absorbed without the REDD payments. As a result – as is already happening in carbon forestry projects in Brazil and other countries – the concerned company or agency makes every effort to preserve every single tree, bush etc. on its land in order to claim that it has stopped “deforestation.” In this case, after land grabbing, we can be sure that REDD forests will be jealously guarded as “financial assets” and people's uses entirely stopped.

If the government intended to address these issues, it would have clearly stated that any REDD program must be subject to people's rights. But in fact, **in all the government's statements on REDD, there is not a single reference to people's forest rights or the Forest Rights Act.** Even the “Technical Paper” released by the Ministry in August entirely ignores people's rights. **It is clear that the government will use REDD as an instrument for maintaining and intensifying its control over people's forests and lands, and at the same time for roping in private players in the name of public-private partnerships.**

The Second Danger: Government Promoting Joint Forest Management Through REDD

Instead of respecting people's legal forest rights, the government is saying that it will implement REDD through the “participatory” system of Joint Forest Management (JFM). But forest staff serve as the secretaries and joint account holders of JFM committees (known as Van Suraksha Samitis), making it impossible for the community to have any control over these bodies and ensuring that only contractors, traders and others close to the Department become their office bearers.

If the government is truly interested in “participation”, why is it not respecting people's rights to protect and manage their forests under the Forest Rights Act? The Act has superseded JFM, which has no statutory basis. But instead of shutting down JFM and genuinely respecting forest dwellers' rights and powers, the government is attempting to expand it on a large scale at precisely the time that people are claiming rights under the Forest Rights Act. REDD will become another instrument in this expansion, even as JFM allows the government to claim abroad that it is implementing REDD in a “participatory” fashion. The consequences will be even more intense resource grabbing.

The Third Danger: REDD and Land Grabbing in the Name of Afforestation

Unlike many other governments, which want money only for preserving forests, the Government of India wants REDD payments to include afforestation and tree planting (a system called “REDD plus”). Indeed, aside from resisting Western pressure to undertake emissions cuts, the Indian government says only one thing in its international statements on climate change: “we” in India have already done a great service to the world by “maintaining and expanding” our forests, which is our great contribution to climate change. Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh informed the visiting US Secretary of State that “Sustainable forestry management is of profound importance to us. We are just embarking on a close to \$ 3 billion programme (and \$ 3 billion to begin with) to regenerate our natural forests that already cover some 165 million acres...” It is notable that this was the only national program or initiative that Ramesh referred to in any detail, with all his other references being vague. Shortly afterward, the Environment Ministry released a “technical paper” claiming that India's forest cover absorbs more than 11% of our emissions – and again referring to the potential of

afforestation. It is plain that the government is riding on forestry projects as the thrust of its international position.

But the government's plantation programs have often been a cover for massive land grabbing.

Such afforestation programmes usually take place on forest land classified as “degraded forest” (or on revenue “wasteland”). However, the Forest Department classifies all land that has less than a certain percentage of tree cover as degraded forest. Thus:

1. Plantations frequently take place on common lands and customary community lands on which people's rights are poorly recorded. People are displaced from their lands and denied access to non-timber forest produce, grazing areas and other livelihood uses.
1. As the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Forests** said in 2008, “afforestation ... deprives forest dwellers and tribals / adivasis of some or all of their lands and adversely impacts their livelihoods and basic needs – for which they are neither informed, nor consulted, nor compensated.”
1. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 recognises the right and the power of communities to protect, manage and sustainably use their customary forests, water bodies, wildlife and biodiversity. As such, under the law, afforestation should be decided and controlled by the local community. Till date, India's plantation programmes do not even provide for consultation – let alone control by the people.
1. Plantations often destroy grasslands, open scrub jungles and other natural ecosystems that people rely on for forest produce and other needs. In the process they cause major environmental damage, drain groundwater and may even end up releasing extra carbon.

Yet none of the plantation guidelines of the Environment Ministry till date have made any reference to forest rights, despite the glaring illegality of these actions. Attacks on people and their livelihoods will greatly increase if there is an additional financial incentive for grabbing people's lands through plantations.

The Fourth Danger: Bringing in Private Companies

In its submission on REDD¹, the Government of India has said afforestation programmes should be supported by a “market based” approach, i.e. carbon trading. Indeed, India's National Action Plan on the Clean Development Mechanism (2003) estimated that plantations could take up 5 million tonnes of carbon, earning \$125 million in 5 years.

For years, paper/pulp companies have been seeking to get forest land for afforestation. If this approach is adopted, they will have a perfect pretext to take over forest land for their own purposes – and, indeed, earn money in the process. The only legal constraint that faces such projects – the legal bar against private afforestation of forest lands, contained in the Forest (Conservation) Act – will almost certainly be removed immediately. Given that people do not have recorded rights to their lands and forests, huge areas can easily be handed over to private companies for these purposes. The plantations programmes will expand enormously, backed by private speculators aiming to trade on the carbon markets. The results can only be imagined.

People's Rights vs. Corporate and Government Resource Grabbing

Thus, the government of India is pushing a regressive, anti-people and anti-democratic program of resource grabbing in forests, which will serve neither the people of this country nor the cause of truly curbing climate change.

The forests and forest lands of this country are not the private property of the government, to be agreed upon, bought and sold as it wishes. They are the homelands and territories of adivasis and other forest dwellers who have, for centuries, lived in and lived with them. **We will not stand by and watch as forests are once again grabbed from us by the rapacious greed of private capital masquerading as “eco-friendly” projects.**

In light of the above, we demand the following:

1. The government of India must withdraw its submissions in support of REDD, oppose any agreement on REDD and not join any REDD scheme;
1. Private companies should be barred from any benefits from forest protection, and forests and other natural resources should not be subjected to carbon trading in any form;
1. The Forest Rights Act must be implemented in full, community rights and powers recognized and all plantation and other forestry programmes brought under local community control;
1. The government must recognise and respect democratic control over resources, stop facilitating corporate deforestation, and take steps to reduce emissions from private automobile transport, excessive electricity consumption, and other genuine sources of environmental destruction.

CAMPAIGN FOR SURVIVAL AND DIGNITY

Composed of the following State federations of people's organisations:

Jangal Jameen Jan Andolan (Rajasthan)
Adivasi Mahasabha (Andhra Pradesh)
Jangal Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti (Maharashtra)
Jangal Jeevan Adhikar Bachao Andolan (Madhya Pradesh)
Jan Shakti Sanghatan / People's Alliance for Livelihood Rights / Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (Chhattisgarh)
Bharat Jan Andolan (Jharkhand)
Adivasi Jangal Janjeevan Andolan (Dadra & Nagar Haveli)
Campaign for Survival and Dignity – Orissa / Orissa Jan Adhikar Morcha (Orissa)
Adivasi Aikya Vedike (Andhra Pradesh)
Campaign for Survival and Dignity – Tamil Nadu

NATIONAL FORUM OF FOREST PEOPLES AND FOREST WORKERS

Including the following organisations:

Adivasi Banihar Shakti Sangathana (Chhattisgarh)
Nadi Ghati Morcha (Chhattisgarh)
Jharkhand Jangal Bachao Andolan (Jharkhand)
Chhattisgarh Jan-ban Adhikar Manch
Birsa Munda Vu-adhikar Manch (Madhya Pradesh)
Patta Dalit Adhikar Manch (Uttar Pradesh)
Kaimnoor KShettra Majdoor Sangharsh Samittee, Sonebhadra, UP
Ghad Kshettra Majdoor Sangharsh Samittee, Uttarakhand
National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (North Bengal Regional Committee)