

# Managing Desertification for Greener Jharkhand

## Introduction

Jharkhand is one of the most vulnerable climate regions of India, where about 14 districts are sensitive to climate impacts. Desertification in Jharkhand is creating environmental, economical and social problems in myriad ways as it leads to loss of biodiversity and agriculture land, downfall in water table and ultimately bringing the main economic activity such as agriculture and associated activities to halt besides impacting overall performance of the economy. Even Niti Aayog has raised the concern of rapid degradation of land in Jharkhand that has a serious impact on the general economy of the state.

- Jharkhand is among the top five states in India which has witnessed rapid desertification. According to the 'Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India-2016' (Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad), Jharkhand has highest area under desertification in the country (during 2011-13) with respect to total geographical area, i.e., 68.98% (around 54987.26 sqkm), followed by Rajasthan (62.90%) and Gujarat (52%).
- As per a report 'Economics of Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (EDLDD)' the land degradation costs India nearly 2.54% of its GDP (Rs. 3,177.39 billion). Similarly, in terms of total economic loss incurred (to land use and cover change in 2009 compared with 2001), the annual cost of land degradation in Jharkhand is estimated at around 218.7 million dollar and annual per capita cost of land degradation is around 6.6 dollar.

# Causes and Impacts

The most significant process of desertification/land degradation in the state is Water Erosion (50.64%) followed by Vegetation Degradation (17.30%) however man-made reasons like urbanisation and settlements have led to increase in land degradation. There is a complexity of factors that leads to the degradation of land which includes increasing population pressure of both human and non-human like cattle and livestock, over-exploitation of natural resources, over cultivation, unsustainable land use practices, and impacts of climate changes. Thus, the main causes of land degradation are either natural processes or man-made/anthropogenic or a mix of both.

The land desertification leads to loss of livelihood options for people and indigenous communities due to scarcity of land and water and lower agricultural productivity that create a cycle of poverty, unemployment and outer migration in the region. Improving productivity of degraded and wastelands is important for the state like Jharkhand where land and livelihood generation are important factors for addressing the issues of poverty, backwardness, gender and equity issues.

## Vision and Approach for Jharkhand

The issue of land degradation has also prominently found a place in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15, which aims to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt biodiversity loss. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) suggests that there is greater need to integrate the poverty eradication programmes with strategies to fight desertification. As a signatory to the UNCCD, India has also implemented a range of policies and programmes to combat land degradation and desertification with the goal of achieving land degradation neutrality and ensuring sustainable human development.

The Department of Forest has taken considerable measures like Mukhyamantri Jan-Van Yojana, Birsa Harit Gram Yojana, Compensatory Afforestation Management Funds Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) etc to better manage the forest resources. It is a matter of pride that Jharkhand has better forest coverage than many other states in India. The efforts have bore fruit and as per the Forest Survey of India report-2021, Jharkhand has made incremental progress in recent years, which has resulted in total forest cover reaching to 29.76%.

However, despite these good achievements, there is an urgent need to stop and reverse the process of land degradation in the state. Some key measures are important which are mentioned below

- A composite/sustainable landscape management should be the focus to reverse the land degradation. Similarly, Forest landscape planning and wildlife protection is important. There is a need to integrate land and water management to protect soils from erosion, salinisation, and other forms of degradation.
- An action plan with sustainable development strategies for restoring biodiversity loss should be an important step. Afforestation activities like agroforestry, silviculture and social forestry should be adopted to protect agricultural lands from further deterioration.
- Minerals and mining explorations should be taken up with scientific manners in degraded areas to protect good lands from further deterioration. Wastelands due to mining should be reclaimed with suitable technologies, and appropriate land-use plans may be drawn up for better utilisation of such landscapes.
- There is an urgent need to generate alternative livelihoods which are sustainable in nature and do not exploit the natural resources or not follow the traditional land use pattern. In this scenario, climate resilient agriculture practices should be promoted to offset the effects of climate change.
- Joint forest management with active involvement of local communities and particularly tribal people must be increased for an efficient forest and land management process. Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures coupled with community led intervention is important to prevent misuse of natural resources and erosion of forest and land.

## **Aims and Objectives of the workshop**

Set in this context and to mark the occasion of World Desertification Day, the Department of Forest, Environment, and Climate Change (GoJ) in association with Centre for Environment and Energy Development (CEED) is organising a workshop on 17th June 2023 in Ranchi. This workshop aims to discuss the key concerning issues and the way forward to address the desertification in Jharkhand. The key objective of this workshop is to bring together representatives of key departments, agencies, industries, and academic institutions to facilitate information exchange of ideas and solutions between experts.