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AFFORESTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

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Afforestation Programmes in Tamil Nadu, India

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Summary

India is losing its forest cover at the appalling rate of 1.5 million ha per year. No wonder it has rightly been pointed out that “forest precedes mankind, deserts follow”. This never-ending ever-increasing depletion of forest wealth, coupled with low productivity of Indian forest in comparative global statistics, has ushered in a total mismatch between the demand and supply of the industrial and domestic wood requirement. This warrants large-scale afforestation programmes to meet the basic needs of the society on a sustainable basis. Tamil Nadu, one of India’s 28 states, is pioneer in establishing afforestation projects in the whole country. The forest area in the state is 13.62%, which is far behind the country’s average of 19.39%. To augment the position of the state forest, the forest department has carried out several afforestation programmes by involving local people through participatory approaches. Some of these successful afforestation programmes are listed below.

- **Rehabilitation of sandal through tribal participation:** Sandal (*Santalum album*) is endemic to two states (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu) of the Indian subcontinent, and is prized for its heartwood content. Illegal felling has selectively removed the elite population, leaving behind the emaciated inferior population. As a result, the species has become endangered. Realising the need for

salvaging this species from total annihilation, the state forest department has launched a sandal estate project with the mandate of reconstituting about 12,968 ha of denuded but potential sandal areas of the state through participation of the original dwellers resident in the vicinity. As a result, a dramatic improvement in the population of the sandal has been evidenced.

- **Afforestation in reservoir foreshores:** There are about 38,314 minor irrigation reservoirs accounting for an area of 557,950 ha in the states. These reservoirs remain flooded every year for a short period of time not exceeding four months. It was considered prudent therefore to utilize these areas for extending tree covers and also to meet the fuelwood needs of the society. Main focus under the SIDA aided Forestry Project was therefore placed on the afforestation of more of these reservoir foreshores. *Acacia nilotica* was a dominant species and the reservoir bed plantations with *A. nilotica* formed a dominant part of the landscape in the state. By meeting a considerable proportion of urban demand for fuelwood, these plantations have also minimised the pressure on Reserve Forest in the vicinity.
- **Interface Forestry Programme (IFP):** The primary objective of the programme is to ease the pressure on forest in the interior by meeting resources of fuel, fodder, fertilizer, etc. in the forest fringes to meet the direct and indirect needs of the adjoining rural communities. Every year 2,000-2,500 ha of forest lands and land adjoining the forest are tried on a watershed basis. Besides afforestation, soil and water conservation measures were also undertaken. These multi-pronged measures have resulted in a dramatic recovery of the hitherto denuded forest areas.
- **Afforestation through aerial seedling:** Vast areas of once-forested land are now denuded, and the extend of such barren land is ever increasing and needs to be reforested, especially those with hostile terrain and/or difficult access. In these areas, afforestation measures were carried out aerially using pelletised seeds, and this has experienced some success.

The paper also discusses the problems encountered during the process of afforestation programmes.
