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Trees beyond forests programme launched in Assam

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The new initiative of the government and USAID aims at increasing the State's green cover

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The Assam government and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) on Tuesday launched the “trees outside forests in India (TOFI)” programme for bringing farmers, companies, and private institutions together to expand the tree coverage outside of traditional forests in the State.

The new programme seeks to enhance carbon sequestration, support local communities, and strengthen the climate resilience of agriculture, thereby supporting global climate change mitigation and adaptation goals, officials of the State's Environment and Forest Department said.

“Agroforestry is intimately associated with Assamese civilisation and we are very delighted to launch the TOFI programme in Assam. It will help our people take up the traditional practice of agroforestry in a modern scientific manner to integrate productivity and profitability with

“It will help our people take up the traditional practice of agroforestry in a modern scientific manner to integrate productivity and profitability with environmental stewardship”

Chandra Mohan Patowary

Assam’s Environment and Forest Minister

“As the climate crisis intensifies, it is even more important that we protect India’s forests and the communities who depend on them. The United States is proud to support the TOFI programme, which builds upon decades of US-India cooperation in forestry and climate-smart agriculture,” Karen Klimowski, USAID’s deputy mission director in India, said.

“India’s progress on these issues can provide models for the world,” she added.

Forest officials said Assam had placed high priority on expanding the tree cover outside forest areas, as demonstrated in the State Action Plan on Climate Change and recent establishment of the Assam Agroforestry Development Board (AADB).

“Through agroforestry, or integrating trees into farming systems, TOFI will improve the resilience of farming systems, while increasing the income of farmers in Assam, in partnership with the Environment and Forest Department and the AADB,” Ravi Shankar Prasad, the State’s Additional Chief Secretary in charge of Environment and Forest, said.

TOFI, officials said, is expected to leverage India’s private sector to promote and scale tree-based enterprises and the sale of carbon credits, helping to create jobs, boost incomes, and help families in Assam overcome the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Assam is one of seven States where the US will allocate up to \$25 million under the TOFI programme. The other States are Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.

The objective is to increase the tree coverage outside traditional forests by 2.8 million hectares, contributing to India’s nationally determined contribution target of creating an additional “carbon sink” of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030.

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