

CSIR-NEERI holds webinar on rejuvenation of wastelands

■ Staff Reporter

CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) organised a webinar on 'Rejuvenation of degraded and waste lands' in memory of Dr Ashok S Juvarkar, renowned former scientist of CSIR-NEERI and land rejuvenation expert.

Dr Nitin Pandit, Director, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE), Bengaluru; Umakant, Joint Secretary, Department of Land Resources, Union Ministry of Rural Development; Dr G G Manekar, General Manager (Mine-Planning), MOIL Limited; Vinsay Bedekar, Senior Manager (Sustainability & EHS), Mahindra Vehicle Manufacturers Ltd, were the guest speakers.

Dr Pandit informed that India had revised its land restoration target to 26 million hectares from previously set target of 21 million hectares in the recently held United Nations Convention to combat desertification. He briefed about strategy for creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide that would be sequestered by restoring the degraded lands as per the Paris

India has restored 23 million hectare of degraded land: Umakant

UMAKANT, Joint Secretary, Department of Land Resources, Union Ministry of Rural Development, said that, India had so far restored 23 million hectares of degraded land whereas the international commitment is 26 million hectares. He affirmed that, wastelands and degraded lands could play an important role in the Indian economy as 40 per cent of population was based on wastelands or degraded lands. Cost benefit analysis and scientific inputs could play a vital role in formulation of effective policies for restoration of wastelands and degraded lands, he asserted. Describing the quantum of work done by State Governments under the guidance of Central Government, he informed the audience that since 2014-15, approximately 7 lakh water harvesting structures had been created and additional area of 14.55 hectares had been brought under protective irrigation. Umakant urged CSIR-NEERI scientists to work with IUCN to develop internationally acceptable and verifiable metrics to assess degraded lands and wastelands. He also briefed about 'Wastelands Atlas' brought out by Ministry of Rural Development to effectively assist in rolling back wastelands for productive use through various land development schemes and programmes. He mentioned the salient features of integrated watershed management programme launched to restore ecological balance by harnessing, conserving and developing degraded natural resources such as soil, vegetative cover, water.

agreement. Expressing concern over the prospect of developing solar photovoltaics (PV) technologies on degraded lands, he said that all 'wastelands' were not degraded lands. "We need to revisit the definition of wastelands and wastelands classification system," he said.

Citing an example of wastelands in Maharashtra, Dr Pandit said that, Satara and Karad had the habitat of critically endan-

gered black buck species. He advocated due caution in setting standards and policies for restoration of degraded lands. Choosing the right sites is important in restoration of degraded lands for building resilience and benefiting livelihoods, he added. He pointed out that, land application of biosolids, the end product of wastewater treatment, which were rich in organic matter and plant nutrients, could be

a better option for rejuvenating wastelands. CSIR-NEERI should explore the use of biosolids to enhance productivity of degraded lands, he added.

Dr Manekar outlined various scientific and technological interventions of CSIR-NEERI instrumental in restoring degraded sites at MOIL, Ltd. He also applauded contribution of CSIR-NEERI in sewage treatment and water management. He paid trib-

ute to Dr Ashok S Juvarkar and said that his contribution was unforgettable. Bedekar illustrated High Rate Transpiration System, a technological solution provided by CSIR-NEERI to Mahindra Vehicle Manufacturers Ltd, Pune, for treatment and safe disposal of its effluent.

He also spoke on combination of TIRTS and rainwater harvesting system to create alternate source of water for plant operations and simultaneously treat the effluent for safe disposal as per the norms.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Dr Rakesh Kumar, Director of CSIR-NEERI, highlighted NEERI's contribution in land rejuvenation. He also spoke on significant contributions of Late Dr Ashok S Juvarkar in the area of land rejuvenation.

Also, he spoke of various initiatives taken by CSIR-NEERI, including conversion of wastelands into productive lands in rural areas by bamboo plantation, and in restoration of fly ash dump sites.

Prakash Kumbhare conducted the proceedings and Asheesh Sharma provided support for seamless transmission of the event.