



Inadequate Compensatory Afforestation

Why in News

According to a recent **study on compensatory afforestation** in lieu of forest diversion for development of projects in **Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district**, only 10% of saplings said to be planted were actually found on the site and their survival rate was as low as 3.6%.

- The study has been carried out by **Himdhara Environment Research and Action Collective**. It is **based on government data and ground research** and was conducted **between 2012 and 2016**.

Key Points

▪ Data Analysis:

- As of 31st March 2014, the total area demarcated for **compensatory afforestation** was 1,930 ha in lieu of 984 ha of forest land diverted for non-forest activities, including roads, hydro-projects, transmission lines, etc.
 - The total diverted forest land in Kinnaur had 11,598 standing trees, belonging to 21 species.
 - The majority of the trees felled were coniferous, dominated by cedar (3,612 felled) and **near-threatened chilgoza pines** (2,743).
- Between 2002 and 2014, of the Rs.162.82 crore collected under **Catchment Area Treatment (CAT) plan** funds of Kinnaur's projects, only 36% had been spent till 31st March 2014.
 - CAT plan funds are budgeted as **mitigation measures for hydroelectric power projects**.
- More than 90% of the diversion of forest in Kinnaur takes place for the development of hydropower projects and transmission lines.
 - Himachal Pradesh has the **highest installed capacity of hydropower projects of 10,000 MW in the country** and **located in Sutlej basin, Kinnaur is the state's hydropower hub** with 53 planned hydropower projects.

▪ Compensatory Afforestation:

- According to **Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)** rules, for every hectare of forest land diverted, double the area of 'degraded' lands are used as sites for 'compensatory afforestation'.
- Every time forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes such as mining or industry, the **user agency pays for planting forests over an equal area of non-forest land, or when such land is not available, twice the area of degraded forest land**.
- As per the rules, **90% of the [Compensatory Afforestation Fund](#) (CAF) money is to be given to the states while 10% is to be retained by the Centre**.
 - The **funds are used for** CAT, assisted natural generation, forest management,

wildlife protection and management, relocation of villages from protected areas, managing human-wildlife conflicts, training and awareness generation, supply of wood saving devices and allied activities.

▪ **Associated Challenges:**

- One of the reasons why the forest department is **unable to fulfil the target is because there's simply no land available** for the compensatory afforestation.
 - A large part of Kinnaur is **rocky and a cold desert where nothing grows**.
 - Around **10% of the district is already forested** and the **rest is either used for agriculture or are grasslands**.
- Many of the plots **carved out for afforestation are actually grasslands** which are used by the villagers **for grazing cattle**.
 - In many instances, the villagers uproot the saplings because they **do not want the grassland converted to a forest**.
 - This lack of land for afforestation means that **once a forest has been felled, it is often lost permanently**.
- The authorities only look at identifying plots of land where afforestation can take place just **because it is mandated which makes the concept faulty**.
- **Socio-economic needs are not considered** and there is also **no monitoring** of the afforestation as well.

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority

- It works as a **national advisory council** under the chairmanship of the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for monitoring, technical assistance and evaluation of compensatory afforestation activities.
- **Objectives of CAMPA:** To promote afforestation and regeneration activities as a way of compensating for forest land diverted to non-forest uses.

Way Forward

- Rapidly running out of space for compensatory afforestation, the Forest Department should carry out plantations in other districts in lieu of forest land diverted in Kinnaur.
- There is a need to understand the adverse effects of deforestation and address it in a timely manner with adequate resources and sufficient monitoring and guidance. The state should encourage people's participation allowing more connections between the people and the forests leading to better care and protection of the new saplings and the existing trees.

[Source: IE](#)

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