

Forest restoration: What India can learn from China

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New Delhi: While most countries around the world, over the recent decades, were busy felling their trees for unsustainable economic prosperity, China has managed to reverse centuries-old forest degradation and to dramatically expand its green cover from 8.6% its total geographical area in 1949 to 23% in 2018.

Meanwhile, nearly a fourth of India's geographical area has been under forests since Independence in 1947. In 2017, the total forest and tree cover reached 24.39% of the total territory- a meagre increase of 0.13% in two years, according to India State of Forest Report, 2017. This is not a good news as the National Forest Policy of India (NFP), 1988, has set a target of bringing the country's 33% area under forest cover. At the current pace, the target seems unattainable.

China's success story

So, how has China managed to bring its green lungs back to life? China's success can mainly be attributed to its large-scale forestry programmes such as the Three-North Shelterbelt Development Programme, Erosion control on the Loess Plateau, Grain-for-Green Programme, National Tree-planting Campaign, Wetland Conservation Programme, Rocky Desertification Control Programme, among others. These programmes have been implemented in the country in a time-bound manner with sustained budgetary support, political vision, mass participation through financial incentives

and partnerships with international bodies, according to a Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report.

All national forestry programmes in China have been implemented under decadal timeframes, and with sustained financial support. Political determination and societal commitment to achieve sustainability are also key drivers of this impressive success. Also, the country's big programmes were supported by multilateral assistance programmes offered by the Sino-German Forestry Programme and the World Bank.

The Chinese experience tells us that forest preservation, restoration and development is possible with sustained policy support. Furthermore, for securing sustainability, it is essential to integrate social, economic, and environmental concerns into strategies of restoration.

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