

Restoration of Degraded Forest lands through Afforestation in Whole of Society Approach

Background:

India has been steadily increasing its forest cover over the years. While India has made consistent progress in expanding its green cover, a significant portion of forest land requires ecological restoration. As per **ISFR 2023**, about **2.08 lakh sq. km** of forest area falls under the *open and scrub* categories, representing **6.33% of the country's total geographical area**.

However, in order to achieve the national goal of 33% forest cover, there is a need to strengthen the *whole-of-government* and *whole-of-society* approach, with a focused emphasis on restoration of degraded forest lands. By fostering broad institutional and community participation, this initiative strengthens India's long-term commitment to forest restoration, green economy expansion and climate resilience, while supporting livelihoods through sustainable resource frameworks designed by the States.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), through guidelines issued on 2nd January 2026 under the provisions of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, has enabled afforestation and ecological restoration of degraded forest lands with the participation of Government as well as non-Government entities.

In accordance with these guidelines, State Governments may undertake restoration activities through both Government and non-Government agencies, strictly in accordance with the approved Working Plans or Management Plans.

FAQs

1. What is the Rationale for the amendment? Will this open up forest management to private players?

No. On the contrary, this step would lead to partnerships between government and non-government entities to undertake afforestation on degraded forest lands and therefore will help increase India's green cover.

Currently, forest lands are largely being managed and restored using public funds only. This move would help bring non-government funds in restoration of degraded forest lands.

Accordingly, the guidelines aim to enable broader participation in the restoration and sustainable utilization of degraded forest landscape ecosystems.

2. Will forest land be leased out to non-Government and Government entities for plantations and after this amendment?

As per Section 2(1)(iii) of the *Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980*, **forest land cannot be leased** to any Government or non-Government entity for plantation purposes **without the prior approval of the Central Government**.

The amendment of the guidelines is to enable the restoration of degraded forest lands through Government or non-Government entities, with the prior approval of the Central Government, and strictly in accordance with the approved prescriptions of the Working Plan.

Such forest restoration activities undertaken on degraded forest lands will be treated as forestry activities. Accordingly, the provisions of compensatory afforestation and net present value will not be applicable.

3. Is it true that such plantations/afforestation would not invite NPV and compensatory afforestation for non-Government entities?

The concept of Compensatory Afforestation (CA) and Net Present Value (NPV) was introduced to offset the loss of forest cover and ecosystem goods and services arising from the

diversion of forest land for nonforestry purposes. Through CA and NPV, forest cover and ecosystem services are rejuvenated in alternate forest areas, thereby compensating for the ecological impact of such diversions.

However, when restoration and afforestation activities are undertaken in degraded forest landscapes without its diversion for non-forest purpose, it directly contributes and strengthens the rejuvenation of ecosystem services. In such cases, the provisions of CA and NPV are not levied, recognizing the intrinsic ecological benefits of restoring degraded forest areas, and, providing an enabling regulatory framework to encourage large-scale participation in forest restoration and sustainable resource management.

Hence, the guidelines enable degraded forest lands to be provided on lease to Government or non-Government entities with prior approval of the Central Government for undertaking forest restoration activities, strictly in accordance with the approved prescriptions of the Working Plans. Such activities will be treated as forestry operations, and accordingly, the provisions of compensatory afforestation (CA) and net present value (NPV) will not be levied.

4. What is the revenue sharing model from such plantations/afforestation?

The harvest and utilization of silviculturally harvestable resources shall be governed by the provisions of the approved of the Working Plans of the area. Accordingly, the State Government can devise appropriate framework for the sustainable utilization of resources from such restored forest areas including and revenue sharing on a casetocase basis.

The guidelines also provide flexibility for States to develop sustainable models for utilisation of silviculturally available and responsibly harvested forest resources, along with mechanisms for equitable revenue-sharing and benefit-sharing arrangements.

5. Will the amendment dilute the Van Adhiniyam guidelines and lead to destruction of centuries-old forests?

The Guidelines issued on 2nd January 2025 embody the principle of restoring forest landscapes. These Guidelines do not exempt such activities from the requirement of prior approval of the Central Government under Section 2(1)(iii) of the *Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980*.

In fact, the proposed activities necessitate a twotier approval process:

- (i) First, State Governments are required to submit proposals received from Government or non-Government entities, seeking lease of forest land for afforestation, ecological restoration, and sustainable harvesting of forest resources, for prior approval of the Central Government under Section 2(1)(iii) of the *Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980*, for assignment of forest land on lease, and,
- (ii) Second, approval of the Working Plan by the Central Government, containing prescriptions for restoration of forest landscapes.

Thus, the Guidelines reinforce and advance the objectives enshrined in the Preamble of the *Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980*, as well as the goals of the National Forest Policy, 1988, by promoting and facilitating the restoration and sustainable management of degraded forest ecosystems.
