1. Country and Sector Background

India is one of the twelve megadiversity countries in the world collectively accounting for 60-70 percent of the world’s biodiversity. India is also a centre of agrobiodiversity with at least 166 species of crop plants and 320 species of wild relatives of cultivated crops. The country’s biodiversity is fundamental to human well-being. About 90 percent of all medicines in India come from plant species, many of which are harvested in the wild. Medicinal plants and other non-timber forest products are particularly important as a source of income and subsistence for tribal and other poor rural populations. Closed primary forests which cover about 21 million hectares or six percent of the total land area and one-third of the total forest area in India, is an important source of timber and fuel wood for the majority of its people. In addition, the natural resources of the country have a major influence on development and well being of its people (with agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery sectors contributing 32 percent of the GDP in 1992/93).
The biodiversity of India is under immense pressures. Unmanaged livestock grazing, indiscriminate cutting of trees for fuel and timber, unsustainable gathering of non-timber forest products, hunting, uncontrolled fires, and the haphazard conversion for agriculture, infrastructure, industrial and commercial development are a major threat to India’s biodiversity. Similarly, pollution, siltation and spread of invasive alien plant species are a major threat to the freshwater, coastal and marine habitats within the country. The country’s high level of human population density and growth, high incidence of poverty and large number of livestock accelerate the speed of degradation. Degraded landscapes are especially prone to invasive plants which compete with native species and lead to further degradation and reduced productivity. Many local people are highly dependent on forests and other natural resources but with limited rights of access, have little incentive to use natural resources in a sustainable way.

The Government of India has demonstrated a strong commitment to conservation and has established a network of more than 600 protected areas across different ecosystems and bioregions. However, these protected areas are largely managed as “islands” surrounded by other forms of land uses that are often not compatible with conservation goals and outcomes. At the same time, there are extensive areas of remaining natural habitats, especially forests that harbor rich biodiversity surrounding the existing protected areas network that are currently not managed with conservation outcomes. The proposed project will strengthen management and viability of core protected areas by seeking to influence development and conservation in lands surrounding these high biodiversity areas by promoting rural livelihoods and integrating conservation concerns in lands surrounding the core protected areas.

The proposed project will build on the past participatory conservation successes, including the concluded GEF/IDA Ecodelopment project by expanding conservation efforts to the landscape level, and integrating rural livelihoods with strengthened protected area management and more biodiversity-friendly development in the surrounding production landscapes. The project would include an explicit component for promoting learning networks, distilling and disseminating lessons learned and encouraging replication of successful participatory conservation management to other protected areas and biodiversity-rich landscapes elsewhere in India. The project would explicitly focus on (i) scaling up of successful conservation models to the landscape level; (ii) raising awareness of the values of biodiversity goods and services and their relevance to the development agenda; (iii) addressing explicit linkages between conservation and poverty alleviation, in both conservation and production landscapes; (iv) mainstreaming biodiversity into policy and development programs at regional and national levels; (v) Monitoring, linked to adaptive management, learning and replication; and (vi) Replicating participatory conservation mechanisms to other PAs and biodiversity-rich landscapes nationally.

2. Objectives

Project Development Objective: The development objective is to develop and promote new models of conservation at the landscape scale through enhanced capacity and institution building for mainstreaming biodiversity conservation outcomes.

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1 A landscape unit could contain a mosaic of land uses, but typically would include one or more protected areas that are interspersed with reserved and production forests, agricultural and other productively used lands and village settlements.
This is to be achieved by improving policies, tools and methodologies, knowledge and skills for developing multi-stakeholder partnerships that support mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation objectives, improving rural livelihoods, enhancing learning and replication of successful participatory conservation models, and improving cost-effectiveness and sustainable funding for conservation of biodiversity at the landscape level.

The project will further support Government of India’s efforts to prevent degradation of biodiversity within the country. It will help GOI mainstream biodiversity and improve rural livelihoods into development planning in areas that surround biodiversity sensitive areas, including protected areas. In the long term, it will assist the country to protect its valuable forests and biodiversity, improve the viability of its protected area network and ensure the survival of critical species. It will contribute towards improving the contribution of biodiversity to local livelihoods so as to enhance the incentives for conservation and help alleviate poverty in remote rural forested areas.

The Bank’s Country Strategy for India, emphasizes the need to: focus on new ways to leverage Bank financing, linked to the Millennium Development Goals and especially environmental sustainability, knowledge provision, generation and dissemination, including introducing international and national best practice, building capacity and cross-state learning through demonstration projects and dissemination; and emphasis on sector-wide approach, which draws on best practice and links conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to poverty alleviation and building social and human capital, including capacity building in government and non-government sectors.

The project is consistent with GEF’s Operational Strategy in that it supports the long term protection and sustainable use of biodiversity. It conforms to GEF’s Operational Program #3 (Forest Ecosystems), with linkages to Operational Program #1 (Arid and Semi-Arid Ecosystems), Operational Program #2 (Coastal, Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems), and Operational Program #4 (Mountain Ecosystems). In the context of an integrated landscape approach to biodiversity conservation, the proposed project would comply with Operational Program #12 (Integrated Ecosystems). It would promote in-situ conservation and sustainable use of globally important biodiversity, and support participatory management approaches at the community level for integrated management of biological and land resources.

The project supports three Pillars of the GEF Strategic Priorities, namely Pillar 1 (Sustainability of Protected Areas), Pillar 2 (Mainstreaming of Biodiversity) and Pillar 4 (Dissemination of Lessons and Experiences). In conformity with these three pillars, the project would support the sustainability of protected area network, improved protected area management with a broader landscape and social context; mainstreaming of biodiversity within broader production systems; and documentation and dissemination of lessons learned, experiences and best practice, the latter through support for learning centers, cross visits, workshops and small grants to promote replication of best practices. All components seek to build on recent experiences in the region, and particularly in India, especially lessons learned from GEF/IDA Ecodevelopment and joint forest management approaches. The project would also provide opportunity for sharing experiences within the country and in the region.
3. Rationale for Bank Involvement

The GOI asked support from GEF under its Operational Program #3 (Forest Ecosystems) to address its critical biodiversity conservation needs. The Bank shares GOI’s and donor recognition of the need to reconcile development and conservation needs through creating appropriate incentive mechanisms for local communities to benefit from conservation and sustainable use of biological resources. The Bank has been supporting GOI’s very successful efforts in the past to conserve its rich biodiversity in partnership with local communities and this project provides an opportunity to further expand these experiences to a broader landscape level so as to extend and ensure the ecological viability of rich biodiversity areas in the country. The Bank is actively working with GEF and other donors in a number of countries to develop similar initiatives in participatory biodiversity conservation and landscape management. The Bank’s comparative advantage is that it has extensive experience in India in sustainable natural resource management, decentralization and participatory management and biodiversity conservation.

4. Description

*Overview:* The Project supports four complementary components that are aimed at strengthening and mainstreaming conservation outcomes in demonstration landscape sites and their replication elsewhere in the country.

*Component One: Demonstration of Landscape Conservation Approaches in selected pilot sites (Total Project Costs $13.11Million):* This component will focus on developing and testing tools and techniques and enhancing knowledge and skills for improving biodiversity conservation and rural livelihood outcomes in two demonstration landscapes (Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat and Askote in Uttarakhand). These landscapes include protected areas, biological corridors and high value conservation sites in production landscapes. As part of the demonstration and learning effort, this component will support: (i) **Participatory ecological and social mapping** to identify areas of high biodiversity value and resource dependencies and threats in order to define targeted interventions for improving conservation outcomes and community livelihoods in the landscapes; (ii) **Improved management of biodiversity rich areas** within and outside the protected areas in the landscape through planning and skills development, zonation and boundary demarcation, habitat management, research and awareness, and communication and monitoring; (iii) **Mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations in production areas** within the landscapes through dialogue and collaboration with sectoral agencies (forestry, livestock, agriculture, irrigation, infrastructure, etc), development of common agreement and frameworks for coordination amongst stakeholders and technical assistance and training to facilitate the integration of biodiversity considerations in development plans of sectoral line agencies; and (iv) **Development and implementation of livelihood strategies** to enhance local community benefits from sustainable management of natural resources linked to conservation. This sub-component will support the preparation of village microplans, investments to improve local livelihoods and reduce dependencies on forest resources, participatory monitoring and community institutional development. In this Component, GEF will finance biodiversity mapping, planning and implementation of conservation management
plans, habitat management activities, research and monitoring, and technical support and training for mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations in sector development plans and programs.

Component Two: **Strengthening Knowledge Management and National Capacity for Landscape Conservation (Total Project Costs $6.22 Million):** This component will support improved knowledge and capacity development building on learning and experience from the two demonstration landscapes (Component 1) and other local conservation models (including the previously funded GEF/IDA Ecodevelopment project). This component will support: (i) **Field Learning Centers at Periyar (Kerala), Kalakad (Tamil Nadu) and Gir (Gujarat)** to provide hands-on training through cross visits, exchange assignments, work experience and training sessions and distillation of conservation best practice. Each of the three learning centers will specialize in specific topics based on their comparative advantages and experiences; and (ii) **National capacity building program** through the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to facilitate the promotion of landscape conservation approaches nationwide. This sub-component will support curriculum development based on lessons learned; new training courses for policy makers, senior and mid-level forestry and wildlife staff, range forest officers and other development sector agencies to build capacity and support for landscape conservation; and development of operational manual and guidelines for promotion of landscape approaches. The national capacity building program will focus on participants from priority high biodiversity landscapes within at least five of the ten recognized biogeographic zones\(^2\) in the country to create critical skills that might enable the uptake of landscape conservation action in other priority landscapes. In this Component, GEF will finance distillation and documentation of best practice, training and exchange visits, field guides, and specialized staff to provide training (ecologist, sociologist, etc) at the field learning sites. GEF will also finance curriculum development, training, documentation of best practices, impact monitoring and development of guidelines for landscape planning and implementation.

Component Three: **Scaling Up and Replication of Successful Models of Conservation in Additional Landscape Sites (Total Project Costs $7.57 Million):** This component would support the further testing and replication of landscape conservation approaches to two additional high biodiversity landscapes from the third year onwards with project financing. The extension of the landscape approach to these two additional landscapes will build on, and expand experiences derived from the two demonstration landscapes (Component 1). The two additional sites will be selected to demonstrate specific aspects of landscape conservation. The additional sites will be selected based on their (i) global biodiversity importance; (ii) level of pressures or threats on these biological resources; (iii) political interest and support for conservation; (iv) state of readiness or preparedness for landscape management; and (v) value addition in terms of providing new learning and experience in landscape conservation. It is also envisaged that the training and skills development in Component 2 could likely encourage the uptake of landscape level planning and management at additional capacitated sites with GoI or other non-project sources of funding. In this Component, GEF will finance biological mapping, protected area planning and management and habitat management, research and monitoring, and technical assistance and training for mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in development plans and programs.

\(^2\) Trans-Himalayan, Himalayan, Desert, Semi-Arid, Arid, Western Ghats, Deccan Peninsula, Gangetic Plains, Coasts, North-East and Islands
Component Four: **National Coordination for Landscape Conservation (Total Project Costs $4.12 Million):** This component will support coordination for landscape conservation at the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). Activities to be financed include: establishment of Management Information System (MIS) for project and landscape monitoring, impact evaluation, and limited operational and technical support to enable MOEF to coordinate and administer the implementation of project activities and facilitate replication elsewhere in India. This component will also support preparation activities for the two additional landscape sites to be supported under the project (Component 3). It will also support the establishment of national communication system for the project, policy and legal studies relating to conservation, impact assessment and review and third party monitoring of the project. In this Component, GEF will finance policy and legal studies for protected area and landscape management, third party impact monitoring, and regional workshops to disseminate best practice and learning from the pilot sites.

The project duration is six years.

5. Financing

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<th>Source</th>
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<td>GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY</td>
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</table>
6. Implementation

The project provides opportunities to link with, and benefit from, best practices in community mobilization and participation developed under a suite of Bank and GoI Community-driven development projects. There are also good opportunities to develop synergies with the GEF-funded Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) which focuses on engaging civil society in conservation initiatives. The CEPF has prepared and approved an ecosystem profile for the Western Ghats, a recognized biodiversity hotspot and one of the project landscapes. During scaling up the project in two additional sites and further replication by the GoI may present opportunities for linking with CEPF through additional engagement of civil society, including local communities, NGOs and the private sector in conservation initiatives in the landscape.

The overall implementation arrangements for the project is based on implementation and monitoring of the project by the national, state, landscape, divisional, district, intermediate and community level stakeholders. The arrangement at all levels will focus on implementation of project activities, financial management and procurement functions and project monitoring, learning and reporting, through enhanced transparency and accountability measures.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) through its National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) will be overall responsible for overseeing the implementation of the project, ensuring timely release of funds and reporting, assisting with project supervision, learning and ensuring the replication of participatory landscape concepts to other sites in the country during and after the project period. The Director, NTCA will be supported by a small team to facilitate intensive learning, supervision and monitoring, outreach and communication, financial management and procurement. At the state level, each of the two States will have a Society or Foundation (registered under an appropriate Act) for implementation and monitoring of project activities. The Society will be responsible for convergence and integration of sector plans, mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation concerns, enhancing rural livelihood improvement, facilitating the settlement of rights and resource use conflicts and enhancing access and benefits of conservation to local communities within the landscape. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Society will be the key executive for the coordination and implementation of the project at the landscape level. At the national level an Advisory Committee of eminent environmentalists and development practitioners will also be established to provide oversight and guidance to the Project Director.

Below the State level, there will be Landscape, Divisional and District Level Project Facilitation Teams, as relevant who will be directly recruited by the project or out-sourced to NGOs or specialized service providers for field based facilitation and implementation of activities.

Planning and implementation of microplans with conservation outcomes and investments at the village level will be implemented through existing community institutions, such as the Van Panchayats in Askote and User Groups (Salt Farmers, Fishermen and Graziers) that will be created at LRK. Besides, Self Help Groups (SHG), Common Interest Groups (CIG) and their federations such as cooperatives and producer companies may be established depending on successes of livelihood component. At village level, household will be the organizing unit for
formulation of community-driven microplans, prioritizations of investments, ensuring community participation and participatory monitoring of biodiversity and socio-economic impacts. Specific eligibility criteria would help prioritize community level investments and ensure their direct linkage with conservation objectives. Local and national NGOs with appropriate expertise would be contracted to assist with microplanning, and capacity building at the community level as well as for independent monitoring of social and economic impacts of the project interventions.

The Project Implementation Plan (PIP) has been prepared by NTCA and will be finalized by negotiations. This includes a participatory process framework that defines principles that would guide community decision making on project investments and participation of project beneficiaries in project decisions. It also defines strategies for identifying and mitigating existing restrictions on resource use and livelihood restoration measures to mitigate against any resource restrictions, define grievance redressal arrangements and participatory monitoring measures. Annual reviews between the GoI and the Bank will be held to agree on annual implementation plans and allocation of project funds.

The project will build on existing GOI financial management systems and those tested under the previous Bank-funded operations. Fund releases from the Central Government to Landscape Biodiversity Societies will be based on the submission of an annual plan of operation (APO) for the landscape that would be compiled and submitted by the CEO at the particular landscape site to NTCA. The CEO will prepare the APOs in consultation with the respective forest departments, relevant sector agencies, local community institutions and other relevant participants. Following review and clearance of the APO by the NTCA, the Internal Finance Department at the Central level will release funds to the respective landscape biodiversity societies, who would, in turn, transfer the funds to the field level PA and local partners. An operational strategy and individual landscape specific operational manuals will be developed to facilitate the administration and reporting requirements of the project. Project administration and financial management will be undertaken by NTCA under its established institutional structure including: (i) budget approval and monitoring; (ii) cash flow management (including processing loan withdrawal applications); (iii) maintenance of accounting records; (iv) preparation of interim and year-end financial reports; (v) administration of supporting information systems; and (vi) execution of internal and external audits.

NTCA has project management experience from managing the IEDP project financed by the World Bank, and the GEF PDF B Grant for preparation of this project.

7. Sustainability: Ensuring the long-term sustainability and replication of participatory conservation mechanisms to other protected area sites is a major objective of the proposed project. The sustainability of the benefits derived from the project will be a paramount consideration during project preparation. The proposed project would build on the vast national experience and learning, particularly from the on-going GEF/IDA Ecodevelopment project, other Bank and donor funded projects, as well as from experience from elsewhere. Options would be investigated during project preparation, include the establishment of village level revolving funds (which has been very successful model in the concluded Bank-funded Forestry Research Extension and Education Project -FREEP), support for self-help groups (that has shown great promise in FREEP and Ecodevelopment Project), linking conservation efforts with the existing
centrally funded conservation schemes that annually amount to around US$ 30 million and the recent Government of India approved Forest Development Agency Program, with provides long term support for forest conservation, re-evaluating and re-defining existing Government of India’s support to the forest areas outside the protected area network in terms of long-term sustainability considerations, supporting community-based ecotourism and revenue generation programs, and even the option of establishing an endowment for supporting participatory conservation and protected areas and biodiversity conservation. Given its integrated nature, the proposed project would work toward inter-sectoral coordination, particularly within the forestry sector and empowering communities to ensure that local government funds are better targeted to give biodiversity as well as social benefits. Through, the introduction and expansion of participatory support incorporation of community needs and aspirations into protected area and landscape planning and support for local institutions, social sustainability would be addressed under the proposed project.

The project is also focusing on building national capacity for landscape-based conservation approaches and the Wildlife Institute of India will develop and impart a training/course curricula to develop capacities in at least 5 additional high biodiversity landscapes across the country.

**Replicability:** The project has explicit learning and replication focus. The project would benefit from experiences and lessons learned from other protected area management and participatory conservation initiatives in the country and elsewhere. In particular, the lessons learned from ecodevelopment approaches and experiences, success with self-help group mobilization and support for conservation, community monitoring and reciprocal commitments, etc. would have direct relevance for the design of the proposed project. Component 3 of the proposed project will support the learning and replication of the existing successful approaches and lessons and experiences emanating from Components 1 and 2 of the project for wider application in the project states and nationally. It will support the documentation of lessons from the field activities and dissemination, the establishment and operation of “learning centers” in the some of the successful Ecodevelopment Project sites that would serve as foci for documenting and disseminating of lessons and training of protected area personnel and community groups for replication of current successful models and those to be introduced under the proposed project. As part of the replication effort, the project will support workshops and exchange visits to landscape and protected area sites for PA staff, NGOs and community representatives to learn from other successful experiences. It would provide small grants to expand approaches to other PAs and support studies for improving understanding of policy and legal issues related to conservation and promotion of participatory approaches, and dissemination of best practices through workshops, website development, publications and participation of PA staff and community representatives in national meetings and conferences. In addition, the project will provide support to the MOEF to build capacity to improve coordination and promotion of the landscape approach throughout the country. It will facilitate the integration of landscape conservation approach into Central and State Conservation Funding Schemes to enable scaling up of the approach elsewhere in the State and Country.

**Cost-effectiveness:** The project will support the further development of best practice in participatory conservation management and scale up existing practices to the landscape level. It will explicitly promote replication of best practice, including mainstreaming of biodiversity
conservation in the production landscape to enhance the ecological integrity and viability of core PAs and to influence the management strategies and development planning of other sector agencies within the landscape. The project will be highly cost-effective since the GEF/IDA investment is expected to a) influence models for landscape level conservation beyond target sites to influence conservation practices nationally and b) during and beyond the project influence government conservation spending and the disbursement of approximately US$30 million annually of central level funding that is available for PA conservation and forest development.

8. Lessons Learned from Past Operations in the Country/Sector

Over the last 10 years (since 1996) India has been experimenting with a new model of ecodevelopment with some successes under GEF/IDA India Ecodevelopment Project (IEDP) and other national initiatives. The proposed project seeks to further this effort by extending lessons and achievements and scaling up to the landscape level. The proposed project has taken into consideration the lessons learned from past forestry and protected areas projects, especially the IEDP which tested participatory conservation and ecodevelopment models around seven protected areas.

9. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

This is a category B project. The safeguard policies on Environmental Assessment (OP/BP/GP 4.01), Forests (4.36), Pest Management (OP 4.09), and Indigenous People (OP 4.10) are triggered. Environmental Management Framework and Social Management and Consultative Frameworks will ensure that environmental and social assessment and management and mitigation processes are incorporated into the entire landscape planning and management process from the village, landscape, state and national levels.

- **Environmental Assessment:** This is applicable given the project’s emphasis on environmental management spanning over large spatial territories. However, potential adverse environmental impacts on human populations are expected to be limited. An environmental management framework will be developed to ensure that all environmental issues are considered in project planning, implementation and monitoring.

- **Pest Management:** The project might involve procurement and use of pesticides on a limited scale to enhance crop production. However, the procurement and distribution of pesticides in India is governed by WHO standards. There will be no procurement of pesticides classified in Class Ia, Ib and II that would be used. Training on methods of integrated pest management will be provided to the extent possible.

- **Forests:** This is triggered as the project aims to bring about changes in the management, protection and/or sustainable utilization of natural forests or its produce (NTFP). The forestry component proposed in the project promotes improvement of biological diversity within degraded forest lands to enhance environmental contribution of forest areas and encourage benefit sharing through collection, utilization and value addition of minor
forest products. Activities proposed are not likely to impact significantly upon forest areas and logging operations are not part of the activities.

- **Indigenous Peoples:** The people in the project areas are Scheduled tribe and other vulnerable group. In accordance with local laws and Bank’s OP 4.10, free prior and informed consultations have been organized and documented. In addition, the social assessments included an analysis of socio-economic conditions, livelihood strategies, symbiotic relationships with natural resources and existing community institutional structures and mechanisms for participatory planning, implementation and monitoring to enhance and improve community livelihood and opportunities to address poverty. Prior, free and informed consultation with tribal and other vulnerable groups will be integrated in the project participatory process framework. An Indigenous People’s Planning Framework (IPPF) has been prepared and will be applied to ensure free, prior and informed consultation with indigenous and vulnerable groups.

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10. List of Factual Technical Documents

- Implementation Completion Report – Ecodevelopment Project
- Lessons learned from Eco-development Experiences in India

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12. For more information contact:

* By supporting the proposed project, the Bank does not intend to prejudice the final determination of the parties' claims on the disputed areas
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