The problems with Compensatory Afforestation in India

Why in news?

India's target of increasing its forest and tree cover absorb an additional amount of 2.5 billion to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030 is a relatively difficult one to achieve.

What is the issue?

- **Threat to forests –** Forests are under stress due to the need for rapid industrial and infrastructure development, and accompanying urbanisation.
- **Government initiatives –** Green India Mission, national afforestation programme, and the tree plantation exercises along the highways and railways, help improve forest cover.
- The *national rural employment guarantee scheme (MGNREGS)* and *Namami Ganga* also have significant afforestation components.



State of forest report.

What is Compensatory Afforestation?

- **Afforestation –** It seeks to ensure that forest lands getting diverted for non-forest purposes, like industrial development, is mandatorily accompanied by afforestation effort.
- **Legal mandate –** It made a legal requirement through the *Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act of 2016*, does ensure that newer parcels of land are earmarked for developing them as forests.
- **Funding –** Project developers, public or private, are required to fund the entire afforestation activity on these new lands.
- **Goods & Services –** Newly afforested land cannot be expected to immediately start delivering the range of goods and services that the diverted forests were providing.
- **Net Present Value (NPV) –** Project developers are asked to pay for the NPV of the forests being cleared, based on a calculation decided by an expert committee.

What is Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) fund?

- The SC in 20o2 in *Godhavarman Vs Union of India* case ordered the creation of CAMPA fund.
- CAMPA was established in 2004 to manage the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) and it acts as the *custodian of the CAMPA fund*.

- National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state was created.
- The State Funds will receive 90% of the payments while the National Fund will receive the remaining 10%.
- **Salient Features –** These Funds will receive payments for:
    1. Compensatory Afforestation
    2. Net Present Value (NPV) of forest
    3. Other project specific payments
- These Funds will be primarily spent on afforestation to compensate for loss of forest cover, regeneration of forest ecosystem, wildlife protection and infrastructure development.
- The Bill also establishes the *National and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authorities* to manage the National and State Funds.

What are the problems associated with the compensatory afforestation practice?

- **No suitable land –** Besides the low utilisation of funds, lack of availability of suitable land remains the biggest problem for compensatory afforestation.
- **Distributed land –** While the law mandates at least an equal area of land to be provided for compensatory afforestation, rarely is a contiguous stretch of land made available for this purpose.
- The total area of land is often distributed over 20 or more different locations.
- **Monocultures –** Companies often indulge in planting plantations in the available land, which is critical because plantations are monocultures, meaning they contain only one species of plants.
- A key element of any *forest is biodiversity*.
- **Biotic Pressure –** Forest officials point to biotic pressures, the challenge the plantations face from nearby human habitations and cattle.
- **Greenwashing –** Critics say compensatory afforestation had legitimised clearing of forests, and see it as an example of greenwashing.
- However, clearing of forests for other purpose cannot be entirely eliminated, compensatory afforestation is a good mechanism for attempting to make up for these losses to some extent.

Reference

1. Indian Express | The problems with Compensatory Afforestation in India

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