

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

RAJYA SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO. 49
TO BE ANSWERED ON 07.12.2023

Soil erosion in Western Ghats

*49. SMT. VANDANA CHAVAN:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware about the recent IIT Bombay study about the doubled soil erosion of Western Ghats in the past two decades, if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether Government has any ongoing initiative for conserving the Western Ghats, if so, the details thereof, if not, the reasons therefor; and
- (c) whether Government has any plan to undertake any official assessment or comprehensive study for the Western Ghats, if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI BHUPENDER YADAV)

(a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARAS (a) TO (c) OF RAJYA SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 49 DUE FOR REPLY ON 07.12.2023 REGARDING “SOIL EROSION IN WESTERN GHATS” RAISED BY SMT. VANDANA CHAVAN.

(a) to (c) A study based on remote sensing data has been carried out by IIT Bombay entitled “Spatiotemporal variations in soil loss across the biodiversity hotspots of Western Ghats Region (WGR), India”, using Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) Model. This article has been published in the Indian Academy of Sciences Journal. The findings of the Model study suggest a rapid increase in soil erosion in the Western Ghats region using remote sensing data to quantify long-term soil losses across the entire WGR. This article also mentions that the outcome of USLE Model study based on remote sensing data might have some methodological shorts comings, therefore the results might have some errors and thus require physical monitoring of soil loss and soil erosion at multiple locations across WGR to validate the findings based on physical observations.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is implementing a number of schemes for conservation of forest, wildlife and environment in different states and Union Territories, including the Western Ghats region States. These include the National Afforestation Programme, Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat, Forest Fire Prevention and Management, Project Tiger and National Mission for a Green India. Funds under Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority are also being utilized for conservation of forest and wildlife in the Western Ghats.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, constituted the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) for undertaking a comprehensive study of the Western Ghats under the chairmanship of Prof. Madhav Gadgil on 4th March, 2010. The Panel was tasked with the responsibility to assess the current status of ecology of the Western Ghats region and to demarcate areas within the Western Ghats Region which need to be notified as Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area (WG ESA). As the States including stakeholders concerned had strong objections regarding finalisation of the WGESA, the Ministry constituted a High Level Working Group (HLWG) on 17th August, 2012, under the Chairmanship of Dr. K. Kasturirangan *inter-alia* to examine the report of WGEEP in a holistic manner keeping in view the comments received from the concerned State Governments, Central Ministries, and other Stakeholders. The HLWG has recommended 37% of the Western Ghats region as ESA. Based on this report, the draft notification for WG-ESA has been published for inviting comments/suggestion of the stakeholders.
