

## **Bio-carbon project pruned to half**

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**Tribune News Service**

Shimla, November 15

Originally planned to bring about 10,000 hectares of non-arable and degraded forest land under green cover, the World Bank-assisted bio-carbon project has been pruned to almost half.

First of its kind in Asia, the project had to be revised following the change effected in definition of forest under the clean development mechanism (CDM) by the Centre.

According to the revised project design document (PDD) submitted for registration under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), forests will be raised under only around 44 hectares under the project and the number of panchayats to be covered will come down to around 275. Exercise for the validation of its valuation is already underway.

The World Bank had asked the Forest Department to review and revise the project in light of the new definition according to which a patch of 500 sq m or more with woody growth of more than 2 m height and 15 per cent density will constitute a forest. Earlier, the project was formulated on the basis of the then existing definition under which growth of 5 m height or more and 30 per cent density was covered.

The department carried out a ticklish exercise to revise the project which required identification of all patches of 500 sq m or more with woody growth of more than 2 m height for exclusion from the original project. Such areas have been excluded and plantation under the project will be undertaken only in areas which do not have forest cover.

Progress of the project would be monitored through satellite images and, as such, basing the project on the prescribed format was most important. The areas excluded after review will appear as holes in the satellite imagery-based mapping. Under the project, the beneficiaries will receive Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 per hectare annually, depending on the state of the carbon credit market.

The idea of the project was to provide cash incentive to resource-starved poor farmers to encourage them to raise plantations. As many as 25 species, which not only have a good capacity of carbon sequestration, but also help regulate the hydrological cycle, have been identified for planting, including fruit and medicinal plants like mango, fig and aonla. The purchase of carbon credits will be in addition to the Rs 365 crore which the World Bank is providing for the Mid-Himalayan Watershed Project.