

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, COOPERATION AND FARMERS WELFARE

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1286
TO BE ANSWERED ON 12/02/2021

**EROSION OF TOP SOIL AND BOULDERS AT DARJEELING-
SIKKIM HIMALAYAN RANGE**

1286 Smt. Shanta Chhetri:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that 250 million metric tons of valuable top soil and boulders are annually being washed down to the rivers and valleys from Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan Range as reported by the Task Force set up by the Central Government around 1980;
- (b) whether Government is aware that annual erosion of valuable top soil and boulders would significantly affect agriculture in the hills;
- (c) whether this would ultimately lead to agricultural refugees; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof and the steps taken so far and if not, the reasons therefor

ANSWER

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE

(SHRI NARENDRA SINGH TOMAR)

(a) to (d): A Task Force constituted by Planning Commission during 1981 to study eco-development in the Himalayan Region, in its report dealt with the problem of soil erosion in Himalayan Region including Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan Range. However, Task Force report does not reveal quantum of valuable top soil and boulders being washed down to rivers and valleys. As per a report 'Degraded and Wastelands of India- Status and Spatial Distribution' brought out by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-2010, out of the total geographical area of 328.73 million ha an area of 89.03 million ha is affected due to water erosion in the country including Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan Range. In Particular, Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan Range, the land affected by water erosion is about 0.18 Million ha. The major cause of loss of top soil in Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan Range is landslides resulting in loss of soil nutrient and organic carbon and finally loss to crop productivity.

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With a view to develop degraded lands, the Department of Land Resources (DoLR), Ministry of Rural Development is implementing Watershed Development Component (WDC) of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY). The activities undertaken inter alia include ridge area treatment, drainage line treatment, soil and moisture conservation, rain water harvesting, nursery raising, afforestation, horticulture, pasture development, livelihoods for asset less persons, etc. PMKSY-WDC help in generating farmers' income, employment for majority of poor/marginal farmers thereby ameliorating the agricultural land for sustainable production besides, reduces the incidence of out-migration to a large extent.

Under this scheme, DoLR has sanctioned, 8214 watershed development projects covering an area of about 39.07 million hectare across the country and provided an amount of Rs. 19707.29 crore Central share to States/UTs (as on 31.01.2021) since 2009-10. Out of above sanctioned projects, 15 projects covering an area of 0.07 million ha and 163 projects covering an area of 0.70 million ha (including 13 projects with an area of 0.05 million ha in Darjeeling district) has been sanctioned in Sikkim and West Bengal respectively.

In addition, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) through Indian Institute of Soil and Water Conservation (IISWC), Dehradun has standardized location specific bio-engineering measures to control soil erosion, and geo-jute technology for slope stabilization and controlling landslides in hilly areas.
