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Q. Explain the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality and discuss India's efforts towards preventing Land Degradation and Desertification. (150 words)

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Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Briefly explain the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality
- Highlight its importance
- Underline the steps taken by the Government of India
- Conclude by suggesting a way forward

Answer

As defined by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), land degradation neutrality is a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources, necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems.

Importance of land degradation neutrality (LDN):

- LDN is a simple idea and a powerful tool. It means securing enough healthy and productive natural resources by avoiding degradation whenever possible and restoring land that has already been degraded.
- At its core are better land management practices and better land-use planning that will improve economic, social and ecological sustainability for present and future generations.
- LDN provides significant benefits in terms of mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Halting and reversing land degradation can transform the land from being a source of greenhouse gas emissions to a carbon sink, by increasing carbon stocks in soils and vegetation.

- Furthermore, LDN plays a key role in strengthening the resilience of rural communities against climate shocks by securing and improving the provision of vital ecosystem services.

India's efforts towards preventing Land degradation and desertification:

- India hosted the 14th Conference of Parties (COP14) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in 2019. India is highlighting its leadership in navigating the land management agenda at the global level.
- India has revised its land restoration targets to an upward of 26 million hectares from the previously set target of 21 million hectares. The targets to restore degraded land will be achieved by 2030.
- Various schemes have been launched by the Government of India such as Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), Soil HealthCard Scheme, Soil Health Management Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojna (PKSY), Per Drop More Crop, etc. are helping to reduce land degradation.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has launched a flagship project on enhancing capacity on forest landscape restoration (FLR) and Bonn Challenge in India, through this flagship project India aims to develop and adopt best practices and monitoring protocols for the Indian states and build capacity.
- ISRO, Ahmedabad, along with its partner institutes has carried out an inventory and monitoring of desertification of the entire country using Indian Remote Sensing Satellites data in Geographical Information System (GIS) environment.

Sustainable management of land resources has to be in close collaboration with local communities. It is no coincidence that the few outstanding examples of sustainable management are all traceable to visionary local leadership supported by the host communities and assisted by public policies for sustainable use of resources, infrastructure creation, knowledge accretion and transmission. One of the prominent examples of this could be the Green Belt Movement started by Wangari Maathai in Africa.

The United Nations has declared 2021–2030 as the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration for highlighting the need for greatly increased global cooperation to restore the degraded and destroyed ecosystem. Land restoration could be one of the vital components of this initiative.