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Budget emphasis on Green growth

Published On: 23-02-2023

Why is in news? The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi addressed the post-budget webinar on 'Green Growth'

Background

Often called the web of life, biodiversity signifies the variety of species on earth, which are all connected and sustain the balance of ecosystems, enabling humans to coexist. They interact with the environment to perform a host of functions.

The importance of our planet's biodiversity was strongly articulated at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, Canada.

188 country representatives adopted an agreement to "halt and reverse" biodiversity loss by conserving 30% of the world's land and 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, known as the 30x30 pledge.

India currently hosts 17% of the planet's human population and 17% of the global area in biodiversity hotspots, placing it at the helm to guide the planet in becoming biodiversity champions.

Programmes for Biodiversity conservation

The Union Budget 2023 mentioned "Green Growth" as one of the seven priorities or Saptarishis, The emphasis on green growth is welcome news for India's biological wealth as the country is facing serious losses of natural assets such as soils, land, water, and biodiversity.

It has envisaged a number of projects and initiatives spread across various sectors and ministries viz. Green Hydrogen Mission, Energy Transition, Energy Storage Projects, Renewable Energy Evacuation, Green Credit Program, PM-PRANAM, GOBARDhan Scheme, Bhartiya Prakritik Kheti Bio-Input Resource Centres, MISHTI, Amrit Dharohar, Coastal Shipping and Vehicle Replacement.

The National Mission for a Green India aims to increase forest cover on degraded lands and protect existing forested lands.

The Green Credit Programme has the objective to "incentivize environmentally sustainable and responsive actions by companies, individuals and local bodies".

The Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes (MISHTI) is particularly significant because of the extraordinary importance of mangroves and coastal ecosystems in mitigating climate change.

The Prime Minister Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment, and Amelioration of Mother Earth (PM-PRANAM) for reducing inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides is critical for sustaining our agriculture.

Under the National Green Hydrogen Mission, India is moving with a target of production of 5 MMT green hydrogen. An allocation of Rs 19 thousand crores has been made to incentivize the private sector in this field.

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India has the potential of producing 10 thousand million cubic metres of biogas from Gobar (cow dung) and 1.5 lakh cubic meter gas which can contribute up to 8% to the city gas distribution in the country. Gobardhan Yojana is an important component of India's biofuel strategy. In this budget, the government has announced plans to set up 500 new plants under the Gobardhan Yojana. These are not like old-fashioned plants. The government will spend Rs 10,000 crore on these modern plants

India's vehicle scrapping policy is a crucial part of the green growth strategy the government has made provisions of Rs 3000 crores in this year's budget to scrap around 3 lakh vehicles owned by Central and State governments that are older than 15 years including police vehicles, ambulances and buses.

Vehicle Scrapping is going to become a huge market following the principle of Reuse, Recycle and Recovery and it gives new strength to our circular economy and urged the youth of India to join various means of the circular economy.

India has to increase its battery storage capacity to 125-gigawatt hours in the next 6-7 years The government has come out with a viability gap funding scheme in this budget to support the battery developers to achieve big goals in this capital-intensive sector

Further, water-based transport becoming a huge sector in India India transports only 5% of its cargo through its coastal route today whereas only 2% of cargo is transported in India through inland waterways. The development of waterways in India will give rise to many opportunities for all stakeholders in this field.

Finally, the Amrit Dharohar scheme directly mentions our biological wealth and is expected to "encourage optimal use of wetlands, and enhance biodiversity, carbon stock, eco-tourism opportunities and income generation for local communities".

If implemented in letter and spirit, Amrit Dharohar, with its emphasis on sustainability by balancing competing demands, will benefit aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The recent intervention by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to stop the draining of Haiderpur, a Ramsar wetland in Uttar Pradesh, to safeguard migratory waterfowl is encouraging.

Measures to be taken for Green Growth

It is critical that these programmes respond to the current state of the country's biodiversity with evidence-based implementation.

A science-based and inclusive monitoring programme is critical not only for the success of these efforts but also for documentation and distillation of lessons learnt for replication, nationally as well as globally.

New missions and programmes should effectively use modern concepts of sustainability and valuation of ecosystems that consider ecological, cultural, and sociological aspects of our biological wealth.

With clear system boundaries, prioritisation of the benefits to 'resource people', and fund-services (rather than stock-flows) as the economic foundation for generating value has enormous potential for multiple sustainable bio-economies.

As far as the Green India Mission is concerned, implementation should focus on ecological restoration rather than tree plantation and choose sites where it can contribute to ecological connectivity in landscapes fragmented by linear infrastructure.

Furthermore, choice of species and density should be informed by available knowledge and evidence on resilience under emerging climate change and synergies and trade-offs with respect to hydrologic services.

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Site selection should also be carefully considered for the mangrove initiative with a greater emphasis on diversity of mangrove species with retention of the integrity of coastal mud-flats and salt pans themselves, as they too are important for biodiversity.

Finally, each of these efforts must be inclusive of local and nomadic communities where these initiatives will be implemented. Traditional knowledge and practices of these communities should be integrated into the implementation plans.

The way ahead

Each of these programmes has the potential to greatly improve the state of our nation's biodiversity if their implementation is based on the latest scientific and ecological knowledge.

As a consequence, each programme should include significant educational and research funding to critically appraise and bring awareness to India's biological wealth.

In response to this need, we hope that the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing, already approved by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC), will be immediately launched by the government.