

4. Global Forest Resources Assessment (GFRA) 2025 – Reports

India has moved up to the 9th position in terms of total forest area globally, as per the Global Forest Resources Assessment (GFRA) 2025, released by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Bali. The GFRA is published every five years

Global Forest Status – Overview and Trends

1. Global Forest Cover

Total Forest Area – The world's forests span 4.14 billion hectares, covering approximately 32% of the Earth's total land surface.

Per Capita Availability – This translates to 0.5 hectares of forest per person, highlighting disparities in forest availability across nations.

Top Ten Countries by Forest Area –

1. Russia (largest forest cover)
2. Brazil
3. Canada
4. United States of America (USA)
5. China
6. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
7. Australia
8. Indonesia
9. India
10. Peru

Deforestation and Global Trends

Slowing Rate of Deforestation – The report notes that the pace of global deforestation has slowed over the last decade, mainly due to increased awareness, afforestation drives, and sustainable management practices.

Continued Loss – Despite progress, the world still loses 10.9 million hectares of forests annually (2015–2025) – a rate that remains environmentally alarming.

Primary Drivers – Agricultural expansion, infrastructure projects, illegal logging, and wildfires continue to be major causes of forest loss in tropical regions.

India's Forest Cover – National Highlights

India's Forest Area Status

Total Forest Area – India's forests cover 72.7 million hectares, accounting for about 2% of the global forest area.

Ranking – India has moved up to 9th position globally in terms of total forest area.

Annual Forest Gain – India ranks third in the world, after China and Russia, for its annual increase in forest cover.

Agroforestry Leadership – Together with Indonesia, India contributes to over 70% of global agroforestry areas, underscoring the country's strong tradition of integrating trees within farmlands.

Significance of India's Achievement

Climate Change Mitigation – Forest expansion enhances carbon sequestration capacity, helping India offset greenhouse gas emissions. Contributes directly to India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, which aim to create additional carbon sinks of 2.5–3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through forest and tree cover by 2030.

Biodiversity Conservation – India's forests support some of the world's richest biodiversity, including endangered species like tigers, elephants, and red pandas. Forests act as ecological corridors connecting fragmented habitats and ensuring genetic flow among wildlife populations.

Livelihood Support – Around 275 million people in India depend on forests for fuel, fodder, non-timber

forest products (NTFPs), and employment. Strengthening forest-based livelihoods is critical for achieving inclusive green growth and rural resilience.

Land and Water Security – Forests reduce soil erosion, prevent landslides, and maintain water cycles by enhancing infiltration and reducing runoff. Forests are vital for river basin management, especially in ecologically fragile zones like the Western Ghats and Himalayas.

Alignment with International Commitments

India's efforts align with – UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) – promoting ecological recovery of degraded landscapes. Sustainable Development Goal 15 (Life on Land) – protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) frameworks.

Government Initiatives for Forest Conservation

Citizen Participation Campaigns

'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' Campaign – Encourages citizens to plant trees in honor of their mothers, linking environmental responsibility to cultural emotion. Aims to foster mass awareness and people's participation in afforestation.

Policy and Legislative Frameworks

National Mission for a Green India (GIM) – A core mission under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). Objective-Increase Forest/tree cover by 5 million hectares and improve quality of existing forests on another 5 million hectares. Focuses on ecosystem restoration, carbon sequestration, and community-based forest governance.

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (2016) – Mandates that entities diverting forest land for non-forest purposes must pay compensatory levies. These funds, amounting to ₹50,000+ crore, are channelled into CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority) for restoration activities. Ensures that development-induced forest loss is offset through afforestation elsewhere.

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) – Designated buffer zones around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries. Restrict high-impact human activities like mining, construction, and industrial expansion. Aim to balance conservation with local livelihoods by promoting low-impact, eco-friendly activities.

Joint Forest Management (JFM) – A collaborative approach between State Forest Departments and local communities. Encourages shared responsibility in protection, regeneration, and benefit-sharing of forest resources. Currently implemented across over 85,000 JFM committees, covering millions of hectares of forest land.

Challenges in Forest Conservation

Development Pressures – Rapid urbanization, road construction, mining, and hydropower projects lead to diversion of forest land. Balancing economic growth with ecological stability remains a persistent policy dilemma.

Forest Degradation and Encroachment – Illegal logging, grazing pressure, and invasive species degrade forest ecosystems and reduce biodiversity. Fragmentation hampers forest connectivity, affecting wildlife movement and regeneration.

Climate Change and Natural Stresses – Rising temperatures, altered rainfall, and increased forest fires disrupt regeneration cycles. Vulnerable forest types (dry deciduous, Himalayan, and mangrove ecosystems) face heightened stress.

Livelihood–Conservation Balance – Dependence of forest-dwelling communities often leads to resource overuse. Need for policies that ensure livelihood security without compromising forest health, such as community forestry and sustainable harvesting models.

Policy Way Forward

Strengthening Scientific Forest Management – Use remote sensing and GIS for continuous forest monitoring and change detection. Promote climate-resilient species and mixed forest plantations to enhance ecological resilience.

Empowering Local Communities – Expand Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 implementation for empowering tribal and forest-dependent communities. Encourage eco-tourism, NTFP-based enterprises, and

community forest enterprises for inclusive growth.

Enhancing Inter-Sectoral Coordination - Integrate forestry policies with water management, agriculture, and rural development programs. Strengthen convergence between Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and state forest departments.

Expanding Green Finance Mechanisms - Mobilize green bonds, CSR funds, and carbon credits to finance large-scale afforestation. Engage private sector in Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCP) for landscape restoration.

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