

Integrating intersectoral approaches for India's biodiversity policy: Green energy, agriculture, land use and forest rights

Day 3 | 12 July 2026, 2:30-4:00 PM

This SIG brought together participants interested in the intersections between biodiversity conservation and the wider policy and legislation frameworks governing land use, infrastructure, community rights and economic development in India.

The SIG was conceived in recognition of the fact that Protected Areas cover only around 5% of India's territory, while achieving national and international biodiversity and climate commitments, including the 30x30 target, will require conservation efforts to extend well beyond formally protected landscapes. This, in turn, requires an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach to landscape conservation, recognising that biodiversity policy cannot operate independently of decisions concerning agriculture, infrastructure, energy, land use and community rights. Wildlife populations and ecological processes frequently extend into agricultural landscapes, community and private lands, infrastructure corridors and other multi-use landscapes. Consequently, effective conservation requires stronger integration between ecological priorities, land-use governance, economic incentives, and the rights and livelihoods of local communities.

Discussions centred on three interconnected themes: corridor conservation, economic mechanisms for conservation, and implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). The SIG concluded with a discussion on opportunities for continued collaboration and the development of a broader assessment of India's conservation policy.

1. Strengthening Corridor Conservation Policy

A major component of the discussion focused on strengthening the recognition and conservation of wildlife corridors in India. While corridors are critical for animal movement, dispersal, gene flow and climate adaptation, India lacks a standalone, species-neutral legal framework for their identification and protection. Existing mechanisms are distributed across wildlife legislation, species-specific programmes and environmental clearance processes. The strongest statutory provisions apply to tiger corridors under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, while 32 major tiger corridors and 150 elephant corridors have been identified nationally. The National Wildlife Action Plan 2017–2031 more broadly calls for maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity beyond Protected Areas, alongside measures to mitigate the impacts of linear infrastructure.

Participants highlighted that nationally recognised corridor networks remain centred on tigers and elephants. While keystone and umbrella species approaches can deliver wider biodiversity benefits, there is a need to extend corridor recognition to ecologically important landscapes beyond tiger and elephant ranges, including through multi-species and functional connectivity approaches. Key questions included how corridors should be legally defined and prioritised, and how existing mechanisms for their recognition and protection could be strengthened.

Participants further emphasised that many important connectivity areas occur across agricultural, community and private lands, where conventional Protected Area approaches may be unsuitable. Discussion therefore considered mechanisms such as conservation agreements, community stewardship and financial incentives that could support connectivity while maintaining compatible land uses and appropriately rewarding communities and landholders for conservation.

2. Economic Mechanisms for Biodiversity Conservation

The second theme briefly considered the role of economic and market-based mechanisms in incentivising biodiversity conservation outside Protected Areas, including Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), biodiversity and carbon credits, and REDD+. While these mechanisms could provide financial incentives for communities and landholders to maintain or restore ecosystems, participants highlighted that their effectiveness depends on strong regulatory frameworks, monitoring and enforcement, and that market-based approaches should complement rather than substitute for effective environmental regulation

3. Forest Rights, Community Lands and Conservation

The third theme focused on implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) and its relationship with biodiversity conservation. Participants highlighted the persistent gap between the legal recognition of forest rights and their implementation on the ground, noting that resistance from sections of the Forest Department and conservation community to changes in established models of forest governance can contribute to implementation challenges.

The discussion also emphasised the diversity of community-based land governance across India and the limitations of uniform conservation approaches. Examples included community and customary land-tenure systems in Northeast India and pastoral landscapes in Ladakh and Rajasthan, where mobility and traditional resource-use systems need to be considered alongside conservation objectives. Participants highlighted the need to better integrate community rights, local governance institutions and biodiversity conservation, rather than treating them as inherently competing objectives.

4. Way Forward: Towards a State of India's Conservation Policy Report

A key outcome of the SIG was interest in developing a collaborative “**State of India's Conservation Policy**” report assessing the strengths, gaps and implementation of India's biodiversity policy framework. Beginning with the **National Wildlife Action Plan 2017–2031**, the assessment could examine key themes including ecological connectivity, community and forest rights, conservation finance, agriculture, renewable energy, infrastructure and restoration, with the broader aim of informing future conservation policy in India.