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Webinar: Land Restoration at Scale - Towards Meeting India's Commitments

Recognising that addressing the complex issue of land degradation and promoting restoration on a large scale will require an inter-disciplinary approach and thinking outside the box, a webinar was organised on 'Land Restoration at Scale - Towards meeting India's Commitments' by Development Alternatives, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and The Nature Conservancy on 26 August 2020.

It focused on the potential levers for promoting land restoration at scale: Policy (e.g., removing tree felling and transport restrictions), Finance (e.g., National Finance Commission -public) and Corporate Social Responsibility - private), Market (e.g., certification), Technology (e.g., digital platform to link tree farmers and funders), and Institutions (e.g., Community Forest Resource Rights and Joint Forest Management committees).

Addressing this issue through the capitals approach and various levers would help India meet its various international commitments – Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target under United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – and the related national goals.

Dr Priya Shyamsundar (Lead Economist, TNC-India) moderated the event. The welcome address was given by Mr Atul Bagai (Head India Country Office, UNEP). It was followed by a keynote address by Mr Satya S. Tripathi (UN Assistant Secretary-General & Head of New York Office at UN Environment). The eminent panelists were Dr Pradeep Monga (Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD), Dr Archana Godbole (Founder-Director, Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF)), Dr Ajai (Emeritus Scientist - Space Applications Centre, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)), and Dr Priya Shyamsundar (Lead Economist, TNC-India). The closing remarks were made by Dr Ashok Khosla (Chairman, Development Alternatives and President, International Union for Conservation of Nature).

The experts highlighted that for dealing with issues like land degradation and desertification, the focus has to be given to all aspects including assessment of ecosystem services, understanding land-use



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patterns, community livelihood practices, technological interventions, financial and market instruments, institutional interventions, capacity building, and knowledge sharing. Additionally, for tackling the issue of land degradation we have to acknowledge the importance of natural capital and non-fungibility of critical natural capital with financial or physical capital. The need of the hour is to harness all other capitals, especially human, social, and cultural capitals, to ensure the long-term sustainability of natural capital.

It was also stressed that for effective community mobilisation the potential of local institutions, NGOs, CSOs need to be tapped. Furthermore, along with micro-level interventions, the aspect of scalability is also important for making long term impact at scale.

