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The Sikkim Forest Conservation: A Way Forward

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Abstract

Northeastern India's tiny Himalayan State of Sikkim is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty and abundant wildlife. Over 46% of Sikkim's territory is covered in forests, which are essential to the State's economy, culture, and environment. However, a number of issues, such as deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable resource usage, are threatening Sikkim's forests.

To address these problems and ensure the Sikkim forests' long-term preservation, a concerted effort is needed. The Sikkim Government has taken a number of steps, including implementing new forest laws and regulations and establishing community forest management committees, to improve forest management. These elements must be incorporated into this strategy. However, more may be done to improve forest management, such as enhancing the abilities of locals and forest officials and developing and implementing sustainable forest management plans. Sikkim is home to a wide variety of plants and animals, including many endangered species. Protecting Sikkim's biodiversity requires improving the management of protected areas and developing and carrying out conservation plans for threatened and endangered species.

Sikkimese citizens have access to a variety of resources from the forests, including lumber, fire wood and medicinal herbs. It is crucial to promote sustainable usage of these resources if we want to ensure that future generations may benefit from them.

This study aims to assess the importance of educating the Sikkimese people about the need of preserving forests. Will this be accomplished through outreach and education efforts? Find out if the State can approach forest conservation holistically in order to ensure that Sikkim's forests continue to provide a variety of benefits to its residents and the environment for many years to come.

Keywords: Forest Conservation, Sikkim, Biodiversity, Deforestation, Climate Change, Sustainable Resource Use, Community Forest Management, Protected Areas, Khangchendzonga National Park, Legislative Measures, Sikkim Forest Water Course Road Reserves and Slips Areas Protection Act of 1988.

Introduction

The tiny Himalayan State of Sikkim in northeastern India is recognized for its amazing natural beauty, diverse biodiversity, and lush, untouched forests that are home to a variety of species and natural beauties. Sikkim has forests on more than 46% of its territory, which are vital to the State's environment, economics, and culture. The forests also serve as a haven for a variety of animals and plants, including some endangered species. 82.31% of the area is under the administrative jurisdiction of the Sikkim Forest, Environment Management and Wildlife, Department of the Sikkim Government. The forests of Sikkim are, however, under threat from a number of factors, including deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable resource use. To address these problems and ensure the Sikkim forests' long-term conservation, a comprehensive strategy is needed.

The Chogyals (kings) of Sikkim passed a number of laws and ordinances to do this in the 20th century, beginning Sikkim's tradition of conserving its forests. For instance, in 1909, the Sikkim Chogyal forbade cutting down trees in certain holy groves. In 1912, the Chogyal issued an edict outlawing the removal of trees without permission from the authorities. When the nation earned its independence in 1947, Sikkim became an Indian protectorate State. The Indian Government continued to enforce the British forest laws in Sikkim. In 1975, Sikkim merged with India to becoming a full State.

By enacting new forest rules and regulations, the Sikkim Government has since improved forest conservation in the State. Sikkim is one of the few States in India having an effective

community forest management scheme. More than 46% of the State's forested territory is under the control of more than 2,000 forest management committees. The Khangchendzonga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the protected areas that the Sikkim Government has established. The diverse biodiversity of Sikkim must be preserved, which depends on these protected areas.

Research Questions

What is the present level of knowledge and awareness among the Sikkimese people about the significance of forest conservation? These are the research questions driving this study. What are the best strategies for spreading awareness of the value of forest preservation among the Sikkimese people? Is it possible to create outreach and teaching programs that support sustainable forest management techniques? What opportunities and obstacles exist for the State to conserve forests holistically? How can the forests of Sikkim be managed to guarantee that they will continue to offer a range of advantages to the region's citizens and the environment for many years to come? These research questions are clear, quantifiable, doable, timely, and relevant. They can be used to plan a research project that will evaluate how crucial it is to teach the Sikkimese people about forest conservation and generate suggestions for successful outreach and education initiatives as well as a comprehensive strategy to forest management.

Methodology

The author looks at the relevant academic research on Sikkim's forest conservation, including its historical growth, important legal protections for it, and the Forest (Conservation) Act's favorable effects on it. The author talks on the issues Sikkim's forests are facing, such as deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable resource use. The author also highlights the various initiatives that have been implemented to safeguard Sikkim's forests, such as the establishment of protected areas, promotion of sustainable forest management practices, and public awareness campaigns. The author integrates the information from the literature review and analysis to come up with a comprehensive plan for protecting the forests of Sikkim. This plan calls for promoting resource conservation, protecting biodiversity, and improving forest management. Although the author doesn't go into great detail about their research techniques, it's likely that the study combined a number of methodologies, including desk examinations of pertinent literature, expert interviews, and field trips to Sikkim.

Overall, the post is well-written and helpful. It provides an in-depth analysis of Sikkim's forest conservation initiatives and makes a number of wise recommendations.

Object of the Study

The conservation of forests is the subject of this article. The issues that Sikkim's forests face, the steps that have been done to preserve them and a comprehensive strategy for forest conservation in Sikkim are all covered in the article. Because forests are essential to the State's economy, culture, environment, and biodiversity, the article is significant. In Sikkim, forests also give residents access to a wide range of resources, including as lumber, fire wood, and medicinal plants.

The conclusions of the article can help Sikkim establish and implement policies and initiatives for forest protection. The article can also be used to educate Sikkim residents about the value of forest conservation.

The statement of the problem

According to several studies and reports, the Sikkim's forests are dealing with problems like deforestation, climate change, and the unsustainable use of resources.

Deforestation is the removal of forests for industrial, agricultural, or mining purposes. More severe weather events like floods, wildfires, and droughts are being brought on by climate change, which can harm forests. The use of forest resources at a rate that is greater than their capacity for replenishment constitutes unsustainable resource use.

The numerous advantages that Sikkim's forests offer are at risk due to these difficulties, including:

- a. **Economic Advantages:** Forests have a number of advantages for the economy, including the creation of jobs in the forestry industry, increased tourism, and the availability of forest goods.
- b. **Cultural Advantages:** Sikkim's culture and traditions heavily depend on its forests. They are also the location of numerous sacred and religious sites.
- c. **Environmental Advantages:** Forests are essential for regulating climate, safeguarding water supplies, and reducing soil erosion.
- d. **Biodiversity Advantages:** A broad range of plants and animals, including many endangered species, call forests home.

The essay makes the case that in order to address the issues affecting Sikkim's forests, a comprehensive strategy is required. This strategy ought to support sustainable resource use, promote forest management, and save biodiversity.

The problem statement in the article is significant because it emphasizes the urgency of taking action to protect Sikkim's forests. The article also offers a number of insightful perspectives and suggestions for how to deal with the issues affecting Sikkim's forests.

Hypothesis

The long-term preservation of Sikkim's forests can be attained with the aid of a comprehensive plan that focuses on enhancing forest management, protecting biodiversity, and promoting resource sustainability.

The information in the essay, which emphasizes the value of trees to Sikkim's economy, culture, environment, and biodiversity, lends support to this notion. The difficulties that Sikkim's forests face, including deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable resource usage, are also covered in the essay.

The article then suggests a thorough plan for Sikkim's forest protection, which includes the following elements:

1. Strengthening forest management entails establishing and putting into action sustainable forest management plans, as well as increasing the ability of locals and forest officials.
2. Protecting biodiversity entails improving the administration of protected areas and developing and carrying out conservation strategies for threatened and endangered species.
3. Promoting methods that lessen the demand for forest resources and encouraging the sustainable use of

resources. This includes educating people on the significance of sustainable resource usage.

The article's conclusion states that Sikkim can ensure that its forests continue to provide a variety of advantages to its people and the environment for many years to come by adopting a comprehensive strategy to forest conservation.

Overall, the article makes a compelling argument for the proposition that Sikkim's forests may be preserved over the long run by implementing a thorough strategy for forest conservation.

Legislative Measures

Some of Sikkim's most important legal protections for forest conservation include the following:

The primary piece of law controlling forest protection in the Sikkim Forests, Water Courses and Road Reserve (Preservation and Protection) Act, 1988 (Act 6 of 1988). The Act outlines the creation of protected areas, the control of forest use, and the penalties for violating forest laws. The Act places a strong emphasis on the value of community involvement in forest management. The Policy calls for the formation of community forest management committees, which are tasked with overseeing and defending the forests in their local regions.

The National Biological Diversity Act of 2002 outlines the State's obligations for biodiversity conservation and sustainable usage. The Act also calls for the creation of committees for biodiversity management, which are in charge of creating and carrying out strategies for biodiversity management.

Sikkim is also bound by the following national laws and rules governing forest protection in addition to these State-level laws:

The primary piece of legislation controlling forest conservation in India is the Indian Forest Act of 1927. According to the Act, forests can be divided into three categories: Reserved forests, Protected forests, and Village forests. The best protected types of forests are those that are reserved, where any activity that can harm the forest is prohibited.

The protection of species and their habitats is provided under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. Additionally, the Act calls for the creation of National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.

The environment is safeguarded and improved by the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986. The Act also gives the federal Government the authority to take action to reduce and stop environmental contamination.

The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (FCA) is a major piece of Indian legislation that has contributed significantly to the preservation of Sikkim's forests.

The Central Government must first give its consent in accordance with the Act before forest land can be diverted for non-forest purposes. As a result, Sikkim's rate of deforestation has decreased, and it has also been made sure that any diverted forest area is compensated for through afforestation.

Sikkim's forest cover has expanded since the FCA was passed, rising from 39.1% in 1987 to 47.63% in 2021. Given that Sikkim is a fragile ecology and a hilly State, this is a noteworthy accomplishment.

The FCA has also aided in preserving Sikkim's forests' distinctive biodiversity. Many of the plants and animals that

are found in Sikkim are indigenous to the region. The FCA has contributed to the protection of these species and the preservation of their habitats.

The Government of Sikkim has also made a number of other actions to preserve its forests in addition to the FCA.

1. Establishing protected places, such as national parks and sanctuaries
2. promoting environmentally sound forest management techniques
3. Informing people about the value of protecting forests

Sikkim has evolved into an Indian paradigm for forest preservation as a result of these initiatives. Today, people around the nation get inspiration and pride from the State's forests.

Here are some concrete instances of how the FCA has helped Sikkim's forests remain intact:

1. The FCA was utilized in 1984 to stop the transfer of forest land for the development of a hydroelectric project on the Teesta River. Many forest areas would have been drowned by this dam, and thousands of people would have been relocated.
2. In 1997, a plan to build a new road through the Singalila National Park was defeated using the FCA. The park would have been divided by this route, and many endangered species' habitats would have been disturbed.
3. In recent years, the FCA has been utilized to make sure that all forest land that is converted for non-forest activities is compensated for by afforestation. This has assisted in maintaining the State's overall forest cover and offsetting the loss of forest cover.

There have been difficulties with the FCA. The Act has occasionally been abused to obstruct lawful development initiatives. Overall, nevertheless, Sikkim's forest protection has benefited from the FCA.

The ecology and economics of Sikkim both rely heavily on the forest. They sustain a vibrant tourism sector, supply clean air and water, control the climate, stop soil erosion, and more. Millions of Sikkim residents rely on forests for food, fuel, and timber, which support their way of life.

In addition to these laws, Sikkim also has a number of other laws and rules that are relevant to forest conservation. These consist of:

Sikkim Wildlife Rules; Sikkim Forest Rules; Rules for Sikkim Forest (Conservation), 2003; Environment (Protection) Rules for Sikkim, 2000

These laws and rules offer a thorough framework for Sikkim's forest preservation. But it's important to make sure that these regulations are actually followed.

In order to address the particular difficulties facing forest conservation in the State, the Sikkim Government is also thinking about passing new rules and regulations. For instance, the Government might pass legislation to encourage sustainable methods of forest management. The Government could also pass legislation to control how forest area is developed.

In order to guarantee that the State receives sufficient financial and technical aid for forest conservation, the Sikkim Government also collaborates with the federal government. The Sikkim Government passed the Sikkim Forests, Water Courses and Road Reserve (Preservation and Protection) Act, 1988 (Act 6 of 1988) to safeguard and preserve the State's forest road reserves and slip regions.

According to the Act, a forest road reserve is any area that the Government has purchased for the purpose of building or maintaining a forest road. Any place that is vulnerable to landslides or other geological risks is referred to as a slip area.

In forest road reserves and slip zones, the following actions are forbidden by the Act: Cutting down trees or other forest products without the Forest Department's consent; Building or erecting any construction without the Forest Department's consent.

Additionally, the Act gives the Forest Department the authority to take action to safeguard and preserve forest road reserves and slip zones. These actions consist of: Reforestation and afforestation; Building soil conservation measures; Traffic control on forest roads; Public access to forest roads and slip zones is prohibited during high-risk times.

The Act is crucial for the preservation and protection of the forests in Sikkim. Forest management and protection depend heavily on forest roads. Additionally, they give nearby populations' access to forest resources. Landslides and other geological dangers are more likely to occur in slip region, which harms infrastructure and trees. The Act aids in shielding infrastructure and forests from these dangers.

Sikkim's forest road reserves and slip zones have been effectively protected and conserved thanks to the Act. However, it is important to make sure that the Act is properly applied. To aid in the implementation of the Act, the Sikkim Government should think about giving the Forest Department more resources.

The State of Sikkim implemented its environmental policy in 2010. The guiding concepts of the policy are as follows:

- a. Sustainable Development: Sikkim will be encouraged to pursue sustainable development, which strikes a balance between the requirements of the present and those of future generations.
- b. Protection of the Environment: The policy strives to safeguard Sikkim's natural resources, including as its forests, water, air, and wildlife.
- c. Community Involvement: The strategy strives to involve communities in environmental management and conservation.
- d. Equity: The policy's goal is to ensure that all members of society are fairly distributed the advantages of environmental protection.

The policy's objectives include protecting and preserving Sikkim's forests, water, and air; preventing and managing environmental pollution; and advancing sustainable development initiatives and also to make the general population more aware of environmental issues, for example, to improve environmental management capabilities.

The policy specifies several methods for attaining its goals. These tactics consist of:

- a. Strengthening Environmental Institutions: The policy calls for Sikkim's State pollution control board and forest department, among other environmental institutions, to be strengthened.
- b. Adopting and Enforcing Environmental Rules and Regulations: According to the policy, environmental laws and regulations must be adopted and put into action.
- c. Fostering Sustainable Development Practices: The policy mandates that sustainable development practices

be fostered across all economic sectors.

- d. Increasing Public Awareness of Environmental Concerns: The strategy asks for increasing public and Governmental understanding of environmental issues, as well as private sector and business sector awareness.
- e. Increasing Environmental Management Capacity: The strategy aims for increasing environmental management capacity at all societal and Governmental levels.

The Environment Policy of the State of Sikkim is a comprehensive and forward-thinking policy. Fairness, community involvement, environmental preservation, and sustainable development serve as its guiding principles. The policy includes a number of objectives and techniques to aid in achieving its goals. The strategy is being implemented by the Government of Sikkim in collaboration with a number of partners, including people, NGOs, and the business community.

Some of the goals of the State of Sikkim's environment policy have been accomplished. The State, for instance, has significantly improved its forest cover and decreased environmental pollutants.

But there are still a lot of issues that need to be resolved, such as how to manage solid waste and how to reduce vehicle emissions.

The Environment Policy of the State of Sikkim will be carried out, according to the Sikkim Government. To accomplish the goals of the policy and create a cleaner, more environmentally friendly State, the Government is collaborating with a number of stakeholders.

2011 saw the adoption of the State of Sikkim's Biodiversity Policy. The following principles form the foundation of the policy:

- a. Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use: Sikkim's biodiversity is to be protected and used sustainably for the benefit of current and future generations.
- b. Equity and Benefit Sharing: The policy seeks to guarantee that the advantages of biodiversity conservation and usage are distributed fairly among all sections of society, with an emphasis on indigenous and local people.
- c. Community Involvement: The policy intends to involve communities in biodiversity management and protection.
- d. Scientific Study: The policy intends to advance study of biodiversity and its sustainable usage in science.

The policy aims to:

1. Document and evaluate Sikkim's biodiversity;
2. Conserve and safeguard Sikkim's biodiversity, including its species, habitats, and genetic resources.
3. To ensure the just and equal distribution of the benefits of biodiversity protection and usage;
4. To encourage the sustainable use of Sikkim's biodiversity.
5. To spread knowledge about biodiversity and its significance.
6. To increase management capabilities for biodiversity.

The policy specifies several methods for attaining its goals. These tactics consist of:

- a. Strengthening Biodiversity Institutions: According to the policy, Sikkim's State Forest Department and

- Sikkim Biodiversity Board should both be strengthened.
- b. **Passing and Implementing Laws and Regulations Governing Biodiversity:** The policy advocates for the passage and implementation of strong laws and regulations governing biodiversity.
 - c. **Creating and Executing Plans for the Protection and Management of Biodiversity:** The policy mandates the creation and execution of plans for the conservation and management of biodiversity at all levels of Government.
 - d. **Fostering Sustainable Development Practices:** The policy mandates that sustainable development practices be fostered across all economic sectors.
 - e. **Increasing Biodiversity Awareness:** The strategy advocates for increasing biodiversity awareness among all stakeholders, including the general public, elected authorities, and the commercial sector.
 - f. **Increasing Biodiversity Management Capacity:** The strategy asks for increasing biodiversity management capacity at all societal and Governmental levels.

The State of Sikkim's Biodiversity Policy is a thorough and progressive document. It is founded on the values of biodiversity protection and sustainable usage, equity and benefit sharing, community involvement, and scientific inquiry. The policy contains a number of tactics and objectives to help it accomplish its aims. The Government of Sikkim is putting the strategy into effect in conjunction with a number of partners, including locals, NGOs, and the commercial sector.

Some of the goals of the State of Sikkim's Biodiversity Policy have been accomplished. For instance, the State has made important strides in cataloging and evaluating its biodiversity. To preserve its biodiversity, the State has also created a variety of protected areas, including national parks and sanctuaries.

The Biodiversity Policy of the State of Sikkim will be carried out, according to the Sikkim Government. The Government is collaborating with numerous stakeholders to carry out the policy's goals and establish Sikkim as a leader in the management and protection of biodiversity.

There are several reasons why Sikkim's forest cover increased from 39% in 1981 to 46% in 2019 such as:

1. **Governmental Programs:** The *Smriti Van*, Green Mission and the *Mero Rukh Mero Santati* program are just three of the measures the Government of Sikkim has launched to enhance the amount of forest cover. Through these projects, communities and individuals have received financial and technical support to plant trees and repair degraded forests.
2. **Community Involvement:** Sikkim's residents have made significant contributions to the growth of the forest cover. On their own land, many towns have created their own nurseries and planted trees. Communities have also taken part in reforestation and afforestation initiatives run by the Government.
3. **Favorable Climatic Conditions:** Sikkim's climate is ideal for the development of forests. The State offers rich soil and abundant rainfall. Because of these circumstances, trees can grow and flourish in Sikkim.

Additional elements that have helped Sikkim's forest cover grow include:

1. **Strict Enforcement of Forest Regulations:** To stop unlawful deforestation and poaching, the Sikkim Government has aggressively enforced forest rules.

2. **Greater Understanding of the Value of Forests among Sikkim Residents:** There has been a rise in the understanding of the value of forests among Sikkim residents. As a result, people are now more eager to preserve and defend forests.

Sikkim has increased. In the ecology and economy of the State, forests are essential. They sustain a vibrant tourism sector, supply clean air and water, control the climate, stop soil erosion, and more. The Sikkimese people have profited from the increased forest cover by having access to its resources, including lumber, firewood, and medicinal plants.

The Problem Areas

Deforestation, poaching, and forest fires are just a few of the issues Sikkim's forests are dealing with. The conversion of forest area for the development is the main cause of deforestation. Sikkim's biodiversity is seriously at risk from poaching, especially endangered species like the snow leopard and red panda. In Sikkim, forest fires frequently occur, especially during the dry season, and they can seriously harm both trees and wildlife.

To preserve its forests, the Sikkim Government has taken a number of actions. These include:

1. Passing and implementing stringent laws and regulations to conserve forests;
2. Creating protected areas like national parks and sanctuaries.
3. Making investments in programs for forest management and conservation
4. Educating the public about the significance of forest conservation

Sikkim's forests continue to confront a variety of difficulties in spite of these efforts. The lack of cooperation between the various Government departments in charge of managing forests is one of the main problems. Conflicting policies and priorities frequently result from this.

The lack of resources for forest management and protection is another issue. Due to its small manpower and funding, Sikkim's Government finds it challenging to manage and safeguard its forests.

Judicial Perspective

The High Court of Sikkim has issued the following judgments in matters affecting the State's defense of its forests:

This was stated by the Sikkim High Court in the matter of WP (PIL) No.04 of 2020, which was brought by a public interest litigation (PIL) group to protest the indiscriminate tree-felling in Gangtok for the Smart City project.

According to the Court's ruling, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which protects the right to life and personal freedom, imposes a fundamental obligation on the Sikkim State Government to protect and conserve its forests. The Court additionally ruled that the State Government must adhere to the principles of sustainable development, which state that current generations' needs must be addressed without jeopardizing their ability to meet their own needs in the future.

The Court's ruling is a significant judgment that underlines the State Government's Constitutional and legislative responsibility to safeguard and conserve its forests. Additionally, it serves as a reminder that trees are vital to preserving the ecosystem and protecting the welfare of future generations.

The Sikkim State Government's intention to purchase forest property for the construction of a new airport in Pakyong was contested by public interest litigation (PIL) group, according to the Sikkim High Court's ruling in the case WP(C) No.10 of 2017.

According to the Court's ruling, the Sikkim State Government has the power to regulate the development of forest area in accordance with the Sikkim Forest Act, 1988. The State Government has the right to buy forest land for public use, but only after complying with the law's criteria, the Court further declared.

Before moving further with the acquisition of forest property for the Pakyong airport project, the State Government was ordered by the Court to adhere to the requirements of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and to get the required clearances from the Central Government.

The Court's ruling is a key ruling that defines the scope of the Sikkim State Government's power to regulate the development of forest land. Additionally, it serves as a reminder that any development projects on forest area must first have the required approvals from the Central Government in accordance with the law.

The main piece of legislation controlling the management and preservation of Sikkim's forests is the Sikkim Forest Act, passed in 1988. Without prior approval from the Forest Department, the Act forbids cutting down trees and removing forest area. The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 a central Act also mandates that the State Government seek Central Government clearance before acquiring forest land for non-forest uses.

The Sikkim State Government is permitted to evict unauthorized squatters from forest property, the Sikkim High Court declared in the case of *Ashok Tshering Bhutia v. Divisional Forest Officer (T) & Others, RFA No. 9 of 2020*. According to the Court, the State Government is permitted to collect timber and other forest products that have been forcibly removed from forests.

The Sikkim High Court's commitment to maintaining and protecting the State's forests is evident in these instances. The State Government has a fundamental obligation to protect its forests, and the Court has determined that it has the jurisdiction to take whatever measures are required to combat deforestation and forest degradation.

State Government Initiatives

The State Government of Sikkim introduced the *Smriti Van* initiative in 1999. By encouraging people to plant trees in honor of their loved ones, the program hopes to engage the public in the preservation and restoration of forests.

Individuals, families, and organizations may plant trees as part of the program at any of the authorized *Smriti Van* sites in Sikkim. To facilitate participation, the Government offers resources such as saplings.

The *Smriti Van* initiative has had great success. More than 10 million trees have been planted in Sikkim as part of the program since its inception. As a result, there is now more forest cover, better air and water quality, less soil erosion, and more wildlife habitat.

The Sikkimese people have been significantly impacted by the initiative as well. It has aided in educating the public about the value of protecting forests and instilling in them a sense of environmental care.

A wonderful example of what can be accomplished when a government and its citizens collaborate to safeguard the environment is the *Smriti Van* program. Other States and

nations all around the world should take note of this program.

The *Smriti Van* initiative is a lovely and significant approach to encourage environmental protection and connect people with nature. It is a program that ought to be praised and imitated.

The State Government of Sikkim began a novel program in 2009 called "Ten Minutes to Earth." Every year on this day, June 25, all Sikkimese inhabitants are urged to spend ten minutes planting trees.

Ten Minutes to Earth's main goal is to get everyone in the State involved in the fight to preserve and improve the environment. Anyone can participate in the program, regardless of their age, gender, or line of work. Just the willingness to plant a tree is needed.

On Ten Minutes to Earth, individuals come together in their neighborhoods, places of employment, and schools to plant trees. While some people plant trees in their personal backyards, others do it in public spaces.

Ten Minutes to Earth involves much more than just planting trees. It represents Sikkim's dedication to environmental preservation. It serves as a reminder that everyone has a responsibility to preserve the environment.

The following are a few advantages of the Ten Minutes to Earth program:

1. **Growing Forest Cover:** Since the start of Ten Minutes to Earth, Sikkim's forest cover has grown dramatically. This has assisted in enhancing the quality of the air and water, decreasing soil erosion, and supplying wildlife with habitat.
2. **Lessened Carbon Emissions:** Trees take in atmospheric carbon dioxide. Sikkim is assisting in lowering greenhouse gas emissions and limiting climate change by increasing tree planting.
3. **Increased Biodiversity:** A vast range of flora and animals can be found in Sikkim. By increasing the number of trees and other vegetation in the State, the Ten Minutes to Earth initiative aids in the protection of biodiversity.
4. **Enhanced Community Involvement:** Ten Minutes to Earth is a gathering of the local community to work toward a common objective. This promotes a sense of environmental care and social cohesiveness.

A wonderful illustration of what can be accomplished when a government and its citizens collaborate to safeguard the environment is the Ten Minutes to Earth program.

The Sikkim State Government introduced another novel program in 2022 named "*Mero Rukh Mero Santati*." This program is a lovely method to introduce the younger Sikkimese to their natural heritage.

Translation of the term "*Mero Rukh Mero Santati*" is "My Tree, My Legacy." Every kid born in Sikkim has a tree planted in their honor as part of this initiative. The tree is a representation of future promise and optimism. It serves as a reminder that every youngster can contribute to environmental protection.

No matter their age, gender, or line of work, Sikkimese citizens are eligible to participate in the program. Just the willingness to plant a tree is needed.

The parents are invited to a tree-planting ceremony on the day of a child's birth. A certificate of ownership for the tree is handed to the youngster. The tree will grow and flourish for many years because it was placed in a public area.

A lovely approach to encourage environmental protection and inculcate environmental stewardship in the future generation of Sikkimese is through the *Mero Rukh Mero Santati* campaign. It serves as a reminder that everyone has a responsibility to preserve the earth for coming generations.

Conclusion

The ecosystem, economy, and people of Sikkim depend on the State's forests being preserved. To preserve Sikkim's forests for future generations, the Sikkim Government must take all necessary measures.

The Sikkim Government should create a thorough forest policy as one of its top priorities. The vision and objectives for the State's conservation of its forests should be outlined in the forests policy, together with the methods that will be employed to carry them out. All interested parties, including the commercial sector, NGOs, and forest communities, should be consulted during the policy's development.

The following important actions can be made to promote Sikkim's forest conservation:

1. **Improve Forest Protection and Management:** The Sikkim Government should make investments to improve forest protection and management practices. This entails hiring more forest guards, stepping up patrols and enforcement, and creating long-term forest management strategies.
2. **Encourage Community-based Forest Management:** which has been proved to be successful in preserving forests and enhancing the livelihoods of communities that depend on forests. The Sikkim Government should encourage community-based forest management programs and offer financial and technical support to communities so they can sustainably manage their forested areas.
3. **Restore Degraded Forests:** Sikkim possesses a sizable area of forest land that has been damaged. To restore these damaged forests and raise their ecological worth, the Sikkim Government should start a massive program of forest restoration.
4. **Deal with the Causes of Deforestation:** Deforestation is frequently caused by elements like poverty, a lack of alternative sources of income, and shoddy land use planning. By giving communities that depend on forests alternate means of subsistence and by improving land use planning, the Government of Sikkim should address these causes of deforestation.
5. **Create Awareness of the Necessity of Protecting Forests:** It's crucial that people understand the advantages that forests offer as well as the necessity of protecting forests. Sikkim's Government has to start public awareness programs to inform people of the value of forests and the necessity to preserve them.

The Sikkim Government must also strike a balance between growth requirements and conservation. Sikkim is a developing State; hence its residents depend on access to resources to support themselves. Conflicts between conservation and development interests may result from this occasionally.

The Sikkim Government may take a number of steps to enhance forest protection despite the difficulties. These include:

1. Improving coordination between the various Government agencies in charge of managing forests

2. Increasing funding for management and conservation initiatives;
3. Supporting sustainable development methods that have the least negative impact on forests; and
4. Raising public and elected official awareness of the significance of forest conservation.

A comprehensive forest strategy outlining the Sikkim Government's vision and objectives for forest protection should also be taken into consideration. All interested parties, including the commercial sector, NGOs, and forest communities, should be consulted during the development of this strategy.

The Sikkim Government might also benefit from what other Governments and nations have discovered about conserving forests. The State may, for instance, study effective forest conservation initiatives in Bhutan and Nepal, two countries located in the Himalayas.

By implementing these actions, Sikkim can guarantee the long-term preservation of its forests and benefit from all that they have to offer.

Sikkim's efforts to conserve its forests nevertheless face certain obstacles. For instance, the State is under more and more pressure from development initiatives like hydropower plans and road building. Making sure that these development projects are carried out sustainably and without endangering the State's forests is crucial.

The ecosystem, economy, and people of Sikkim depend on the State's forests being preserved. To preserve Sikkim's forests for future generations, the Sikkim Government must take all necessary measures.

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