

The issue with tree planting schemes

he exploitation of forest resources due to uncontrolled and unsustainable practices has degraded forest landscapes. The World Bank estimates that the world has lost about 10 million square kilometres of forests since the start of the 20th century. The emphasis on forest restoration approaches to bring such degraded ecosystems back to their earlier state was the main purpose of declaring the decade of 2021-2030 as a Decade of Ecosystem Restoration by the United Nations. This targeted the restoration of 350 million hectares of degraded land to generate \$9 trillion in ecosystem services and sequester an additional 13 gigatons-26 gigatons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

As one of the proven methods to support and sustain biodiversity, tree planting is an undisputed, most appealing and popular approach, and with spectacular potential, to address climate-related crises and other environmental challenges. This includes biological carbon sequestration as a mechanism to store and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This is one reason to consider a mass-scale drive of tree planting as a silver bullet to tackle the challenges of climate change globally, by governmental and non-governmental organisations including individuals. Keeping this indispensable role of trees in maintaining the ecological balance, the then Indian Agriculture Minister, K.M. Munshi, launched the Van Mahotsava ('festival of trees') programme in July 1950. Since then, India has been religiously celebrating this programme of tree planting, annually, in the first week of July. To some extent, these efforts have been successful not only in motivating people but also in bringing tangible results that include improving the forest area.

Fancy drives, catchy slogans

In recent years there has been a spurt in tree planting in the name of special drives by various agencies, including governments, which is a elcome sign for environmental conservation.



Mohan Chandra Pargaien

former Indian Forest Service officer Hyderabad, Telangana

In tackling the

adequate

community

participation

and technical

considerations

need to be

prioritised

many problems,

finances, active

headline-grabbing campaigns, these programmes of tree planting, both globally and at a national level, have attracted huge media attention and the involvement of people including various organisations to fulfil their objectives. Be it a single day of a planting drive in various Indian States, the "One Trillion Project" of the World Economic Forum, the "Great Green Wall of China", the "10 Billion Tree Tsunami" of Pakistan or the "Bonn Challenge" to restore 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030, many of these drives may seem welcome. But they have been criticised for limited community participation, a lack of adequate post-planting measures and for promoting monoculture, thereby proving less effective for carbon sequestration and biodiversity development.

With catchy slogans, glamorous drives and

The problem with such drives

The neglect of ecology and locality with little involvement of people in various tree planting programmes has been a major concern of environmentalists and scientists in recent years In a study led by Joseph Veldman it was found that except for deforested areas, tree planting in certain locations such as grasslands and animal habitat destroys plant and animal habitats and can damage ecosystems, increase wildfire intensity and exacerbate global warming. Similarly, William Bond and colleagues, in their study, expressed scepticism in considering grasslands as deforested and degraded lands for electing them for tree planting by rehabilitation; these lands are highly productive and biodiverse, supporting many livestock and people.

Planting saplings alone does not fulfil the multifarious expectations unless we have provision for adequate post-planting measures and monitoring of tree growth - which we hardly find in the majority of tree-planting drives, more specifically in those programmes which are not supported by the government. Contrary to popular belief, tree planting only is not a

cost-effective climate solution when compared to another more rewarding approach of restoration and other alternative low-cost approach such as tree islands which involves planting in small patches or islands.

India's challenges In 2023, in a joint address with United States resident Joe Biden, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, said at the White House that 'India is the only G20 country that has fulfilled its commitments under the Paris Agreement'. And in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha, in February 2024, the Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Chang Ashwini Kumar Choubey, said that 'India has achieved an additional carbon sink of 1.97 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent'. In India, nearly 10 million hectares of its forests are under encroachment, nearly 27.5 crore of people are dependent on forests for subsistence and nearly 5.7 million hectares of forest land have been lost for non-forestry purposes since Independence. These are challenges that pose problems for India's initiatives to restore 26 million hectares o degraded forests by 2030 and to improve forest cover using steps that include tree planting.

India's remarkable policy changes, in recent times, to tackle the challenges of forestry and restoration approaches are also being affected by these inherent problems. In the background of the criticism of mass planting drives, we need to introspect these strategies, giving much required space to adequate finances, active community articipation and technical considerations. The have not been given priority. Along with public awareness campaigns, social media, and incentivised community participation, such reoriented innervations and strategies can help to bring changes in the ecological systems of our forests, and with increasing numbers, also help to create resilient forests that have diverse capacities and capabilities.

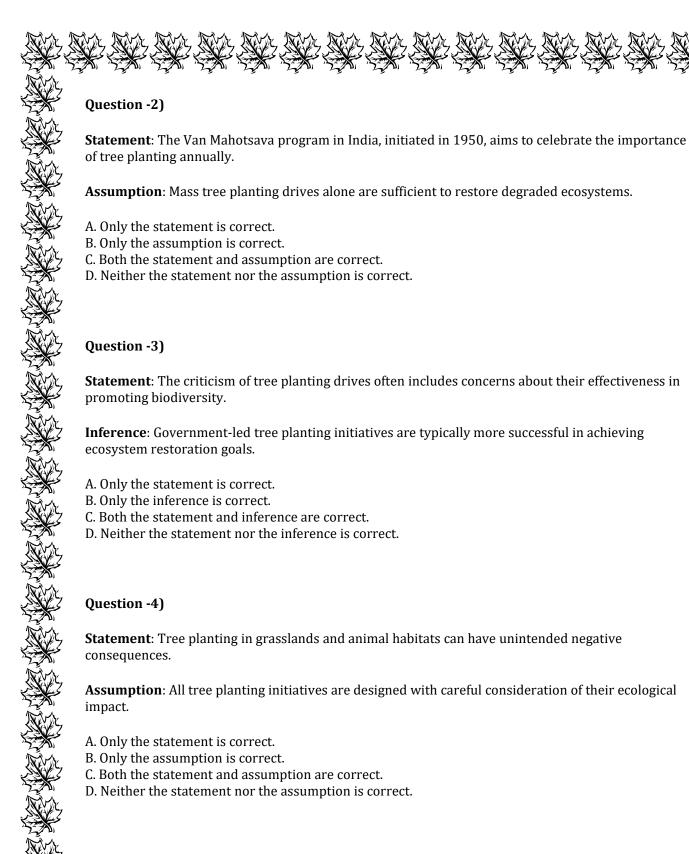
The views expressed are person

Question -1)

Statement: The World Bank estimates that about 10 million square kilometers of forests have been lost since the start of the 20th century due to unsustainable practices.

Conclusion: Forest restoration efforts are essential to mitigate the damage caused by deforestation.

- A. Only the statement is correct.
- B. Only the conclusion is correct.
- C. Both the statement and conclusion are correct.
- D. Neither the statement nor the conclusion is correct.



Question -5)

Statement: The Bonn Challenge aims to restore 350 million hectares of degraded landscapes by 2030.

Evaluation: The Bonn Challenge has been criticized primarily for its lack of specific targets and measurable outcomes.

- A. Only the statement is correct.
- B. Only the evaluation is correct.

