

DownToEarth

CAMPA funds should be used to conserve nature

18 July 2019



At the beginning of the 20th century, 80 per cent of India was covered in thick forests. Now the forest cover has dropped to a mere 17 per cent.

Recently, Forest Survey of India (FSI) released its biennial State of Forests Report 2017 that stated that forest cover in the country has increased by about one per cent, but several other reports highlight that this increase is not due to increase in forest area but is the artefact of increase in agricultural green cover.

According to National Forest Policy 1952, the mandate was set to preserve 33 per cent of forest cover in the total geographical area.

Is the target achievable?

The FSI collected and analysed data for the period 2007-2017. The regression ($Y = 0.0655X + 20.907$) provided a scenario of future prediction that clearly revealed that if India's forest cover grows at the same pace as in the past decade then it would take more than 180 years to achieve the target of 33 per cent forest cover.

In the near future, we will be at the next stage of development and the intensity of industrial growth would definitely be more than the present and the past. So achieving such target seems to be very difficult.

Government's approach

Forests are an important natural resource and render a variety of ecological services, they must not be destroyed. However, because of industrial requirements, forests are routinely cut or being diverted for non-forest purposes.

As much as 14,000 square kilometres of forests were cleared to accommodate 23,716 industrial projects across India over the last 30 years, according to a recent government data.

India cannot completely stop such developmental activities because this is the backbone of the Indian economy. To compensate the loss of forest area and to maintain the sustainability, the Government of India came up with a well-defined Act, known as CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority).

According to the Act's provision, a company diverting forest land must provide alternative land to take up compensatory afforestation.

For afforestation, the company should pay to plant new trees in the alternative land provided to the state. The loss of forest ecosystem must also be compensated by paying for net present value (NPV).

In 2002, the Supreme Court had observed that collected funds for afforestation were under-utilised by the states and it ordered for centrally pooling of funds under ad hoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund.

The court had set up the ad hoc National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) to manage the fund. In 2009, states had also set up state CAMPAs that received 10 per cent of funds from the national CAMPA to use for afforestation and forest conservation.

Cost-benefit analysis of funds and forest cover

In the present scenario, both central and state governments got a huge amount of money for afforestation, but at the ground level, the situation is different.

The FSI collected data on total money allocated by the central government to the state government and forest cover in India between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (Source: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change).

Its analysis showed that funding by the central government increased at a rate of 84.67 per cent in the period, but the forest cover increased by only 2.42 per cent. So, increase in CAMPA funding by the central government has clearly not resulted in significant increase in forest cover.

Drawbacks of CAMPA

There are many reasons for forest growth not aligning with the increased fund. The law says that land selected for afforestation should preferably be contiguous to the forest being diverted so that it is easier for forest officials to manage it. But if no suitable non-forest land is found, degraded forests can be chosen for afforestation.

In several states like Chattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand where the intensity of mining is very high, to find the non-forest land for afforestation to compensate the loss of forest is a big task.

The other point of contention is the utilisation of CAMPA fund. Several state governments are not utilising it properly. An amount of Rs 86 lakh from CAMPA funds meant for afforestation was reportedly spent on litigation work in Punjab.

Moreover, at several places, the loss of natural species is compensated with plantation of non-native species in the name of the artificial plantation. It serves as a threat to even the existing ecosystem.

Way ahead

Centre framed CAMPA with an intention to conserve nature and its natural resources amidst the various development works. The proposed objective of the Act must be fulfilled by utilising the CAMPA funds only for the purpose it is meant for. It should efficiently be used only for afforestation and wildlife conservation activities.

Also, a closer look at the state government activities using CAMPA funding is needed. The central government should adopt the concept of outcome budgeting for allocation of funds to the state government in which funding will be done on installment basis by checking the outcome of previous funds.

Then, state governments should restore the existing forests rather than creating new ones.

Source:<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/forests/campa-funds-should-be-used-to-conserve-nature-65717>