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Dialogue on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought

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Why in News

Recently, the **Prime Minister delivered a keynote address** at the **United Nations (UN)** “**High-Level Dialogue on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought**” via video conference.

- He spoke as the President of the **14th Session** of the **Conference of Parties (CoP)** of **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.
- The Dialogue will encourage all member states to **adopt and implement Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and National Drought Plans**.

Key Points

- **Highlighted Steps Taken by India:**

- India is on track to achieve its national commitment on **Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) (Sustainable Development Goal target 15.3)**.

LDN is a state whereby the **amount and quality of land resources**, necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, **remains stable or increases** within specified temporal and spatial scales and **ecosystems**.

- Working to **restore 26 million hectares** of degraded land by **2030**.

This would contribute to India's commitment to achieving **an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes** of carbon dioxide equivalent (a part of the **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** target under the 2015 **Paris Agreement**).

- **Over the last 10 years**, around **3 million hectares of forest cover** has been added.

- **For Example:** The **Banni region in Rann of Kutch in Gujarat** suffers from highly degraded land and receives very little rainfall.

In that region, **land restoration is done by developing grasslands**, which helps in achieving land degradation neutrality.

- **On Challenges Faced by Developing World:**

- Today, **land degradation** affects over **two-thirds of the world**.

- India is assisting fellow **developing countries** to develop land restoration strategies.

- A **Centre of Excellence** is being set up in India to promote a scientific approach towards land degradation issues. It is at **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education**.

ICFRE, based in **Dehradun**, is an **autonomous body** of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.

Land Degradation

- **About:**

- Land degradation is caused by **multiple forces**, including **extreme weather conditions**, particularly drought.
- It is also caused by **human activities** that pollute or degrade the quality of soils and land utility.

- **Impact:**

- **Desertification** is a consequence of **severe land degradation** and is defined as a process that creates arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.
- It **accelerates climate change** and **biodiversity loss**, and **contributes to droughts, wildfires, involuntary migration** and the **emergence of zoonotic infectious diseases**.

- **Global Efforts to Check Land Degradation:**
 - **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):** It was established in 1994, the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
 - The **Delhi Declaration of 2019**, signed by 14th CoP of the UNCCD, called for **better access and stewardship over land**, and emphasised gender-sensitive transformative projects.
 - **The Bonn Challenge:** To bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.
 - **Great Green Wall:** Initiative by Global Environment Facility (GEF), where eleven countries in Sahel-Saharan Africa have focused efforts to fight against land degradation and revive native plant life to the landscape.
- **India's Efforts to Check Land Degradation:**
 - India is focusing on **sustainable land and resource management** for livelihood generation at community level for making the local lands healthier and productive for providing a better homeland and a better future for its inhabitants.
 - The **National Action Programme for combating desertification was prepared in 2001** to take appropriate action in addressing the problems of desertification.
 - Some of the **major programmes** which address issues related to land degradation and desertification, being implemented currently are as follows:
 - **Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) (Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana)**
 - National Afforestation Programme (NAP),
 - National Mission for Green India (GIM),
 - The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**,
 - Soil Conservation in the Catchment of River Valley Project,
 - National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (NWDPR),
 - **Fodder and Feed Development Scheme**-component of Grassland Development including Grass Reserves.
 - Command Area Development and Water Management (CADWM) programme,
 - **Soil Health Card Scheme**, etc.

Source: IE