

4. G7 Declaration on Desertification – Environment

The G7 Environment Ministers have recognized desertification, land degradation and drought as 'systemic global challenges' and 'security risk multipliers', marking a significant shift in global environmental governance.

1. Background

For decades, land degradation was viewed primarily as an agricultural or environmental issue confined to developing nations. However, the cumulative impact of climate change, unsustainable land use, and population pressure has transformed desertification into a multidimensional crisis. The G7's recent declaration represents a paradigm shift—acknowledging that degraded landscapes are not just ecological concerns but also drivers of conflict, migration, and instability. With nearly 40% of global land degraded and affecting 3.2 billion people, the world is witnessing how environmental stress directly fuels geopolitical tensions, particularly in vulnerable regions like the Sahel where over 40% of conflicts are linked to land and water disputes.

2. Understanding the Global Land Crisis

Magnitude of Degradation

1. Nearly 40% of the world's land surface has undergone degradation, impacting approximately 3.2 billion people globally.
2. Degradation manifests through declining soil fertility, widespread water scarcity, and the collapse of essential ecosystem services.
3. Agrarian economies face existential threats as productive land shrinks, directly undermining food security and rural livelihoods.

The Climate–Conflict Nexus

1. The G7 declaration explicitly identifies environmental degradation as a security risk multiplier rather than a standalone ecological problem.
2. Over 40% of intrastate conflicts worldwide are directly linked to disputes over land ownership and water resources.
3. Desertification drives forced migration, intensifies resource competition, and destabilizes political systems in already fragile regions.
4. The Sahel region exemplifies this nexus, where environmental collapse has fueled armed conflicts and mass displacement.

3. India's Land Degradation Challenge

Scale of the Problem

1. Approximately 97.85 million hectares, constituting 29.7% of India's total geographical area, experienced land degradation as of 2018–19 according to ISRO's Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas.
2. Desertification affects around 30% of India's landmass, threatening the backbone of the nation's economy.
3. With over 40% of the population dependent on agriculture and land-based livelihoods, declining soil health poses direct threats to food security and economic stability.

India's Commitments and Progress

1. India became a signatory to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 1994 and ratified it in 1996.
2. The nation has pledged to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 under the Bonn Challenge and UNCCD framework.
3. Significant progress has been achieved with 18.94 million hectares already restored against the 2030 target.

4. India's Policy Response Framework

Flagship Initiatives

1. The Aravalli Green Wall Project, launched in 2023, creates a green corridor spanning Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi and Gujarat, drawing inspiration from Africa's Great Green Wall.
2. The National Action Plan to Combat Desertification, revised in 2023, integrates seamlessly with MGNREGS, CAMPA, and PMKSY for ground-level implementation.
3. The Green India Mission was revised in 2025 with an enhanced outlay of ₹12,190 crore, targeting afforestation over 1 million hectares.
4. The Integrated Watershed Management Programme under PMKSY addresses water conservation and soil health through community participation.

Global Alignment

1. India's restoration efforts directly support Land Degradation Neutrality commitments under UNCCD.
2. These interventions align with SDG 2 on food security, SDG 13 on climate action, and SDG 15 on life on land.
3. India actively participates in global platforms, showcasing indigenous solutions and best practices in land restoration.

5.G7's Strategic Policy Commitments

Integrated Governance Approach

1. The G7 advocates moving beyond traditional sectoral thinking toward a comprehensive systems-based framework.
2. This approach integrates environmental sustainability, economic development, and security considerations into unified policy architecture.
3. Land is positioned as central to sustainable development, climate resilience, and peacebuilding efforts globally.

Restoration and Resilience Measures

1. Emphasis on scaling up sustainable land management practices, ecosystem restoration projects, and drought preparedness mechanisms.
2. Ecosystem-based approaches are recognized as critical for building long-term resilience against environmental shocks.
3. Priority focuses on vulnerable communities and regions most affected by land degradation.

Financial Architecture

1. Strong emphasis on blended finance models combining public and private investment streams for land restoration.
2. This aligns with global calls for innovative green financing frameworks to meet the massive restoration funding gap.
3. Recognition that traditional public funding alone cannot meet the scale of investment required.

6.UNCCD COP17 and Global Mechanisms

Investment and Targets

1. The restoration challenge requires approximately \$1 billion per day in investment between 2025 and 2030.
2. UNCCD COP16 held in Riyadh in 2024 secured \$12 billion in pledges for land restoration initiatives globally.
3. COP17 scheduled for August 2026 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, carries the theme 'Restoring Land, Restoring Hope'.

Complementary Global Frameworks

1. The Bonn Challenge launched in 2011 aims to restore 350 million hectares globally by 2030.
2. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework addresses land restoration through specific Targets 2 and 11.
3. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration spanning 2021–2030 represents a joint UNEP–FAO initiative.
4. The G20 Global Land Initiative, aligned with India's G20 Presidency in 2022, targets reducing degraded land by 50% by 2040.

7.Way Forward

Translating Commitments into Action

1. Global pledges and financial commitments must be rapidly converted into on-ground restoration projects with measurable outcomes and transparent monitoring mechanisms.

Strengthening the Climate-Security Framework

1. International institutions must formally integrate land degradation into security and foreign policy agendas, recognizing environmental stress as a legitimate conflict driver requiring diplomatic and developmental interventions.

Scaling Community-Led Solutions

1. Empowering local communities through decentralized governance, traditional ecological knowledge, and participatory restoration models ensures sustainable outcomes while addressing livelihood security simultaneously.

Conclusion

The G7's recognition of desertification as a security threat marks a transformative moment in global environmental governance. With nearly 40% of Earth's land degraded and billions affected, the crisis demands unprecedented coordination between nations, innovative financing, and community empowerment. India's progress toward its 26-million-hectare restoration target demonstrates that ambitious goals are achievable through policy integration and grassroots participation, offering a replicable model for global land restoration efforts.

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