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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Protecting Biodiversity — Strategy Improves, But Outcomes Remain Uncertain

 **BUSINESS STANDARD**

24 March 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED**ENVIRONMENT****GS PAPERS****GS3****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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Protecting Biodiversity — Strategy Improves, But Outcomes Remain Uncertain

 Business Standard

24 March 2026

GS3

BS

Business Standard

MAINS RELEVANCE:

GS Paper 3



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India has strong biodiversity laws on paper. Why does implementation lag, and what institutional reforms would close the gap?"

Protecting Biodiversity — Strategy Improves, But Outcomes Remain Uncertain

Business Standard's editorial on March 24, 2026, notes that while India's biodiversity governance framework has improved — with better monitoring, satellite data, and institutional capacity — actual outcomes on the ground remain uncertain, as land degradation continues at scale and protected areas cover remains limited.

THE STRATEGY-OUTCOME GAP

India has built an impressive institutional architecture for biodiversity conservation:

Institutional Strengths

- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** (amended 2022) — legal backbone
- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002** — regulates access to genetic resources
- **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)** — statutory body in Chennai
- **State Biodiversity Boards** in all states
- **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)** at local body level — over 2.7 lakh constituted
- **Forest Survey of India (FSI)** — biennial India State of Forest Report (ISFR)
- **National Mission for Green India** — under NAPCC

Technological Improvements

- Satellite-based forest monitoring (ISRO + FSI collaboration)
- Real-time fire alerts via MODIS and VIIRS

- DNA barcoding for species identification
- Camera trap networks in tiger reserves
- AI-assisted species monitoring (Project Insight)

Yet the editorial argues these improvements have not translated into measurable biodiversity outcomes.

WHERE OUTCOMES LAG

Land Degradation

- **96.4 million hectares** (29.3% of India’s geographic area) is degraded (ISRO/SAC study)
- Degradation is increasing in semi-arid zones (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra)
- Key drivers: overgrazing, mining, urbanisation, unsustainable agriculture
- **Desertification** affects 83.69 million hectares

Protected Area Coverage

- India’s Protected Area (PA) network covers approximately **5.26%** of total land area
- Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) target: **30% by 2030** (30x30 target)
- India’s combined PA + forest cover: ~24% — still short of the 30% target
- Many PAs are “paper parks” — notified but poorly staffed and funded

Species Under Threat

- India hosts **~8% of global biodiversity** with only **2.4% of global land area**
- IUCN Red List: **172 Critically Endangered** species in India
- Western Ghats: Lost 40% of primary forest cover
- Coral reefs: Bleaching events increasing in frequency

THE FOREST COVER PARADOX

ISFR 2023 reported India’s forest cover at **7,13,789 sq km** (21.71% of geographic area). However:

CATEGORY	AREA	TREND
Very Dense Forest	99,779 sq km	Slightly increasing
Moderately Dense Forest	3,06,890 sq km	Stable
Open Forest	3,07,120 sq km	Increasing
Total	7,13,789 sq km	Marginal increase

The editorial cautions that “open forest” (canopy density 10-40%) includes **plantations and degraded forests** that lack biodiversity value comparable to natural forests. The quality of forest cover matters as much as the quantity.

THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE

Biodiversity Management Committees

- Over **2.7 lakh BMCs** constituted — but most exist only on paper
- Few BMCs have prepared People’s Biodiversity Registers (PBRs)
- Local communities lack training and resources
- NBA has limited enforcement capacity

Environmental Impact Assessment

- EIA notification 2020 expanded exemptions for several project categories
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) — not yet implemented despite recommendations
- Post-facto environmental clearances undermine the preventive purpose of EIA

Funding

- India’s biodiversity spending: estimated **0.01% of GDP**
- CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation) funds: Over Rs 70,000 crore collected, utilisation around 50%
- GEF (Global Environment Facility) funding declining
- Private sector biodiversity funding: Negligible

KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

India adopted the GBF in December 2022 at COP15. Key targets:

TARGET	COMMITMENT	INDIA’S POSITION
30x30	30% land and sea protected by 2030	Currently ~5.26% PA + OECMs
Reduce invasive species	By 50%	Limited national strategy
Reduce pollution	Nutrient loss by 50%	Fertiliser subsidy reform needed
Biodiversity finance	\$200 billion/year by 2030	India advocates CBDR principle
Indigenous rights	Respect traditional knowledge	Biological Diversity Act provisions exist

THE WAY FORWARD

The editorial recommends:

- 1 **Shift from area-based to outcome-based conservation metrics** — measure species recovery, not just hectares notified
- 2 **Invest in ecological restoration** of degraded lands alongside afforestation
- 3 **Activate BMCs** with training, funding, and legal backing
- 4 **Implement CAMPA funds** strategically — not just plantation drives
- 5 **Integrate biodiversity into economic planning** — natural capital accounting

UPSC RELEVANCE

NBA, ISFR data, PA coverage, GBF 30x30 target, CAMPA, Biological Diversity Act 2002

MAINS GS-III:

Biodiversity conservation, environmental governance, forest policy, GBF implementation

INTERVIEW:

Why does India have strong environmental laws but poor outcomes? Is the problem institutional or political?

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

INDIA'S BIODIVERSITY PROFILE:

Biodiversity hotspots: 4 (Western Ghats, Eastern Himalayas, Indo-Burma, Sundaland)

Species: ~8% of global biodiversity on 2.4% of land area

IUCN Critically Endangered species in India: 172

Protected Areas: ~5.26% of land area

Forest cover: 7,13,789 sq km (21.71%, ISFR 2023)

KEY LAWS:

Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended 2022)

Biological Diversity Act, 2002

Forest Conservation Act, 1980 (amended 2023)

Environment Protection Act, 1986

KEY INSTITUTIONS:

NBA: National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai (statutory under BD Act 2002)

FSI: Forest Survey of India, Dehradun

WII: Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun

ZSI: Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata

BSI: Botanical Survey of India, Kolkata

GBF (KUNMING-MONTREAL):

Adopted: December 2022, COP15, Montreal

30x30 target: 30% land and sea protected by 2030

Finance: \$200 billion/year by 2030

India position: CBDR (Common But Differentiated Responsibilities)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

CAMPA fund: Rs 70,000+ crore collected, ~50% utilised

Degraded land: 96.4 million hectares (29.3%)

BMCs constituted: 2.7 lakh+ (most inactive)

India's first National Wildlife Action Plan: 1983 (current: 2017-2031)

Sources: [Business Standard](#) , [FSI](#) , [NBA](#)

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