

Conservation and Sustainable Management of Western Ghats:

Endeavor by Western Ghats task force, government of Karnataka

Introduction

The '*Malenadu*' or '*Sahyadri*' region, technically called, *the Western Ghats* region of Karnataka, is recognized as one of the 12 mega bio-diversity regions of the world since it is considered as highly significant ecological system of global scale. It is not only important in environment & ecological perspectives, which is equally important in the interest of livelihood security of millions of people in Karnataka too. Because, this region has very immense role in regulating the monsoon, providing timber & non-timber forest products, rejuvenating the ground water table & perennial source of the rivers, nourishing wide diversity of crop & medicinal plants and so on. Several union and state laws are already there to govern their conservation, enhancement & sustainable utilization.

However, because of a lot of gap in the intention & action, it is deteriorating continuously over the decades. Hence, almost all parts of the *Western Ghats region* are under threat in different scale for different reasons. In order to address all those issues at one forum and to develop an integrated conservation and sustainable development model for the region, Govt. of Karnataka formed a special forum called "***Western Ghats Task Force***", one of its first kind in the country, by making provision in the budget of 2008-09, for the first time in the country. This Task Force, thus, can become an umbrella forum, where all these issues and stakeholders are brought together to bring in a holistic conservation policy and synergetic action. It has commenced its works from September 2008. (G.O.No: AaPaJee.125 / FAP 2008 dt. 04.09.2008). This report is the second annual progress report, being submitted to the government. The salient features of *Western Ghats* and its significance is given through figures and tables in subsequent pages.

Vision and Mission of Western Ghats Task Force

Vision:

- Appraising the significance of *Western Ghats* (WG) to all sections of the society through various awareness building programmes.
- Ensuring the highest possible protection for the natural ecosystems in the *Western Ghats* region by developing strategies in order to prevent any further degradation of forest & environment through Dept. of Forest & Environment and public participation.
- Designing, promoting and monitoring sustainable developmental efforts that would balance both ecological security and livelihood security of the people through concerned government departments.
- Designing strategies for conserving natural resources and Natural Resource Management (NRM) based employment generation, specially keeping the welfare of indigenous people in mind.
- Make all the sections and stakeholders of the governance and public in general realized over the significance of W.G., so that a sustainable land use policy is brought about for the entire *Sahyadri* region, aiming at long term welfare of the people.

- Empowering public in general and education, research & civil society organizations in particular, to take active part in the task of conservation of natural resources by applying all available socio-economic, scientific and legal tools.

Mission:

The *Western Ghats* Task Force has the mandate of facilitating the entire governance process related to *Western Ghats* region taking the best possible ways of its conservation and sustainable development into consideration. It is a committee having both non-official experts from different fields and also the departmental level heads of the different govt. departments. It would help in synthesizing right policy measures and implementation plans. The initial consultations with the Task Force members, experts and public have revealed that the following areas are to be considered on priority basis to begin with.

1. **Assessment of current Ecological & Environmental status:** *Sahyadri* region is facing several serious problems like deforestation, encroachment, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, river bank destruction, landslide, migration of tribal and local people as urban labor etc., because of poor management of natural resources over the years. Therefore, a rigorous exercise is needed to comprehend all those issues by consolidating all the available information and may be by initiating fresh studies too. Such an exercise can act as the baseline data for evolving further remedial actions.

Functioning Mechanism of the Task Force

- The *Western Ghats* Task Force conducts meetings periodically in order to deliberate on all the issues and suggests the possible action plans for the govt. Meetings are held usually every month or as and when necessary. Apart from the Task Force members, senior govt. officers, experts, scientists, civil society representatives and even general public are invited if it is needed. The other regular activities would be carried out by the Task Force office under the guidance of its Chairman.
- The need based subcommittees of the Task Force members and external experts are formed in order to come out with specific action plans for a specific issue. WGTF is commissioning short term expert studies on various issues in order to develop a clear perspective plans.
- Chairman establishes coordination among all the govt. departments & Boards, who are all working in the different spheres of the conservation and development of *Western Ghats* region through review meetings and visits to the field in the *Western Ghats* districts.
- Books, booklets, monographs and brochures are brought out on different issues or topics so that they are used at specific level for the effective policy framing and successful implementation.
- An annual event called '*Sahyadri Summit*' is planned in order to bring all those are concerned together, every year.
- The progress reports with mid-term recommendations are being submitted to Hon. Chief Minister for every three months. The first annual report with a few major recommendations was submitted in September 2009. This is the second annual progress report with interim recommendations.