Environment & Ecology · GS - IV

In line with the Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the government has a constitutional obligation to ensure basic needs – “Roti, Kapda aur Makan (Food, Clothes and Shelter)” – for the under-privileged. Pursuing this mandate, the district administration proposed clearing a portion of forest land to develop housing for the homeless and economically weaker sections of the society.

The proposed land, however, is an ecologically sensitive zone densely populated with age-old trees, medicinal plants and vital biodiversity. Besides, these forests help to regulate micro-climate and rainfalls; provide habitat for wildlife, support soil fertility and prevent land/soil erosion and sustain livelihoods of tribal and nomadic communities.

Inspite of the ecological and social costs, the administration argues in favour of the said proposal by highlighting that this very initiative addresses fundamental human rights as a critical welfare priority. Besides, it fulfils the government’s duty to uplift and empower the poor through inclusive housing development. Further, these forest areas have become unsafe due to wild-animal threats and recurring human-wild life conflicts. Lastly, clearing forest-zones may help to curb anti-social elements allegedly using these areas as hideouts, thereby enhancing law and order.

- **(a) Can deforestation be ethically justified in the pursuit of social welfare objectives like, housing for the homeless?**
- **(b) What are the socio-economic, administrative and ethical challenges in balancing environmental conservation with human development?**
- **(c) What substantial alternatives or policy interventions can be proposed to ensure that both environmental integrity and human dignity are protected?**

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2025	GS - IV	Environment & Ecology

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Human dignity, welfare versus ecology, intergenerational equity, environmental ethics, precautionary principle, sustainable development, tribal rights, biodiversity, alternative land, rehabilitation, carrying capacity, social justice

Model Answer

(a) Ethical Justification of Deforestation

Deforestation cannot ordinarily be ethically justified merely because it serves an immediate welfare objective. Housing fulfils human dignity and social justice, but destroying a biodiversity-rich ecosystem may violate the rights of future generations, tribal communities and other species. Therefore, the ethical test should be necessity, proportionality and availability of alternatives.

(b) Major Challenges

Socio-economic: Displacement of tribal and nomadic communities, livelihood loss, human-wildlife conflict and unequal distribution of costs and benefits.

Administrative: Pressure for quick implementation, competing departmental objectives, inadequate land-use planning and difficulty in balancing welfare targets with environmental regulations.

Ethical: Present welfare versus intergenerational justice, human needs versus intrinsic value of nature, individual housing rights versus community rights, and development versus the precautionary principle.

(c) Alternatives and Policy Interventions

1. Conduct a scientific environmental and social impact assessment before taking a final decision.
2. Identify degraded or non-forest government land for housing.
3. Promote in-situ upgrading and redevelopment of existing settlements wherever feasible.
4. Use compact, vertical and climate-resilient housing to reduce land requirements.
5. Involve Gram Sabhas and affected communities in decision-making.
6. Where diversion is unavoidable, ensure minimum ecological damage, compensatory measures and rehabilitation.
7. Develop wildlife corridors, early-warning systems and community-based conflict mitigation where wildlife threats exist.

Conclusion

The ethical solution is not “forest versus poor”, but “housing for the poor without unnecessary destruction of forests”. Sustainable development integrates human dignity with ecological responsibility.

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