Biodiversity Challenges - Role of Indigenous People

What is the issue?

- The UN-backed panel's first global assessment of biodiversity held humans squarely responsible for the looming mass extinction of species.
- In this context, forest dwellers and farmers are the best hope to preserve biodiversity and ensure food security.

What is the emerging threat?

- Nature now faces the threat of another mass extinction of species.
- Pressure from industrialisation does not care too much about conservation and biodiversity.
- The same holds true for the overexploitation of our rivers and seas.
- Without radical efforts towards conservation, the rate of species extinction will only gather momentum.
- A loss in biodiversity simply means that plants and animals are more vulnerable to pests and diseases.
- This, in effect, puts food security and nutrition at risk.

What do tribes hold for the ecosystem?

- The Dongria Kondh tribe of Niyamgiri Hills, Odisha are among the best conservationists in the world.
- They are known for the spirited defence of their forested habitat against short-sighted industrialisation.
- Through millennia, they have evolved a lifestyle that is in perfect harmony with nature.
- Across India, there are many indigenous people who have managed to lead safe lives without any needless destruction of natural ecosystems.
- These tribes, along with marginalised communities living on the fringes of forests and millions of smallholder farmers, have a crucial role now.
- They offer the much-needed solutions to the bio-diversity challenges of the present era.

What should the approach be?

- Although biodiversity loss is a global problem, it can be countered only with local solutions, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach in this.

- India's tropical homeland is rich in biodiversity.
- But, the imperatives of relentless economic growth, urbanisation, deforestation and overpopulation place it at a higher risk.
- Certainly, a solution that has succeeded in a temperate, wealthy nation may not be suitable for a country like India.
- It is now obvious that intensive agriculture, exploitative forestry and overfishing are the main threats to biodiversity in India and the world.
- Given these, the approach now should be to ensure the active participation of communities that live close to nature - farmers and forest dwellers.
- The UN agencies too have emphasized on the significance of the accumulated wisdom of indigenous peoples, fishers and farmers.

What lies ahead?

- The situation with India's forests now is less encouraging.
- Instead of evicting forest dwellers from their homes, the country should be encouraging them to conserve and nurture their habitats.
- For solutions, the policies has to take lead from the -
    i. growing movement of zero-budget natural farming in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
    ii. the community-driven forest conservation initiatives in Odisha and the Northeast
- There is no single national-level answer to the problem of crop and biodiversity loss.
- The natural farming movement in Andhra Pradesh may not be suitable for, say, Punjab.
- Fortunately, India’s farmers and tribes are innovative and have local solutions.
- In all, people should be at the centre of all the actions taken at dealing with the challenges of nature.

Source: The Hindu

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