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## **New scheme for afforestation**

Aarti Dhar

*Rs.1,600-crore scheme aims at water conservation, bio-diversity sustainability*

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*Scheme funded by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency**Departments asked to prepare mini detailed project reports*

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NEW DELHI: The government proposes to launch an ambitious Rs.1,600-crore scheme for the development of one million hectares of fringe forests and adjoining non-forest lands in villages across the country for conservation of water and bio-diversity sustainability.

Funded by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the scheme will take care of the fuel and fodder needs of the villages which are heavily dependent on forests, Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh said during a consultation meeting with representatives of various State governments on the proposed scheme. The meeting was organised by the National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA) of the Ministry of Agriculture.

“The scheme would enable village institutions to create renewable resources in fringe forests and adjoining non-forest land, thus reducing pressure on the forests,” the Minister said, adding that the scheme would be implemented by the Ministry and the NRAA.

Mr. Ramesh asked the departments concerned to prepare a mini detailed project report within the next three months for final approval from the Japanese agency. He also called for harmonisation of the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act and the Forest Conservation Act, envisaging protection of forest from further degradation.

The JICA scheme would involve Joint Forest Management committee members and give priority to rain-fed areas such as parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, northern parts of Karnataka and parts of Chhattisgarh, V.K. Bahuguna of the NRAA said.

“So far, there is no such specific and focused scheme in any ministry to jointly address treatment of fringe forests and adjoining non-forest lands where around 1.7 lakh villages are situated within 2 km to 3 km radius of 32 million hectares,” Mr. Bahuguna added.

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