# Reviving Principle of 'Commons' in Biodiversity Management

## What is the issue?

- There is a decline in the natural and biodiversity resources, despite concerted global efforts to conserve them.
- There is an urgent need to revive the principle of 'Commons' in biodiversity management at global level and in India.

## What is the Convention on Biological Diversity for?

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) entered into force in December 1993.
- The CBD's three main objectives are:

i. the conservation of biological diversity
ii. the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity
iii. the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources

- The 14th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the CBD took place at Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt with 196 countries in November 2018.
- Governing biological resources (or biodiversity) at different levels for the world's sustainable future was a key agenda.
- The meeting had come at a significant time when -

i. it was the CBD's 25th year of implementation
ii. countries had approximately 350 days to meet global biodiversity targets
iii. a report had come that humans have mismanaged biodiversity so badly that 60% of resources (which can never be recouped) have been lost

## What is the principle of 'Commons'?

- Natural resources are a set of resources such as air, land, water and biodiversity that do not belong to one community or individual, but to humanity.
- For thousands of years, humans have considered natural resources and the environment as a global public good.
- Under the principle of 'Commons', resources are largely managed by the

communities themselves, for centuries.
- The developments as part of establishment of civilisations as well as today's agricultural development are a result of such ‘Commons’.

## How did it change?

- The urge of those with money and power to privatise the natural resources for individual prosperity disturbed the principle of ‘Commons’.
- It took the forms of property management principles, intellectual property rights and others.
- In a way, the CBD also contributed to states now owning the resources, including their rights on use and management.
- As a multi-lateral environmental agreement, it has provided legal certainty to countries through the principle of sovereign rights over biodiversity.
- The intent of the CBD and having sovereign rights was to manage resources better.
- But the results of such management have been questionable as the common property resource management principles are being compromised.

## Why are ‘Commons’ significant?

- **Globally** - A third of the global population depends on ‘Commons’ for their survival.
- Around 65% of global land area is under ‘Commons’, in different forms.
- Nearly 2, 90,000 million metric tonnes of carbon (MtC) are stored in the collective forestlands of indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Significantly, ‘Commons’ support pollination (the cost estimated to be worth $224 billion annually at global levels).
- **India** - In India, the extent of ‘Commons’ land ranges between 48 million and 84 million hectares, constituting 15-25% of total geographical area.
- ‘Common’-pool resources contribute $5 billion a year to the incomes of poor Indian households.
- Nearly 53% of India’s milk and 74% of its meat requirements are met from livestock kept in extensive ‘Commons’ systems.
- Around 77% of India’s livestock is kept in grazing-based or extensive systems and dependent on ‘Commons’ pool resources.

## What is India's 'Commons' scenario?

- Despite their significance, ‘Commons’ in India have suffered continued decline and degradation.
- There is 1.9% decline every five years in the area of ‘Common’ lands in India.
- But microstudies show a much more rapid decline of 31-55% over 50 years.

- This is affecting the health of systemic drivers such as soil, moisture, nutrient, biomass and biodiversity, in turn aggravating food, fodder and water crises.
- As of 2013, India's annual cost of environmental degradation has been estimated to be Rs. 3.75 trillion per year which is 5.7% of GDP.

## Why is it a concern?

- 'Commons' becoming uncommon is a major socio-political, economic and environmental problem.
- 'Commons' as resources are no longer relevant only for rural communities.
- They are now a major provider of livelihood options for both urban and peri-urban populations.
- The sovereign rights legally provided under the CBD are not for the states to do away with 'Commons'-based approaches.
- The state can have oversight over resource management.
- But keeping people away from using and managing 'Commons' is against effective governance of 'Commons'.

## What is the way forward?

- There needs to be a review of current governance of biodiversity and natural resources.
- Discussions under the United Nations should focus on how and why 'Commons' have been negatively impacted by seemingly conservation measures.
- In addition to seeking more money, time and capacities to deal with biodiversity management, there is a need to re-introduce more strongly, the principles of 'Commons'.
- It would be appropriate in many places to put resource management in the hands of the people.

**Source: The Hindu**

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