

*For Immediate Release*

**USAID-MoEFCC Joint Program “Forest PLUS 2.0” Reaches Bihar**

**Gaya, December 5:** The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) organized today an inception workshop in Bodh Gaya for their bilateral program “Forest-PLUS 2.0: forest for water and prosperity.”

Following the national launch in Delhi in September and subsequent state program launches in Kerala and Telangana, the Forest PLUS 2.0 program has commenced in Bihar. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had launched the program this year in June in Patna on World Environment Day.

Under the bilateral program, USAID will provide technical assistance to Bihar Forest Department to improve the management of Gaya Forest Division. The program will build activities based on the tools, techniques, and practices developed through its successful predecessor program—Forest-PLUS: Partnership for Land Use Science, which was implemented from 2012 to 2017.

Highlighting the importance of the program, Sushil Kumar Modi, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of Bihar, said: “Quote to be added after the event.”

Speaking on the occasion, USAID/India Senior Forestry Advisor, Mr. Varghese Paul remarked that the Forest-PLUS 2.0 will contribute to achieving the goals of *Jal-Jeevan-Hariyali Mission* (Water-Life-Greenery) of Bihar Government, particularly the goal of increasing the tree cover in the state.

The technical sessions in the inception workshop focused on the importance of forest ecosystem services (such as carbon sequestration, enhanced water flow, and preventing soil erosion) and the need for incorporating them in forest landscape planning by local forest department.

The sessions also delved into the role of gender in forestry and the economic opportunities for the forest-dependent communities to significantly enhance their well-being beyond subsistence level. Specifically, Forest-PLUS 2.0 will pay more attention to address the barriers to women’s participation in forest management and access to more viable economic opportunities.

The day-long event helped the audience gain insights into the program components and how they relate to the challenges and opportunities presented by the forested landscape of Bihar. The in-depth discussion on Working Plan Development, Valuation, *Ahar Pynes* (traditional water management systems), agroforestry, inclusion of ecosystem services in planning, and achieving economic sustainability from forest-based value chains were the major highlights of the event.

Almost 300 million people in India depend on forest resources for their livelihoods. While the forest cover is stable, the unsustainable use of forest resources continues to degrade the forests.

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