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United Nations Forum on Forests

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Why is in news? India is hosting the meeting of the United Nations Forum on Forests to deliberate on forest fires and forest certification

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is organising a **Country-Led Initiative (CLI) event as part of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)** from 26-28 October, 2023 at the Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

About UNFF:

The United Nations Forum on Forests **promotes the management, conservation, and sustainable development of all types of forests.**

India holds the distinction of **being a founding member** of UNFF.

It was **established in 2000** by the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC) **based on the Rio Declaration.**

The UNFF has **universal membership of all Member States of the United Nations and specialized agencies.**

The UN General Assembly **adopted the first-ever UN Strategic Plan for Forests** for the **period of 2017-2030.**

This Strategic Plan serves as a **global framework for actions at all levels to achieve the sustainable management of all types of forests**, including trees outside forests, and to combat deforestation and forest degradation.

About the meeting:

The CLI's primary goal is to **contribute to the discussions of UNFF** regarding the **implementation of Sustainable Forest Management and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests.**

It also **aims to facilitate the sharing of best practices** among UNFF member States for the implementation of SFM and the UNSPF.

The CLI will **discuss on thematic areas involving forest fires and forest certification.**

During this event, experts from UNFF member countries, the UN organizations, regional and sub-regional partners, as well as major groups, will deliberate on the thematic issues.

The formal meeting will commence on 26th October 2023. The programme includes two days of deliberations and exchange on guiding themes- forest fires and forest certification- and a one-day field trip.

The **deliberations on the thematic areas- forest fires and forest certification-** will promote sharing of good practices on these areas to support global actions in advancing the Global Forest Goals of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF).

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Wildfires:

In recent years, the world has **witnessed an alarming increase in the scale and duration of wildfires**, leading to profound impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services, human well-being, livelihoods, and national economies.

Forested areas have been particularly affected, with approximately 100 million hectares, equivalent to 3% of the world's forest area, affected by fires every year.

The severity of these fires has been exemplified by numerous high-profile incidents, resulting in unhealthy air quality and significant loss of human lives, wildlife, ecosystem services and property, including wildfire disasters in the northern hemisphere this summer.

The situation is no different in India, with changing climate forest fires are becoming a regular phenomenon.

Issue of forest certification:

The **issue of forest certification** has received growing global attention in recent years.

The total forest area under certification has increased by 35% (or 120 million ha) since 2010. Between 2020 and 2021, the certified forest area increased by 27 million hectares.

The developing countries continue to face several challenges with the certification process.

This includes excessive costs of certification, audit and compliance issues, inaccessibility to forest owners in remote regions, and lack of capacity due to complexity of various certification standards.

The deliberations vis-à-vis forest certification will enrich the policy landscape in the developing countries with regards to this issue area.

Others:

The UN Forest Instrument has **adopted several policy measures** to encourage sustainable forest management through promoting and implementing voluntary instruments such as voluntary certification systems or other appropriate mechanisms in a transparent manner.

However, some countries consider the measures and requirements for certification as creating trade challenges or market barriers for their forest products.

On the other hand, some other countries **consider forest certification as an effective means to ensure SFM** and a tool for preventing forest degradation or deforestation.

Another major concern is that **most consumer markets recognize certification** from a **select few certifying bodies** at the expense of other certification schemes.

This meeting will host discussions amongst the participating states on these issue areas. This will be attended by more than 80 delegates participating from over 40 countries and 20 international organizations, both in person and online.

The meeting is expected to come out with implementable frameworks and recommendations for management of forest fire and forest certification leading towards Sustainable Forest Management, which will be considered for discussions at the **19th session of UNFF scheduled at UN Headquarters, New York in May 2024.**