

Draft for discussion

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# ECODEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Some Concepts and Issues

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This paper does not intend to repeat the discussions already available in various other papers and documents on ecodevelopment<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to raise some of the major, broad, issues relating to the concept of ecodevelopment and to the way ecodevelopment projects are planned and implemented.

### History

WA Rodgers has already given (Rodgers 1998) a historical survey of ecodevelopment. All that needs to be added is a somewhat more detailed description of the process by which the centrally sponsored ecodevelopment scheme and the subsequent two ecodevelopment projects in India (the FREEP and the India Ecodevelopment Project<sup>2</sup>) came into being.

During 1990 and 1991, when the process of finalising the eighth plan was underway in the Planning Commission, there was great pressure on the Planning Commission to initiate a new centrally sponsored scheme on ecodevelopment. This pressure came primarily from the then Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the then Director of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). The scheme was quickly designed and was almost approved when the Government changed and the process of finalising the eighth plan was postponed. The Planning Commission then took a view that no new scheme would be approved before the eighth plan was finalised. However, due to sustained pressure

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Singh, Shekhar, *Biodiversity Conservation Through Ecodevelopment: Planning and Implementation Lessons from India*, UNESCO, Paris, 1997; Singh, Shekhar, *Integrated Conservation Development Projects for Biodiversity Conservation: The Asia Pacific Experience*, The World Bank, 1995

<sup>2</sup> The FREEP project had ecodevelopment as an add on. It supports ecodevelopment activities in Kalakad Mundunthurai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu and in Great Himalayan National Park in Himachal Pradesh.

on the Commission, ecodevelopment became the only new scheme in the environment and forest sector to be approved mid-plan, in 1991-92.

Meanwhile, the Government of India had been attempting to get the GEF to approve a biodiversity project for India. A proposal for ecodevelopment around wildlife protected areas was submitted in 1991 but was, for some reason, not approved. This resulted in the absurd situation where India, one of the mega biodiversity countries of the world, did not get a biodiversity project in the first round of GEF funding, while many other smaller and perhaps less biodiversity rich countries got one or sometimes even more than one.

The embarrassment that this caused to the GEF and the World Bank was well exploited by the Government of India which got the World Bank to agree to support a biodiversity conservation component in the Forestry Research, Education and Extension Project (FREEP). The FREEP was, in 1992, almost ready for approval.

However, if the FREEP was not to be delayed, there was a need to very quickly prepare the project document for the proposed biodiversity conservation (ecodevelopment) project. As such, the MoEF approached the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi to be the project consultants and to prepare the ecodevelopment plan and the project document within three months. This almost impossible task was accepted by the IIPA as it was seen as a way of keeping out a plethora of international consultants and keeping the cost of planning low. Two other conditions were also agreed to. First, it was agreed that the areas selected would be those where the IIPA had already been doing research and, as such, already had much of the information that would be required to prepare such a plan. Consequently, the Great Himalayan National Park (HP) and Kalakad Mundunthrai Tiger Reserve (TN) were selected. It was

