

Sustainability: ITC strengthens its initiatives in Water Stewardship & Biodiversity Conservation

June 05, 2020



ITC Limited, one of India's leading multi-business conglomerates and an exemplar in environment sustainability said that it is rapidly scaling up its highly acclaimed Integrated Watershed Development and Environmental Resources Replenishment initiatives through partnerships with various State governments. These partnerships will be largely focussed on water stewardship and biodiversity conservation.

Over the past decades, ITC has demonstrated environmental stewardship by not only ensuring efficient use of resources but also by augmenting precious natural capital. ITC has the distinction of being the only company in the world to be carbon positive for over 14 years, water positive for over 17 years and solid waste recycling positive for over 12 years. Over 41% of the energy consumed by ITC is met through renewable sources. ITC's afforestation programme has greened over 7,76,000 acres. Its watershed development initiatives have covered over 1 million acres, whilst its solid waste management programme Well Being out of Waste (WoW) covers over 1 crore citizens across the country. ITC is also a pioneer in green building movement in the country with over 25 Platinum-rated green buildings. Some of its other notable social investment initiatives at scale include women empowerment, primary education, skilling and vocational training, livestock development, health & sanitation and so on. ITC's businesses have supported over 6 million sustainable livelihoods till date.

Commenting on the company's resolve to reinforce its environment sustainability initiatives, Mr. Chitranjan Dar, Corporate Management Committee Member of ITC responsible for overall supervision of Quality Assurance, ITC Life Sciences & Technology Centre, Central Projects Organisation and Environment, Health & Safety said, "Going

forward, our focus on sustainability and environment stewardship would gain larger significance in the post-Covid-19 period. The lockdown period has witnessed nature healing herself and going forward, citizens will expect corporates to demonstrate larger steps to replenish and preserve the environment. At ITC, we believe that expanding interventions in environment replenishment and addressing climate change will be critical for a sustainable future. An enterprise of tomorrow is one that pursues competitive growth to create larger value for society even as it enriches the environment and creates opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Our Integrated Watershed Development programme, large scale afforestation programme, our renewable energy and green buildings footprint are some of the successful pivots in our strategy to pursue 'Responsible Competitiveness' – a socio-economic construct that underpins the ITC's objective to be future ready whilst ensuring that growth is sustainable and inclusive."

It is also ITC's strong belief that Biodiversity conservation and water stewardship are extremely critical aspects of environment protection as forests and other biomass are natural sponges which improves groundwater recharge and sub-surface flows. Such focus is even more relevant today when the world is increasingly imparting a renewed focus on biodiversity conservation as a means to maintain vital ecological balance.

Water Stewardship Initiatives

ITC's extensive watershed programme today covers more than 1,000,000 acres across India. Under this program, the company has adopted a comprehensive approach focussed on supply augmentation and demand side management. Supply augmentation covers area treatment, water harvesting, groundwater recharge and biodiversity conservation and demand side management aims at improving water use efficiency in principal crops of area. ITC's Kovai Paperboards factory in Tamil Nadu has earned the unique distinction of being the only facility in India to be awarded the Alliance for Water Stewardship Platinum-level certification – the highest recognition for water stewardship in the world.

The success of ITC's integrated water management approach has not only benefitted farmers by enhancing crop yields and expanding cultivation area but has also led to large savings through efficiency in water usage.

ITC's Water Stewardship programme is also a community based participatory approach. It employs low cost technologies to arrest erosion, enhance moisture, conserve rainwater and recharge groundwater. The benefits of ITC's water stewardship programme are multiple and multidimensional.

With water scarcity increasingly becoming an area of concern, ITC continues to focus on an integrated water management approach within the fence that includes investing in water conservation measures and rainwater harvesting initiatives at its units. For larger coverage and scale, ITC has also partnered with various State Government departments and programmes such as MGNREGS programme and NABARD for watershed development in 5.6 lakh acres area.

Similarly, as part of demand management, ITC has entered a novel partnership with Water Resources Department of Maharashtra to improve water productivity in 2.42 lakh acres of command area which is under four irrigation schemes spread in 4 districts of the state. This partnership aims at supporting the Government's 'More Crop per Drop' credo and reduce crop water demand in the dams.

These large scale interventions will serve as meaningful examples and inspire many more such fruitful programmes in this area to benefit farmers.

Biodiversity management initiatives:

To improve biodiversity, ITC is partnering with Forest departments in Maharashtra and Telangana to improve forest cover through soil moisture conservation and fringe area development. The Company is also partnering with Wasteland and Pastureland development board of Rajasthan for regeneration of pasturelands in the State. These partnerships will help impact 79,000 acres of forest land and 2.47 lakh acres of pasturelands in 11 districts.

As a responsible Corporate, ITC is committed to continue to strengthen and scale up its environmental sustainability interventions through-and post the pandemic. The company believes that business is an integral organ of society that can bring about transformational change in social value creation, besides enriching the environment. It is with this conviction that ITC continues to pursue business models that envisages the creation of social and environmental capital and economic wealth as a unified strategy.