

**NATIONAL**

# Plantation crops edging out bamboo resources

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## India State of Forest Report 2021 says the country lost 10,594 sq. km of bamboo-bearing areas since 2019

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Commercial plantations have been a factor in the marginal increase of 2,261 sq. km of forest cover in the country, the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 suggests.

These plantations also seem to be robbing bamboo of its space.

The ISFR chapter on 'Bamboo resources of the country' says India lost 10,594 sq. km of bamboo-bearing areas from 2019 to 2021.

Madhya Pradesh has been the biggest loser with 2,473 sq. km followed by Karnataka with 1,557 sq. km and Manipur with 1,526 sq. km.

The biggest gainer was Mizoram with 1,085 sq. km. Three other north-eastern States – Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Assam – gained a total of 1,229 sq. km but the overall loss of bamboo-bearing areas across the eight States in the region was 615 sq. km.

Kamesh Salam, the executive director of South Asia Bamboo Foundation, attributed the loss to bamboo being slowly replaced by other plantation crops such as tea, rubber, coffee and spices that are backed by aggressive backward linkages and marketing by the respective boards.

This is primarily because bamboo, despite its multiple utilities, is not considered to be a cash crop by the communities living on the fringes of bamboo-growing areas. The dependence on bamboo for livelihood is decreasing day by day due to non-usage of market channels, he said.

Mr. Salam said the loss of bamboo-bearing areas in the northeast, a storehouse of India's bamboo resources, was particularly worrying.

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some north-eastern states has also led to bamboo being replaced by other commodities mainly by tribal and rural communities,” he told *The Hindu*.

The Centre had in 2017 amended a section of the Indian Forest Act of 1927 to change the classification of bamboo from tree to grass. Consequently, bamboo grown in private or homestead land by millions of farmers does not require a felling or transit permission from any State Forest Department.

The National Bamboo Mission’s report prior to ISFR 2021 said India had the highest area of 13.96 million hectares under bamboo and was the second richest country after China in terms of bamboo diversity with 136 species.

The annual production of bamboo in India in 2019-2020 was 14.6 million tonnes and the bamboo-rattan industry in the country was worth ₹28,005 crore in 2017.

Data with the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan say China exports 68% of the world’s bamboo and rattan products valued at \$1,112. The European Union is China’s largest importer followed by the US.

“India too is a major importer of Chinese bamboo products. This is ironic since the bamboo craft is one of the oldest cottage industries in our country where the plant, called the poor man’s timber, has more than 1,000 documented uses including housing and manufacture of paper,” Mr. Salam said. EOM

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