

RESTORE

Livelihoods, Climate and the Future of Landscapes

14-15 October 2026 | India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Background

India's development trajectory is increasingly shaped by interconnected pressures from climate change, ecosystem degradation, water stress, food-system pressures and livelihood vulnerability. Rising temperatures, and land degradation affect agricultural productivity, water security, and the resilience of rural and urban economies. Restoration is therefore not only an environmental objective; it is critically part of India's broader development and climate-resilience strategy. The IPCC identifies the protection and restoration of natural and semi-natural ecosystems as important adaptation measures, with potential benefits for biodiversity, food and water security, livelihoods and human well-being. It also emphasises that climate, biodiversity and human systems need to be considered as interconnected systems ([IPCC, 2022](#)).

RESTORE 2026, the second edition of the national restoration dialogue, will take place on 14–15 October 2026 in New Delhi, co-hosted by WRI India and Transform Rural India Foundation. Under the theme *Livelihoods, Climate and the Future of Landscapes*, the dialogue will bring together government, philanthropy, finance, business, technology, civil society, researchers, practitioners, entrepreneurs and community leaders to examine how restoration can become part of India's development pathway.

Building on the first [RESTORE 2025 dialogue](#), the 2026 edition moves from the question of how to build a restoration economy towards a broader question: **what does it take to manage and restore landscapes for a changing climate, evolving livelihoods and multiple demands on land and water?** It will connect ecosystem recovery with climate resilience, heat, water, food systems and livelihoods, while examining the policy, institutional, governance, measurement and financial pathways needed to support landscape-scale action.

India's changing landscapes

Around 97.85 million hectares, or 29.77% of India's geographical area, was affected by land degradation and desertification in 2018–19, according to the Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas prepared by the Space Applications Centre, ISRO ([MoEFCC, 2023](#)).

Average temperatures over India rose by about 0.7°C during 1901–2018, alongside changes in rainfall, atmospheric moisture and climate extremes. ([MoES, 2020](#)) Water is a critical dimension of this challenge. India has around 18% of the world's population but only 4% of its water resources, while nearly 70% of annual rainfall occurs in just three months. Around 600 million people face water stress, and water-dependent sectors contribute roughly half of economic value added and employ nearly 70% of the workforce ([World Bank, 2026](#)). These pressures are closely linked to agriculture, which engaged 46.1% of India's workforce in 2023–24 and contributed approximately 17.8% of GDP. Small and marginal holdings, below two hectares, constituted 86.08% of operational holdings in the 2015–16 Agriculture Census ([Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2025](#); [Government of India, Agriculture Census 2015–16](#)). Forest and tree cover stood at 25.17% of India's geographical area in the India State of Forest Report 2023. However, cover alone does not capture ecological condition. Composition, structure, function, connectivity and landscape context are equally important ([FSI, 2023](#)).

Together, these trends point to the need for landscape approaches that integrate land, water, agriculture, ecosystems and climate risks. They also highlight the growing importance of hydrological, ecological, climate and spatial data in understanding where interventions are needed, what they can achieve and how outcomes change over time.

What does restoration success mean for a changing landscape?

Restoration science is shifting from a focus on tree planting, area treated and physical interventions towards recovering ecological functions, resilience and benefits for people. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration defines ecosystem restoration as a continuum of practices that halt and reverse degradation, improve ecosystem services and recover biodiversity, with approaches shaped by local ecological conditions and societal choices ([UNEP & FAO, 2021](#)).

India's experience illustrates both the scale of restoration action and the challenge of measuring what it achieves. India's Second Progress Report on the Bonn Challenge, released in June 2026, reports 21.76 million hectares brought under restoration against India's commitment to restore 26 million hectares by 2030. The report draws on data from 36 States and Union Territories and covers diverse landscapes and forest landscape restoration interventions, while highlighting the need for a more systematic national approach to monitoring restoration progress ([IUCN, 2026](#)).

This scale of action reinforces the need to move beyond area-based measures towards outcomes such as biodiversity, soil and water functions, carbon, agricultural productivity, livelihoods and resilience. Measuring these outcomes requires appropriate baselines, long-term monitoring and attention to trade-offs, since interventions that generate benefits in one dimension may create pressures elsewhere if they are poorly matched to local ecological, social or economic conditions ([UNEP & FAO, 2021](#); [IPCC, 2022](#)).

From restoring landscapes to generating livelihoods

At the same time, climate change makes restoration an increasingly forward-looking exercise. Interventions need to respond not only to current ecological conditions but also to changing temperature, rainfall, water availability, land use and livelihood needs. To do this, local knowledge and institutions must be strengthened through remote sensing, geospatial tools and other forms of environmental intelligence, enabling more place-specific planning and adaptive management supporting community decision making.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 recognises individual and community forest rights, including rights to protect, regenerate and conserve community forest resources ([Ministry of Tribal Affairs](#)). The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 gives Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas important roles in protecting community resources, managing local resources and approving plans and programmes ([Ministry of Home Affairs](#)). Women's roles, decision-making and access to benefits also need to be considered in how restoration responsibilities and gains are distributed. These principles are consistent with the UN Decade's emphasis on locally appropriate, inclusive and context-specific restoration ([UNEP & FAO, 2021](#)).

India already has significant policy and implementation platforms that can support landscape-scale action, including the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), State Action Plans on Climate Change, watershed development, rural employment, agriculture and forestry programmes. The NAPCC brings together eight core missions spanning areas including water, sustainable agriculture, sustainable habitat, forestry and strategic knowledge ([MoEFCC](#)).

The Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, which came into force nationally on 1 July 2026, provides a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment and has a central allocation of ₹95,692.31 crore for 2026–27. Its thematic areas include water-related works, livelihood-related infrastructure and works for mitigating extreme weather and disaster risks, creating opportunities to connect rural employment, natural-resource management and climate resilience ([Ministry of Rural Development, 2026](#); [PIB, 2026](#)).

The opportunity, therefore, is not simply to increase restoration expenditure. It is to strengthen convergence across existing programmes, institutions and sources of finance around the needs and outcomes of specific landscapes. Restoration finance and emerging green markets need appropriate safeguards so that efforts to generate carbon or biodiversity benefits do not result in exclusion, enclosure of commons or displacement of rights-holders. A Restoration Economy can also contribute to India's green economy through job creation, establishing local enterprises and restoration-positive value chains for agroecological commodities.

Shaping the future of landscapes: From projects to landscape-scale action

India's Nationally Determined Contribution for 2031–2035, submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in April 2026, strengthens the link between land-based action and climate policy. It includes a commitment to create a carbon sink of 3.5–4.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through forest and tree cover by 2035, against a 2005 baseline, alongside stronger adaptation action in sectors including agriculture and water resources ([UNFCCC, 2026](#); [Government of India, 2026](#)).

The future of India's landscapes, and the communities that depend on them, will be contingent on their ability to remain ecologically functional, economically productive and resilient to climate change. Landscapes will need to perform multiple functions at once: supporting biodiversity and

ecosystem services, securing water, sustaining food production and livelihoods, and buffering communities from heat and other climate risks. This calls for moving beyond restoring landscapes towards **future-proofing them for a changing climate and evolving livelihoods**. Restoration will remain important, but it must be part of broader systems of planning, stewardship, production, and investment that enable landscapes to adapt over time. Realising the potential of future landscapes will require stronger collaboration, better evidence and diversified finance. This means strengthening local stewardship; improving landscape-level planning and monitoring; integrating ecological, hydrological, climate and livelihood data; and aligning public programmes, public investment, markets and private finance with landscape outcomes.

Public finance can anchor landscape investments, while development finance, philanthropy, Corporate Social Responsibility, blended finance and private capital can support innovation and catalyse scale. Globally, finance for nature-based solutions remains well below estimated requirements. United Nations Environment Program's *State of Finance for Nature 2026* estimates that investment in nature-based solutions needs to increase to US\$571 billion annually by 2030 to meet global climate, biodiversity and land-degradation goals. In 2023, only US\$220 billion flowed into nature-based solutions, with private finance accounting for around US\$23 billion ([UNEP, 2026](#)).

Looking ahead

The next phase of restoration is not simply about restoring more hectares. It is about shaping landscapes that can adapt to a changing climate, sustain ecological functions, support resilient livelihoods, and respond to the interconnected demands placed on land, water, and food systems.

RESTORE 2026 will bring together diverse stakeholders to ask what future-ready landscapes could look like, what is already changing across India, and what it will take to move from working on individual issues to **shaping landscapes as interconnected systems**. The dialogue will explore how climate, livelihoods, and ecological recovery can come together to shape resilient and productive landscapes.

At the heart of the dialogue is a shared question: *How can India build future-ready landscapes that sustain nature, food and livelihoods in a changing climate?*

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[RESTORE 2025 background and dialogue](#)