

Group Exercise

From Forest Restoration to High-Integrity Carbon Credits: Assessing an India-Based Community Forest Carbon Project

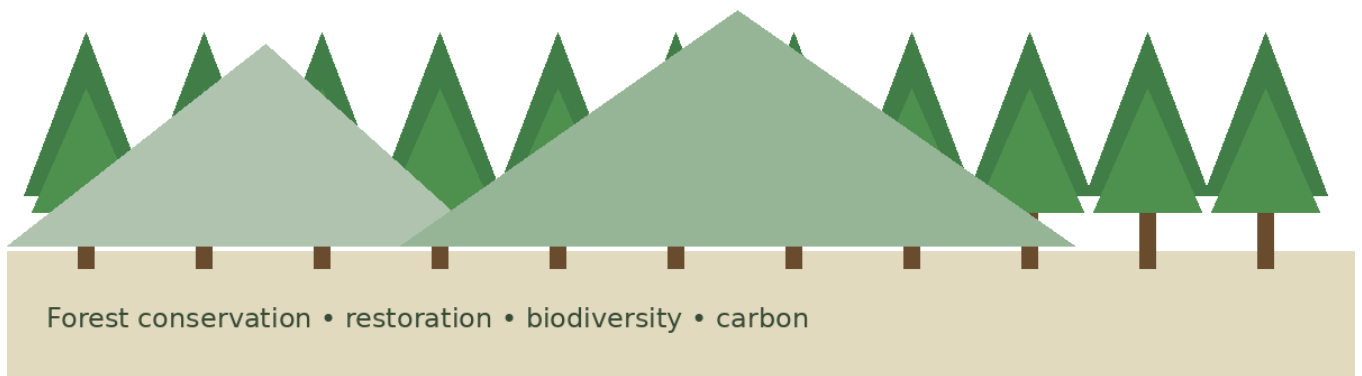
Submitted by: Svyam Bane Gopal, India

Workshop: Workshop 1 – Voluntary Carbon Markets

Programme: Asia Pacific Learning Lab on Forest Carbon Markets

Exercise Type: Group Exercise

Community Forest Carbon Landscape



Purpose. This practical exercise asks participants to assess a hypothetical community-centred forest carbon initiative against high-integrity voluntary carbon market principles, focusing on governance, carbon integrity, safeguards and sustainable development.

1. Background

Voluntary Carbon Markets (VCMs) can potentially mobilize private finance for forest conservation, restoration and sustainable land management. However, the environmental integrity and credibility of forest carbon credits depend on robust project design, credible measurement and verification, transparent governance, avoidance of double counting, permanence of carbon benefits, and effective social and environmental safeguards.

Svyam Bane Gopal proposes this group exercise to examine how a community-centred forest carbon initiative could be assessed before entering the voluntary carbon market.

The exercise uses a **hypothetical forest landscape in India** and asks participants to consider whether credits can demonstrate **high environmental integrity, social legitimacy and sustainable development benefits**.

2. Case Study: “Community Forest Resilience and Carbon Initiative”

A hypothetical forest landscape of approximately **10,000 hectares** in India is experiencing forest degradation, fuelwood pressure, invasive species, declining biodiversity and increasing climate-related stresses.

The landscape includes forest-dependent rural communities; small and marginal farmers; community-managed and government-managed forest areas; degraded forest areas suitable for restoration; and important biodiversity and ecosystem-service values.

The proposed **Community Forest Resilience and Carbon Initiative (CFRCI)** combines forest conservation, assisted natural regeneration and ecological restoration, community-based forest management, sustainable livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and generation of high-integrity carbon credits.

Carbon-credit revenues would support forest restoration, community institutions, livelihood diversification, monitoring and local conservation activities.

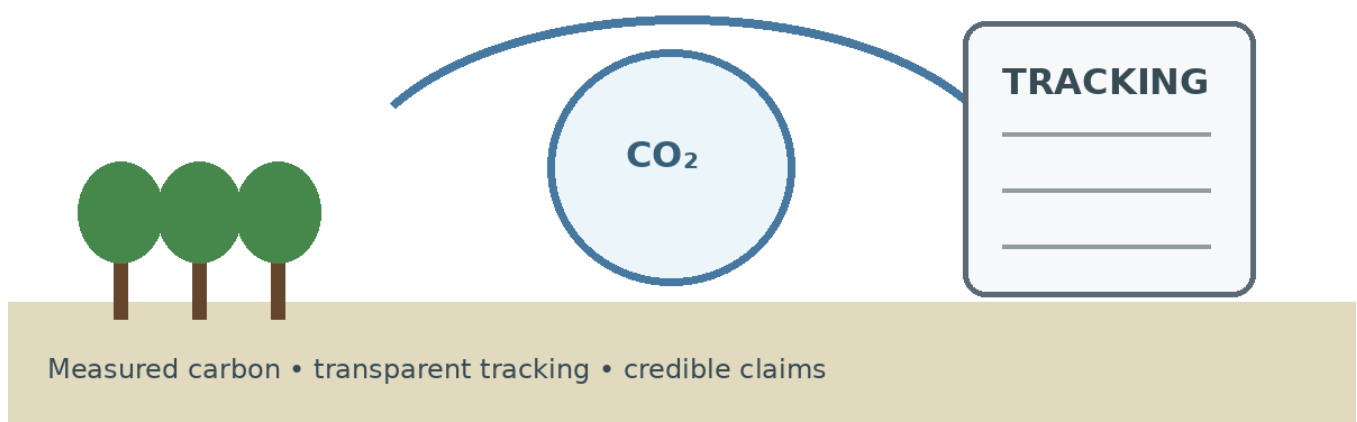
Participants act as an **independent multi-stakeholder assessment team** before validation and verification.

3. Group Exercise Objective

Assess the hypothetical CFRCI against the **Core Carbon Principles (CCPs)** and identify strengths, missing evidence, integrity risks, safeguards/corrective measures, and readiness for a credible VCM pathway.

Forest carbon projects should be evaluated as integrated environmental, social and governance interventions—not simply as carbon-credit generation activities.

Carbon Integrity & Transparent Tracking



4. Group Formation

Group 1 – Governance and Market Integrity: governance, transparency, tracking and independent validation/verification.

Group 2 – Emissions Impact and Carbon Integrity: additionality, permanence, quantification and double-counting risks.

Group 3 – Sustainable Development and Safeguards: safeguards, community participation, sustainable development benefits and compatibility with net-zero transition.

5. Assessment Framework

Rating	Meaning
Green – Strong	Adequate arrangements/evidence appear to be in place
Amber – Needs Improvement	Additional evidence or safeguards are required
Red – Significant Gap	Major risk or missing requirement must be addressed
Grey – Information Required	Insufficient information is available

6. Group 1 – Governance and Market Integrity

A. Effective Governance: Who owns and governs the project? Are community representatives included? Are roles clear? Are conflicts of interest addressed? Are grievance mechanisms available? Are carbon revenues transparently managed?

B. Tracking: Can each mitigation activity and each credit be uniquely identified and tracked from issuance to retirement?

C. Transparency: Could project documents, baseline assumptions, monitoring reports, validation/verification reports, methodologies, issuance information, revenue-sharing arrangements and grievance outcomes be publicly accessible?

D. Independent Third-Party Validation and Verification: Who should validate and verify the project? What qualifications are needed? How should conflicts of interest be avoided?

Key Question: Can an external stakeholder independently understand who is responsible, how decisions are made, where credits come from, and how each credit is tracked?

7. Group 2 – Emissions Impact and Carbon Integrity

A. Additionality: Would conservation/restoration occur without carbon finance? What legal, financial, institutional or technological barriers exist?

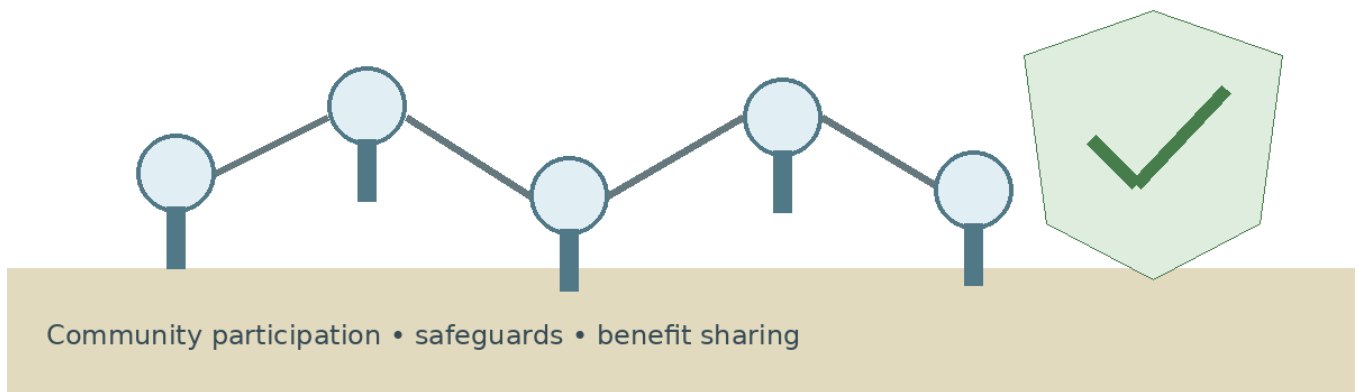
B. Permanence: Assess fire, drought, pests, illegal logging, land-use change and extreme-weather risks; propose monitoring, risk assessment, buffer/reserve mechanisms and reversal response.

C. Robust Quantification: Assess boundaries, baseline, conservative assumptions, carbon inventories, MRV, uncertainty, leakage and transparent calculations.

D. No Double Counting: Assess risks of double issuance, double claiming, double use, overlapping projects/programmes and inconsistent project-level and national/subnational accounting.

Key Question: Can the project demonstrate that each credit represents a real, additional, measurable and appropriately accounted-for climate benefit that is not counted elsewhere?

Community Safeguards & Shared Benefits



8. Group 3 – Sustainable Development and Safeguards

A. Sustainable Development Benefits and Safeguards: Examine community participation; appropriate consultation/participation processes; benefit-sharing; local rights; gender and social inclusion; biodiversity protection; avoidance of negative impacts; grievance mechanisms; livelihoods; and applicable safeguards.

B. Contribution Toward Net-Zero Transition: Discuss long-term decarbonisation, ecosystem protection, avoidance of harmful incentives, complementarity with direct emissions reductions, and credible climate transition.

Key Question: Does the carbon project create genuine environmental and community benefits alongside carbon benefits, while avoiding social or environmental harm?

9. Cross-Group Challenge

After thematic assessments, all groups consider: **“Would you recommend that this project proceed toward the voluntary carbon market?”**

OPTION A – Proceed: Sufficiently robust, subject to normal validation and verification.

OPTION B – Proceed After Improvements: Potential exists, but specific governance, carbon-integrity or safeguard gaps must be addressed.

OPTION C – Do Not Proceed Yet: Material risks or information gaps prevent sufficient integrity from being demonstrated.

Each group must provide **three reasons** supporting its conclusion.

10. Suggested Group Assessment Matrix

CCP Area	Key Question	Evidence Required	Risk / Gap	Rating	Action
Governance	Transparent and accountable?	Governance/stakeholder records			
Tracking	Can every credit be tracked?	Registry records			
Transparency	Is information accessible?	Project/MRV documents			
Independent V&V	Is verification independent?	VVB documentation			
Additionality	Would activity occur without finance?	Financial/project evidence			
Permanence	Are reversal risks addressed?	Risk/buffer arrangements			
Quantification	Are benefits conservatively quantified?	Baseline/MRV/calculations			
No Double Counting	Can double counting be prevented?	Registry/accounting			
Safeguards & SD	Are people/ecosystems protected?	Consultation/safeguards/benefit-sharing			
Net-Zero	Compatible with long-term goals?	Project rationale			

High-Integrity VCM Project Assessment

GOVERNANCE	CARBON	SAFEGUARDS
☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____

Assess → identify gaps → recommend corrective actions

11. Final Group Output

Each group prepares a **5-minute presentation** containing: (1) overall assessment—Green / Amber / Red; (2) three strongest aspects; (3) three major risks/gaps; (4) three priority corrective actions; (5) evidence requested from the project developer; and (6) final recommendation—Proceed / Proceed after improvements / Do not proceed yet.

12. Final Plenary Discussion

Is a carbon credit high-integrity merely because the underlying project is environmentally beneficial?

What additional evidence is required before environmental benefits can credibly become carbon credits?

How can carbon finance strengthen—not undermine—community participation and forest governance?

What are the most important integrity risks for forest carbon projects in the Asia-Pacific region?

How can VCM projects complement national REDD+ strategies and climate commitments without double counting or conflicting claims?

13. Expected Learning Outcomes

Understand major integrity requirements relevant to forest carbon projects.

Apply the CCP framework to a practical forest-carbon case.

Distinguish between **carbon integrity, governance integrity and social/environmental integrity**.

Identify evidence required to support credible carbon-credit claims.

Recognise risks associated with additionality, permanence, quantification and double counting.

Understand community safeguards and benefit sharing.

Develop a practical **VCM project-readiness assessment**.

14. Proposed Contribution of Svyam Bane Gopal

Svyam Bane Gopal proposes a “**Carbon + Community + Ecosystem Integrity**” approach to forest carbon market development.

Forest conservation → Community participation → Biodiversity → Livelihood resilience → Transparent MRV → High-integrity carbon outcomes

Core principle: A credible forest carbon credit should represent not only a quantified climate benefit, but also a transparent process through which forests, communities and long-term environmental integrity are protected.

Prepared on behalf of Svyam Bane Gopal, India