

Recently, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its Synthesis Report, drawing attention to concerns surrounding India's ongoing policy of afforestation. Typically, this policy permits the felling of forests and their replacement in different locations. This development is significant in climate change discussions as afforestation constitutes a major aspect of India's climate commitments.

### **India's Climate Commitments and the Role of Afforestation**

The Indian government has pledged to create an additional carbon absorption capacity of 2.5 to 3 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO<sub>2</sub>e) by increasing forest and tree cover by 2030. This commitment effectively makes afforestation one of the country's main strategies towards achieving its climate objectives.

The Afforestation initiative is legally backed by the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), established in 2002 on the Supreme Court's directive. CAMPA operates under the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, providing monitoring, technical support, and evaluation for compensatory afforestation activities.

### **Understanding the Role of CAMPA**

CAMPA's main function is to endorse afforestation and regeneration initiatives as a form of compensation for forestry land redirected to non-forest use. Whenever forests are repurposed for uses such as mining or dam construction, they can no longer offer their original ecosystem services or sustain biodiversity. The project proponent intending to modify the land must identify a replacement tract for afforestation and bear the cost of the land and the afforestation exercise.

### **Controversies Around CAMPA**

From 2006 to 2012, CAMPA's fund increased dramatically from Rs 1,200 crore to Rs 23,600 crore. However, in 2013, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) found the majority of this fund had not been utilized. Furthermore, CAMPA has been criticized for enabling the destruction of natural ecosystems under the guise of creating new forests in different locations.

### **Case Example: Haryana Government's Use of CAMPA**

In October 2022, an example of the controversy surrounding CAMPA funding came to light. The Haryana government announced plans to develop the "world's largest curated safari" using CAMPA funds originating from deforestation activities in Great Nicobar, a location with a vastly different topography, situated 2,400 km away. The project was criticized for endangering landscape connectivity and biodiversity corridors.

### **IPCC's Recommendations on Natural Ecosystems and Renewable Energy**

Natural ecosystems are crucial to biodiversity, local livelihoods, hydrological services, and carbon sequestration. To mitigate the negative impacts of diverting these ecosystems, the IPCC recommended promoting renewable energy projects

like wind and solar plants. Despite the higher costs associated with preserving natural ecosystems compared to wind power, these expenses are still lower than those involved in "ecosystem restoration, afforestation, restoration", per GtCO<sub>2</sub>e.

### **Recap of Previous Year's UPSC Civil Services Examination Question on CAMPA**

In a previous year question (2019) of the UPSC Civil Services Examination, candidates were required to assess two statements related to CAMPA, namely whether CAMPA exists at both national and state levels according to the law, and if people's participation is mandatory in the compensatory afforestation programmes under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016. The correct answer was that only the first statement was correct.