

## Forest cover in Tamil Nadu: two green thumbs up

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The December deluge may be remembered more for its destruction but the rain ensured that Tamil Nadu remained verdant. Adding to the cheer, a report by the Forest Survey of India shows the state's forest cover has increased by 2,501sqkm in the two-year period 2013-15 -an increase of 10.5% over the previous period. TN's increase accounted for nearly 65% of net forest cover increase across the country. The state topped the list followed by Kerala.

At a time when many states in the country are facing challenges in retaining its forest cover, TN has recorded an increase for the third consecutive year. This has been possible thanks to the sustained afforestation programmes launched in the past 15 years.

Statistics on forest cover, calculated using satellite images show that the increase has been consistent. In 2011, the green cover was 28,306sqkm, which increased to 28,710sqkm in 2013 and jumped to 30,850sqkm by 2015.

Hans Raj Verma, principal secretary of forests and environment, said many afforestation programmes have been taken up in the past few years. At present three major tree planting programmes are being implemented -Tree Cultivation in Private Lands under the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project (TBGP), Massive Tree Planting programme and Biodiversity Conservation programme. The TBGP that began in 2011 has achieved half its target of planting 8 crore saplings over eight years.

One of the most successful programmes is the massive tree planting programme under which 64 lakh saplings were planted across the state in 2012 alone. The next year 65 lakh saplings were planted. The present financial year's aim is 66 lakh saplings. But planting is just the first step and the department ensures the plants are well cared for. "We do web-based monitoring of the saplings. The Forest Survey report reflects the results of the saplings which were planted in the first two years of this project," Verma said. The third programme focuses on the vulnerable species of trees."Nearly 600 species of trees from 17 protected areas have been classified as vulnerable and threatened and efforts are on to protect these," he added.

The key to increase green cover is not just afforestation but better conservation methods which pertain to strict laws that ensure no developmental activity inside forests and better patrolling against smuggling of wood. Agro-forestry practices, which promote growing trees in and around farms, is another major reason for the increase.

C K Sreedharan, chairman, United Nilgiris Conservation Trust, said two phases of Tamil Nadu Afforestation project (TAP) helped to increase the forest and tree cover in the state.

The success of this project was that it was implemented with the support and cooperation of the people. "We adopted a participatory approach and achieved great success," he said. TAP was implemented in 2,500 villages across the state. However, Sreedharan has a word of caution for afforestation programmes, "Only consistent efforts and conservation programmes can ensure an upward trend in forest cover and not just planting saplings," he says.

**Source:** <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Forest-cover-in-tn-two-green-thumbs-up/articleshow/50446755.cms>