UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity

everywhere

कहीं पर भी गरीबी , हर जगह की समृद्धि के लिए खतरा है

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Answer Hint

Meaning of poverty and prosperity; multidimensional poverty; global interdependence; economic inequality; social justice; human development; unemployment; education and healthcare; inclusive growth; poverty alleviation in India; international cooperation; sustainable development goals; role of government; equitable distribution of opportunities

Model Answer

Introduction

Prosperity is often measured through rising incomes, expanding industries, modern infrastructure and technological advancement. Yet a society cannot be considered truly prosperous when millions of people lack adequate food, shelter, healthcare, education and opportunities for a dignified life. Poverty is not merely an individual hardship; it is a social, economic and political challenge whose consequences extend far beyond the people directly affected by it.

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The statement, “Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere,” highlights the interconnected nature of human development. In an increasingly globalised world, poverty in one region can affect economic growth, public health, political stability, environmental sustainability and international security elsewhere. Weak purchasing power limits markets, inequality can generate social conflict, and deprivation can undermine the collective capacity of societies to respond to common challenges.

Therefore, poverty eradication is not simply an act of charity or a responsibility confined to poorer countries. It is a shared investment in global stability, sustainable growth and human dignity. Lasting prosperity requires a world in which economic opportunities and the benefits of development reach all sections of society.

Body

1. Understanding Poverty and Prosperity

Poverty is traditionally understood as an inability to meet basic material needs. However, contemporary development thinking recognises that poverty has multiple dimensions.

Income poverty: Individuals lack sufficient income to purchase essential goods and services.

Educational deprivation: Children and adults lack access to quality education, literacy and opportunities to develop their capabilities.

Health deprivation: Poor nutrition, inadequate healthcare, unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation undermine physical and mental well-being.

Social exclusion: Discrimination based on caste, gender, disability, ethnicity or other circumstances may prevent people from accessing opportunities.

Vulnerability and insecurity: Households may be unable to withstand illness, unemployment, natural disasters or economic shocks.

Similarly, prosperity extends beyond the accumulation of wealth. It includes good health, meaningful employment, social mobility, environmental security, freedom and dignity.

A country may experience rapid economic growth while large sections of its population remain deprived. Such growth may be impressive in aggregate terms but fragile in social terms.

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True prosperity must therefore be inclusive, sustainable and broadly shared.

2. Poverty Undermines Economic Growth

Poverty can weaken the foundations of economic prosperity through several interconnected mechanisms.

Low purchasing power

People living in poverty have limited capacity to consume goods and services beyond basic necessities. This restricts domestic demand and can reduce opportunities for businesses to expand.

Low productivity

Malnutrition, poor health and inadequate education reduce workers' ability to perform effectively. When a large section of the population cannot develop its capabilities, the economy loses valuable human potential.

Limited human capital formation

Children growing up in poverty may experience poor nutrition, interrupted schooling and inadequate healthcare. These disadvantages can affect their future earnings and perpetuate poverty across generations.

Reduced entrepreneurship

People without savings, credit or secure livelihoods may be unable to start businesses or invest in productive activities. Poverty therefore restricts not only consumption but also economic initiative.

Higher social expenditure pressures

Preventable diseases, inadequate housing and social instability can impose substantial costs on public institutions. Addressing these problems through preventive investment is often more sustainable than responding only after deprivation produces severe consequences.

Thus, poverty is not simply a consequence of underdevelopment; it can also become a cause of continued underdevelopment.

3. Poverty in One Region Affects Prosperity Elsewhere

Globalisation has connected economies through trade, finance, migration, technology and supply chains. These connections mean that deprivation in one part of the world can have consequences elsewhere.

Disruption of global demand

When large populations remain poor, they cannot fully participate in the global market as consumers. This limits potential markets for goods, services and innovations.

Migration pressures

Poverty, conflict and the absence of livelihood opportunities may compel people to migrate. Migration can benefit both origin and destination countries, but forced or irregular migration may create humanitarian challenges and pressure on public services when institutions are unprepared.

Global health risks

Inadequate healthcare systems and poor sanitation can make disease prevention and outbreak control more difficult. Infectious diseases do not respect national borders, making health security a shared responsibility.

Supply-chain vulnerability

Poverty and weak infrastructure can contribute to fragile production systems. Disruptions affecting workers, transport and essential services in one country may influence industries and consumers elsewhere.

Political instability

Severe deprivation, when combined with exclusion, weak institutions and injustice, can contribute to social unrest and instability. Such instability may affect regional security, investment and international cooperation.

The implication is clear: global prosperity cannot remain secure if substantial sections of humanity are excluded from its benefits.

4. Poverty Threatens Social Harmony and Democratic Stability

Economic deprivation can weaken social cohesion when people perceive that opportunities and public resources are distributed unfairly.

Social inequality and resentment

Large disparities in income, education, housing and access to justice can create feelings of exclusion. When deprivation persists alongside visible privilege, public trust may decline.

Exploitation and vulnerability

People without secure livelihoods may be more susceptible to exploitative employment, bonded labour, human trafficking and other forms of abuse.

Crime and insecurity

Poverty does not automatically cause crime, and most poor people are not criminals. However, deprivation combined with exclusion, lack of opportunities and weak institutions can increase vulnerability to certain forms of social instability.

Weak democratic participation

People struggling to secure basic necessities may face barriers to accessing information, participating in public affairs and holding institutions accountable.

Intergenerational disadvantage

Children born into deprived households may remain disadvantaged because their access to education, nutrition and social networks is limited. This undermines equality of opportunity.

Reducing poverty can strengthen social trust and democratic legitimacy by ensuring that people have a meaningful stake in society's progress.

5. Poverty and the Sustainable Development Agenda

The international community recognises poverty eradication as a central condition for sustainable development.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, place the eradication of poverty under **SDG 1: No Poverty**. However, poverty is closely connected to other goals:

- **SDG 2 — Zero Hunger:** Food security and adequate nutrition improve health and productivity.
- **SDG 3 — Good Health and Well-being:** Accessible healthcare prevents illness from pushing families into poverty.
- **SDG 4 — Quality Education:** Education expands opportunities for employment and social mobility.
- **SDG 5 — Gender Equality:** Women's empowerment improves household welfare and economic participation.
- **SDG 6 — Clean Water and Sanitation:** Safe water and sanitation reduce disease and improve dignity.
- **SDG 8 — Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Productive employment provides sustainable income.
- **SDG 10 — Reduced Inequalities:** Fairer opportunities help ensure that growth benefits disadvantaged groups.

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These goals demonstrate that poverty cannot be eliminated through income transfers alone. It requires coordinated progress in health, education, employment, gender equality and institutional development.

6. The Indian Context: Poverty and the Challenge of Inclusive Growth

India has made substantial progress in expanding economic opportunities, improving access to basic services and reducing several dimensions of deprivation. Nevertheless, poverty and vulnerability remain important development concerns.

Agrarian vulnerability

A significant number of rural households depend on agriculture and allied activities. Small landholdings, uncertain rainfall, fluctuating prices and rising input costs can make their incomes unstable.

Informal employment

Many workers lack written contracts, paid leave, pensions and adequate social security. A sudden illness, job loss or economic downturn can push vulnerable households into poverty.

Urban deprivation

Rapid urbanisation has increased demand for affordable housing, sanitation, transport and public services. Informal settlements may face overcrowding, insecure tenure and environmental risks.

Regional disparities

Differences in infrastructure, education, healthcare and employment opportunities affect the ability of states and districts to achieve development outcomes.

Gendered poverty

Women may face unequal access to property, finance, paid employment and decision-making. Unpaid care work can further limit their economic participation.

Social disadvantage

Historically disadvantaged communities may face persistent barriers to education, employment, credit and access to public institutions.

Addressing these challenges requires policies that combine economic growth with equitable access to opportunities and essential services.

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7. Poverty Alleviation Measures in India

India has implemented several programmes aimed at improving livelihoods, strengthening social protection and expanding access to essential services.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

The programme provides a statutory framework for wage employment for eligible rural households and can support income security and the creation of productive community assets.

National Food Security Act and public distribution system

Food entitlements and subsidised foodgrain distribution help protect vulnerable households against hunger and food insecurity.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana

Housing programmes seek to improve access to secure housing, an essential component of dignity and household stability.

Ayushman Bharat and public healthcare initiatives

Health coverage and stronger primary healthcare can reduce barriers to treatment and help protect families from catastrophic medical expenditure.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

Financial inclusion enables people to access formal banking services and supports the delivery of benefits through financial systems.

National Rural Livelihoods Mission

Self-help groups and livelihood support can strengthen women's participation, community institutions and access to economic opportunities.

Skill development initiatives

Vocational education and training can help workers improve their employability and adapt to changing labour-market needs.

The effectiveness of these initiatives depends on implementation quality, adequate funding, awareness, accessibility and accountability. Schemes must reach the most vulnerable without exclusion, delays or unnecessary administrative barriers.

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8. Why Charity Alone Cannot Eliminate Poverty

Charitable assistance can provide immediate relief during emergencies, but persistent poverty requires structural solutions.

First, people need access to productive employment and fair wages rather than dependence on irregular assistance.

Second, education and healthcare must enable individuals to develop their capabilities and participate in economic life.

Third, access to land, credit, markets, technology and infrastructure can improve opportunities for small entrepreneurs and farmers.

Fourth, discrimination and exclusion must be addressed so that disadvantaged people can benefit from development.

Finally, public institutions must ensure that citizens can access their entitlements and seek remedies when services fail.

Social protection remains essential, especially for children, older persons, persons with disabilities and those unable to work. However, sustainable poverty reduction combines protection against hardship with the creation of opportunities for self-reliance.

9. The Way Forward: Building Inclusive and Sustainable Prosperity

A comprehensive poverty-eradication strategy should focus on the following priorities.

Invest in human capital

Quality public education, nutrition, preventive healthcare and skill development are essential for improving long-term productivity and social mobility.

Promote decent employment

Labour-intensive manufacturing, modern agriculture, tourism, healthcare, renewable energy and small enterprises can create diverse employment opportunities.

Strengthen rural development

Irrigation, storage, rural roads, digital connectivity, agricultural processing and market access can improve rural incomes and reduce distress migration.

Support women economically

Equal access to education, credit, property, employment and leadership opportunities can improve household welfare and expand economic participation.

Improve social protection

Accessible pensions, food security, healthcare and employment support can protect households against shocks.

Use technology inclusively

Digital public infrastructure can improve service delivery and financial inclusion, provided that digital literacy, privacy, grievance redressal and alternative access channels are maintained.

Promote international cooperation

Developing countries need fair access to markets, appropriate technology, climate finance and capacity-building support. International institutions and richer countries can contribute by supporting sustainable development without creating unmanageable financial burdens.

Strengthen governance

Transparent administration, decentralisation, effective grievance mechanisms and reliable data can improve the targeting and delivery of poverty-reduction programmes.

The central principle is to ensure that economic growth expands people's capabilities rather than concentrating opportunities in a limited section of society.

Conclusion

Poverty anywhere threatens prosperity everywhere because humanity's economic, social, environmental and security interests are interconnected. Deprivation weakens human potential, restricts economic participation, deepens inequality and can undermine social stability. In a globalised world, the consequences of poverty cannot be confined within national borders.

India's development journey illustrates that poverty reduction requires a combination of economic growth, public investment, social protection, institutional accountability and equal opportunity. Neither growth without inclusion nor welfare without sustainable livelihoods can provide a complete solution.

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The objective should be to create a society in which every individual has access to education, healthcare, decent work and the freedom to pursue a dignified life. At the global level, cooperation must replace indifference, and shared responsibility must guide development.

Ultimately, prosperity is not measured solely by the wealth accumulated by a nation, but also by the opportunities available to its people. A world that allows poverty to persist in one region weakens the foundations of prosperity everywhere. Eradicating poverty is therefore not merely a moral obligation; it is an economic necessity and an investment in humanity's shared future.

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