FAO's SOFO 2026 – India first in area under active forest restoration (9.8 Mha); China second (7.9 Mha)

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News

FAO Director-General QU Dongyu launched 'The State of the World's Forests 2026' (SOFO 2026) on 28 Sep 2026 at the opening of the 28th session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO 28) at FAO headquarters, Rome. Its title: 'Restoring forests and landscapes: The way forward for a sustainable future'. Using Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025 (FRA 2025) data, India ranks first in the world in forest area under active restoration with 9.8 million ha, ahead of China (7.9 Mha) and Ethiopia (5.0 Mha). Note: by the measure in India's 7th National Report to the CBD (18.9 Mha under forest and landscape restoration), India is second after China.

Key facts

Report	State of the World's Forests (SOFO) 2026 – FAO; biennial
Launch	28 Sep 2026 – COFO 28, FAO HQ, Rome
Focus	Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR)
Ranking	India 9.8 Mha (1), China 7.9 (2), Ethiopia 5.0 (3)
Global	Forests 4.14 bn ha (32% of land); degraded land 1.56 bn ha (incl. 460 Mha forest)

Economics	Up to $30 return per $1 invested in restoration

Background

- FRA 2025 (Oct 2025): India is 9th in the world in forest area (72.74 Mha, about 2% of the world's forests) and 3rd in annual net forest gain. Since 1990, 489 Mha of forest has been cleared.
- India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023 – Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun; 18th biennial report: forest 7,15,343 sq km (21.76%) + tree cover 1,12,014 sq km (3.41%) = 25.17%. National Forest Policy 1988 goal – 33% of land under forest/tree cover.
- Global targets: under the Bonn Challenge India pledged to restore 26 Mha of degraded land by 2030 (UNCCD COP14, 2019, Greater Noida). Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 2 – 30% of degraded ecosystems under effective restoration by 2030.
- Constitution: the 42nd Amendment (1976) moved 'Forests' from the State List to the Concurrent List and added Article 48A (State's duty) and Article 51A(g) (citizens' duty).

Tamil Nadu link: per ISFR 2023, Tamil Nadu's green cover is 24.47% (forest 20.34% + tree cover 4.13%). The 'Green Tamil Nadu Mission' (launched 24 Sep 2022) aims to raise green cover from 23.69% to 33% in 10 years.

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