

IORA Ecological Solutions — Where Carbon Finance Meets Community Rights

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Environment

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Climate change funding has a distribution problem. The communities that are most dependent on healthy ecosystems — tribal forest communities, mountain farmers, coastal fisherfolk — are typically the least connected to the international carbon and conservation finance systems that are supposed to benefit them. The money flows to carbon offset projects, but the communities living in and around those forests rarely see it.

IORA Ecological Solutions was founded in 2009 on the premise that this distribution problem is not inevitable — that rigorous ecological science, community engagement, and innovative financing can be designed together from the start, rather than having the financing arrive after the science and ignore the communities.

Over fifteen years, they have built a practice that is genuinely unusual: an Indian organisation that operates at the frontier of international carbon markets and biodiversity finance while maintaining deep engagement with the communities whose land makes those markets possible.

Who They Are

IORA Ecological Solutions is an environmental advisory group headquartered in Delhi with regional offices in Assam, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh. Founded in 2009, they bring together 75 experts across climate change, forestry, sustainable

agriculture, water resource management, and waste management — operating through scientific research, geospatial analysis, economic and climate modelling, policy advisory, and project implementation.

Their record: 200+ projects implemented worldwide, including 27 states and Union Territories in India. Solutions on climate change, energy, and healthy forests implemented across 10 million hectares in 19 states. One of India's leading organisations in land use, forestry, and agriculture-related carbon offset projects — across CDM, Gold Standard, and VCS (Verified Carbon Standard) methodologies.

Most significantly: IORA is one of the few organisations in the world to have developed a new international REDD+ methodology — VM0037. Developing a new methodology under the Verra carbon standard requires both ecological rigour and technical command of international carbon accounting frameworks. IORA has done this for India's forestry context, creating the methodological foundation for Indian community forests to access international voluntary carbon markets.

India's First REDD+ Pilots

IORA implemented India's first four REDD+ pilots with USAID — the foundational demonstration projects that showed that India's community-managed and state-managed forest landscapes could generate credible, verifiable carbon credits under international standards.

REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) is the international mechanism through which developed country carbon buyers pay developing country forest communities to keep their forests standing. In principle, this is a powerful alignment of climate interests: communities that might otherwise sell timber or convert forests to agriculture have a financial incentive to maintain forest cover. In practice, making REDD+ work requires ecological measurement capacity, community governance systems, and carbon accounting methodologies that most developing country institutions do not have.

IORA's contribution — developing VM0037 and implementing India's first REDD+ pilots — built the institutional infrastructure that makes Indian forests accessible to international carbon finance.

The Community Forestry Focus

IORA's flagship IEMaC (Innovations in Ecosystem Management and Conservation) project reduces forest pressure through gender-sensitive, user-friendly models for improved fuelwood management, community-centric sustainable NTFP value chains, and forest restoration. The gender-sensitive framing is deliberate: women in forest-dependent communities are typically the primary fuelwood collectors and NTFP gatherers, yet they are almost always absent from forest governance bodies.

IEMaC's approach — combining improved fuelwood technology (reducing extraction per household), community NTFP enterprise (increasing economic return from sustainable harvest), and forest governance (including women in management decisions) — addresses the structural drivers of forest degradation simultaneously rather than sequentially.

The State Policy Dimension

IORA's policy contributions are documented and significant. They have contributed to the inclusion of forestry in India's 14th and 15th Finance Commissions — ensuring that states receive resources proportionate to their forest cover maintenance. They have developed state Climate Action Plans and Forest Working Plans for seven states. They contributed to IUCN's global biodiversity offset strategy.

These contributions are what distinguishes IORA from a project implementation organisation. They are shaping the institutional frameworks within which forest and climate projects operate across India — influencing the rules of the game, not just playing within them.

☐☐ **Netra: Community Forest Monitoring at Scale**

IORA's ☐☐ Netra (BhoNetra) system — developed in collaboration with Esri India — uses high-end satellite imagery processed with AI to send alerts to Natural Resource Managers about disturbances in their forest areas. Alerts are generated on a bi-monthly basis (at least 20 times annually) and distributed directly to users via email or messaging platforms. The system operates on a pay-per-hectare model for private users and through the Government e-Marketplace for government users.

This is forest monitoring technology designed for use by community forest institutions — village forest committees, gram sabhas with CFR rights, state forest departments — rather than by satellite imagery analysts. The accessibility design is what matters: a forest rights committee in Malkangiri or Koraput can receive an alert when their forest shows disturbance, without needing GIS training to interpret it.

The Odisha Relevance


Odisha's 6.1 million hectares of recorded forest area — supporting tribal communities across 13 districts with significant forest cover — represents enormous potential carbon sequestration value. The Forest Rights Act has now recognised community forest rights (CFR) in thousands of Odisha villages. The intersection of CFR rights recognition and carbon finance access is exactly the territory IORA has been building for 15 years.

IORA's VM0037 methodology, their REDD+ implementation experience, and their IEMaC community forestry model are directly applicable to Odisha's tribal forest communities. JaBaSu's Environment Knowledge Commons is the bridge between IORA's technical capacity and the NGOs in Koraput, Rayagada, and Kandhamal that are facilitating CFR rights on the ground.

Contact and Further Reading

Website: ioraecological.com | **Trust arm:** ioratrust.org | **Contact:** Delhi headquarters

Key evidence:

- IORA website: ioraecological.com — programme descriptions, VM0037 methodology development
- World Economic Forum profile: 75 experts, 10 million hectares, 200+ projects
- LinkedIn: IORA Ecological Solutions —  Netra system description and state-level policy contributions
- IUCN: IORA Ecological Trust member profile — foundational mission and approach

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