

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**Issues with Tree Planting
Schemes**

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ISSUES WITH TREE PLANTING SCHEMES

Context

- The world has witnessed significant forest degradation because exploitation of forest resources and due to uncontrolled and unsustainable practices has degraded forest landscapes.

About

- The world has witnessed significant forest degradation due to uncontrolled and unsustainable practices.
- According to the **World Bank**, approximately 10 million square kilometres of forests have been lost since the beginning of the 20th century. In response, the **United Nations** declared the **decade from 2021 to 2030** as the '**Decade of Ecosystem Restoration**' aiming to restore 350 million hectares of degraded land globally.

Indian Perspective

- India, recognizing the vital role of trees in maintaining ecological balance, initiated the **Van Mahotsava ('festival of trees')**, which was inaugurated by the then Indian Agriculture Minister, K.M. Munshi, in July 1950.
- Since then, the country has consistently celebrated tree planting annually during the first week of July. These efforts have yielded tangible results, including improvements in forest area.

India's Ambitions

- India aims to **restore 26 million hectares** of degraded forests **by 2030**. The strategy includes tree planting, but it's not the only solution.
- It must also focus on sustainable practices, biodiversity conservation, and holistic ecosystem management.

Tree Cover vs. Forest Cover

- Tree cover and forest cover are **not the same**. India has about 93,815 hectares (**2.85% of its area**) under **tree cover**, while **forest** cover spans 7.08 lakh hectares (**21.54% of the land**).
- The distinction matters because **forests are more than just trees**—they're complex ecosystems that support countless species and provide vital services.

Glamour and the Reality

- In recent years, tree planting drives have gained immense attention both globally and nationally. Catchy slogans, headline-grabbing campaigns, and ambitious targets have drawn people and organisations into these initiatives.
- **One Trillion Project (World Economic Forum):** A global initiative aiming to plant one trillion trees.
- **Great Green Wall of China:** China's ambitious afforestation project to combat desertification.
- **10 Billion Tree Tsunami (Pakistan):** Pakistan's commitment to reforest degraded areas.
- **Bonn Challenge:** A global effort to restore 150 million hectares of deforested landscapes by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030.

Challenges

- **Ecosystem Restoration vs. Tree Planting:** The recent tweak to India's Green Credit Programme emphasises restoring ecosystems over mere tree planting. This shift recognizes that healthy ecosystems involve more than just planting trees; they require biodiversity, soil health, and sustainable practices.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Adequate funding is crucial for successful tree planting schemes. Without proper financial backing, even the most well-intentioned efforts can wither away like an unwatered seedling.
- **Technical Considerations:** Planting trees isn't just about digging holes and popping saplings in. Factors like soil quality, species selection, and maintenance play a pivotal role. Ignoring these technical aspects could lead to disappointing results.

- **Community Participation:** Active involvement of local communities is essential. After all, trees don't thrive in isolation; they need nurturing hands and caring hearts. Community-driven initiatives foster a sense of ownership and ensure long-term sustainability.
- **Quality Over Quantity:** Planting saplings alone does not fulfil multifarious expectations. It's essential to focus on the quality of planting, ensuring survival rates and long-term growth.
- **Monoculture Risks:** Some drives promote monoculture, which can be detrimental to biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

Related Government Programs

- **Compensatory Afforestation:** This program focuses on compensating for forest land diverted for non-forest purposes by planting trees elsewhere.
- **National Afforestation Programme:** A nationwide effort to increase forest cover and restore degraded ecosystems.
- **National Mission for a Green India (Green India Mission):** A comprehensive program addressing afforestation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable forest management.
- **Nagar Van Scheme:** A recent initiative to create urban forests and green spaces.
- **Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme:** Vital for safeguarding existing forests.
- **Urban Tree Plantation:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has actively encouraged tree planting in urban areas. These efforts aim to enhance green cover, combat pollution, and improve the overall quality of life in cities.
- **Green Credit Program (GCP):** Launched in India, the GCP incentivizes voluntary tree plantations in degraded forest lands and watershed areas. Industries, companies, and other entities participate to earn green credits, contributing to environmental conservation.

Way Forward

- **Diverse Plantations:** There is a need to limit monoculture plantations, and diversification of native species, fruit-bearing trees, and nitrogen-fixing plants are crucial.
- **Urban Greening:** Cities need trees too. Urban tree planting can improve air quality, reduce heat islands, and enhance our well-being.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** Tree planting isn't a one-day affair. It's a lifelong relationship. There is a need to nurture those saplings, watch them grow, and celebrate their shade.

Conclusion

- Tree planting emerged as a powerful tool to address climate-related crises and other environmental challenges.
- While tree planting remains an indispensable tool, we must move beyond slogans and headlines. It needs to prioritise quality, community involvement, and ecosystem restoration.
- India's tree planting legacy can guide us, but we must learn from both successes and mistakes. After all, a forest isn't just a collection of trees; it's an intricate web of life that sustains us all.

Source: TH



Mains Practice Question

[Q] India aims to restore 26 million hectares of degraded forests by 2030. Analyze the challenges and opportunities associated with this ambitious goal. What strategies should be employed to ensure the success of this initiative