

STATEMENT BY MR. VIJAI SHARMA , SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS OF INDIA AT THE ROUND TABLE ON INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF LAND AND WATER RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 17TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON MAY 14, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

Land and water are closely interwoven into the matrix of rural livelihoods.

India accounts for about 2.4 per cent of the world's geographical area and 4 per cent of global water resources, but supports about 17 per cent of the world's human population and more than 15 per cent of the livestock.

The need for providing food and water for the growing population while sustaining the natural resource base has emerged as one of the main challenges for India in the 21st century.

Growing water scarcity, frequent occurrence of drought as well as degraded soils that suffer from nutrient depletion, low organic carbon, salinity, water logging, toxicity build-up, development of hard pan and loss of fertile top soil through erosion, apart from poor rural infrastructure are significant challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals of sustainable development and reducing hunger.

This situation is further compounded by climate change.

Against this background, India has been taking a variety of measures.

India is developing an index-based weather insurance instrument to provide increased support to small and marginal farmers.

In order to provide early warning, a number of national agencies are working closely with each other to monitor agricultural drought once every two weeks on a real time basis during the main crop seasons in India.

Sixty percent of India's arable land is rainfed, with variable rain patterns involving long dry spells. Thus, to augment groundwater supplies and to enhance rainwater use efficiency, India is implementing an Integrated Watershed Management Programme in mission mode.

The watershed programmes are used as an entry point activity for converging livelihood programs in the watersheds through a holistic systems approach. Our long experience with various watershed management programmes show that these are an effective strategy for addressing the problems of rainfed areas in an integrated manner, as well as an engine for inclusive growth and poverty alleviation. It may be noted that the average cost-benefit ratio of the watershed programmes in the country is 1:2, with an internal rate of return of 27%.

Some of the approaches adopted in the programmes include rainwater harvesting and conservation, increasing crop productivity, integrated nutrient management, diversification of crops and cropping systems, micro-enterprises to benefit women and vulnerable groups, and diversification of livelihood options.

There is also a high-level inter-ministerial National Rainfed Area Authority to address all aspects of sustainable and holistic development of rainfed areas, by converging and synergizing numerous ongoing programmes.

Moving away from a stand-alone project approach to a programmatic approach to combating land degradation, India has formulated in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank a Sustainable Land and Ecosystem Management (SLEM) Country Partnership Programme.

India has recently launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change, a National Mission for a "Green India" under which six million hectares of degraded forest land would be afforested by 2018. This would be one of the largest afforestation programmes in the world.

Mr. Chairman,

"Broad based and inclusive growth" is the main strategy of India's developmental planning. This involves targeted interventions aimed at assisting the poor and the vulnerable.

We are also adopting institutional and policy mechanisms, particularly by adopting participatory approaches for sustainable management of natural resources, such as joint forest management initiative, farmer participatory action research programs for water management, participatory integrated watershed development, and participatory irrigation management in irrigated areas. These aim to build the social and institutional capital, particularly in rural areas, for sustainable management of natural resources.

These significant strides made by India notwithstanding, there still remains a long way to be traversed in view of the enormity of the task.

Thank you.

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