

Trees Outside Forests (TOF) Certification Standard Initiative India

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is a multi-stakeholder non-profit organisation, registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, working for establishing a globally aligned country specific certification scheme and standards.

Introduction

Tree outside Forest (TOF) is a versatile natural resource and as important as our natural forest. Their management is a bigger challenge because of wide spread landscape, fragmentary nature and unincorporated information into any databases. Global attention on forest resources has increased manifold where as our attention on tree outside forests has remain diffused as intrinsically these are multi-sectoral and multipurpose.

Forests and TOF occupy about 24% of the geographic area our country however majority of industrial demand of wood is met from TOF at present. It is believed that bringing TOF in purview of certification will eliminate the market barriers, support farmers and private tree growers for optimum price and also install some of the best management practices to grow and manage TOF.

Definition of TOF

The term TOF, refers to “all trees growing outside recorded forest areas” are defined as trees outside forests. The recorded forest area means “reserve”, “protected’ or ‘unclassified forest’. However trees grown under Social Forestry irrespective of “Recorded Forest” status will fall under TOF for implementation of NCCF Certification Scheme in the country. The trees growing in private lands in agroforestry, farm forestry, along the farm bunds and homesteads, and in orchards and in common and government non-forest lands in parks and gardens, along roads, canals and railway line in rural or urban areas constitute TOF. Trees Outside Forests can have their occurrence in the form of block, linear and scattered stratum.

Classification of TOF

TOF resources can be classified on the basis of ownership (private, community and government), formations (linear, block & scattered) and management (farmers, industries, associations, federations, cooperatives, government, etc.). Broadly TOF has two categories agroforest and urbanforest.

The agroforest category includes all kinds of tree plantations done on farm lands and rural landscapes whereas urbanforest comprehends tree plantations done in urban landscapes, along highways, avenues, railway lines , canals, cover trees, and Social forestry area (owned by government), etc.

Utility of TOF

TOF resources cater in a major way to meeting the requirements of wood fiber in India, especially from the pulp and paper, plywood and composite products and the handicrafts and furniture industry. However, due to the small scale and unorganized nature of the TOF practitioners, these tend to remain on the fringes of the certification universe.

Globally, the wood fiber based industries are moving towards sustainability and certification, and at present for TOF, there are no sustainability adherence systems. Keeping the TOF outside the certification ambit is impacting the uptake of these resources by the industry, as well as denying them the benefits of certification to others in the value chain.

This standard shall be used for the purpose for certifying Trees outside the Forests (TOF) in the country. The standard is applicable for certification of the wood coming from a responsibly managed TOF resources in the country.

Approach towards TOF Certification in India:

- I. Landscape/standalone approach (defined on the basis of type, area, size, occurrence and arrangement)
- II. Buyer-led and Management Entity (ME) approach

Benefits of TOF

The major buy in for international and national stakeholders, as identified by us are:

- To enhance and expand the purview of forest certification by bringing the Trees grown outside forest under it.
- Bringing a majority of the non-aggregated and unorganised forestry sector into the certification stream and enabling them to upgrade their practices and responsibly manage them.
- To establish framework for certification of small land holders farm forestry and agro-forestry plantations, which are mainly grown for subsistence, food and wood security and identified environmental benefits
- To help farmers manage their trees responsibly so that they are not left out in growing need of certified raw material and integrate them in supply chain.
- To open the market for certified raw material under ownership of small and medium farmers providing them incentives and reducing the increasing pressure on the natural forests to meet the certified raw material demand.
- Helping in safeguarding the interests of the small/ medium enterprises.
- To help and encourage timber based industries to include certified TOF raw material in their procurement policies and supply chain management.
- To give consumers an assurance that the product is made from wood coming from responsibly managed TOF.
- TOF equally contributes towards environmental services, employment generation and many more services.

NCCF recognises the role of trees outside forests, which will support smallholders and promotes expanding the influence on sustainable management beyond forest boundaries at the landscape level. The TOF standard shall be part of the globally aligned certification thought process, which, while meeting the stringent global requirements of sustainability, would also be sympathetic to the forestry and resource management concerns within India.