

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.

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