



Govt urged to rehabilitate Sindh`s lost forest cover

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By Our Correspondent

NAWABSHAH, Dec 26: While causing widespread devastations the recent floods also provided an opportunity to revive forests in Sindh.

This was stated by speakers at a seminar on “revival and rehabilitation of riverine forest after flood” organised by the Pai Forest Action Network in collaboration with WWF`s Indus for All Programme here on Saturday.

Badar Abro, who writes on subjects like environment and wildlife, said that a campaign to increase the forest cover in Sindh needs to be initiated on an emergency basis. He said that ideally forest cover should be 25 per cent of the total area of a country but unfortunately forests in Pakistan were rapidly depleting.

He suggested that the government and civil society should strive to increase the forest cover to at least ten per cent of the total area.

Mr Abro also suggested a complete ban on cutting of trees in Sindh. It should be declared a crime and heavy penalty should be imposed on violators.

He said that many precious species of wildlife such as elephants, rhinoceros, black panthers and blue bull had become extinct in Sindh mainly due to habitat degradation. The remaining species could be protected by banning hunting with the help of local community.

The Programme Coordinator of WWF Nasir Ali Panhwar said that riverine forests of Sindh used to provide food and fibre and the contribution of forests to economic, ecological, social and cultural wellbeing of people was significant.

Under the millennium development goals, he said, Pakistan was expected to increase the forest cover by seven per cent till 2015.

A number of multilateral environmental agreements have been signed by Pakistan, including biodiversity convention and Ramsar convention, which needed to be implemented in true spirit.

He said the WWF was providing alternate energy sources such as biogas to community living around the Pai forest to reduce pressure on forests.

Professor Mithal Jiskani of Sindh Agriculture University said that Sindh needed to enhance the forest cover across the province, but only in riverine areas. He said that free seed should be provided to the community for plantation, besides alternate sources of livelihood.

He said that the growth of trees were affected by diseases, but there was not a single plant ecologist in the forest department.