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National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being

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This article is based on “**Saving biodiversity, securing earth’s future**” which was published in The Hindu on 05/06/2021. It talks about the positive impact of the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being.

Globally, there has been a 7% loss of intact forests since 2000, and recent assessments indicate that over a million species might be lost forever during the next several decades. Further, climate change and the ongoing pandemic will put additional stresses on our natural ecosystems. India is not an exception to these trends.

Today, it is becoming clear that repairing our dysfunctional relationship with nature is one of the ways to mitigate climate change and curtail future outbreaks of infectious diseases that can bring unimaginable misery. Thus, preserving biodiversity is directly relevant to the social, economic, and environmental well-being.

In this context, the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being (NMBHWB) is a step in the right direction.

Significance of India’s Biodiversity

- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** India is home to nearly 8% of global biodiversity on just 2.3% of global land area, and contains sections of four of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots.
- **Staggering Economic Value:** While the precise economic value of all ecosystem services provided by biodiversity may not be known, estimates suggest that India’s forests alone may yield services worth more than a trillion rupees per year.
Further, it can be imagined how much greater this value will be with grasslands, wetlands, freshwater, and marine can add.
- **Protection From Natural Disasters:** The varied ecosystems across land, rivers, and oceans, feed our people, enhance public health security, and shield us from environmental disasters.
- **Spiritual Enrichment:** Our biodiversity also serves as a perpetual source of spiritual enrichment, intimately linked to our physical and mental well-being.

NMBHWB: Vision

- In 2018, the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) in consultation with the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change and other Ministries approved an ambitious National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being.
- The Mission proposes a national effort that aims to transform biodiversity science by linking it to the peoples' economic prosperity.
- It further aims to help India realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by using India's rich biodiversity to create solutions for challenges in agriculture, health, and climate change.
- Under this Mission, research institutions, government, and non-government organizations will work together to catalogue, map, assess, monitor, and use our vast but declining natural assets sustainably.
- The Mission will also help create a cadre of biodiversity science professionals to sustain and secure Indian biodiversity.
- Finally, the Mission hopes to initiate a mass movement to engage India's massive population to feel pride in our natural heritage, and help in restoring and conserving nature.

NMBHWB: Impact

The pandemic has exposed the dysfunctional relationship between humanity and nature, and wants us to focus on challenges like: the emergence of infectious diseases; lack of food and nutritional security; rural unemployment; and climate change, etc. In this context, the mission can help in following ways:

- **Boosting Rural Economy:** The mission can rejuvenate agricultural production systems and increase rural incomes from biodiversity-based agriculture while also creating millions of green jobs in restoration and nature tourism.
- **Augmenting International Commitment:** The Mission can help India meet its commitments under the new framework for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and UN SDGs related to pressing social issues including poverty alleviation, justice and equity, and protection of life.
Further, the mission can help India to emerge as a leader in demonstrating linkage between conservation of natural assets and societal well-being.
- **Economic Advantage:** The Mission's comprehensive efforts will empower India to restore, and even increase, our natural assets by millions of crores of rupees.
Further, restoration activities across India's degraded lands, which amount to almost a third of our land area, alone could generate several million jobs.
- **Developing National Commitment:** It will generate a strong national community committed to sustaining biodiversity, promoting social cohesion and uniting the public behind an important goal.

Way Forward

- **Envisaging One Health Concept:** There is a need to rethink and reimagine the concept of **One Health** for all living organisms, including the invisible biota in soils that sustain our agricultural systems.

Implementing One Health concept has both the preventive potential to curtail future pandemics along with the interventional capability for unexpected public health challenges.

- **Dedicated Cadre:** There is a need for a strong and extensive cadre of human resources required to meet the enormous and complex environmental challenges of the 21st century.

This will require training professionals of the highest calibre in sustainability and biodiversity science, along with an investment in civil society outreach.

- **Enabling Cultural Change:** The gains of environmental change will be upheld and carried forward by the cultural change from environmental education for millions of students, from kindergarten to postgraduate levels.
- **Promoting Nature-based Solutions:** There is a need to promote nature-based solutions to numerous environmental challenges, including degradation of rivers, forests, and soils, and ongoing threats from climate change, with the goal of creating climate-resilient communities.

Conclusion

On this World Environment Day (June 5), with the novel coronavirus pandemic raging across our vast country, we must reflect on the ways to rebuild our relationship with nature. In this context, the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being Mission can offer a holistic framework, integrated approaches, and widespread societal participation.

Drishti Mains Question

The National Biodiversity Mission can help mend the dysfunctional relationship between humanity and nature. Discuss.
