

Case Studies (2025) Q. 8

8. 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.

In spite 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?

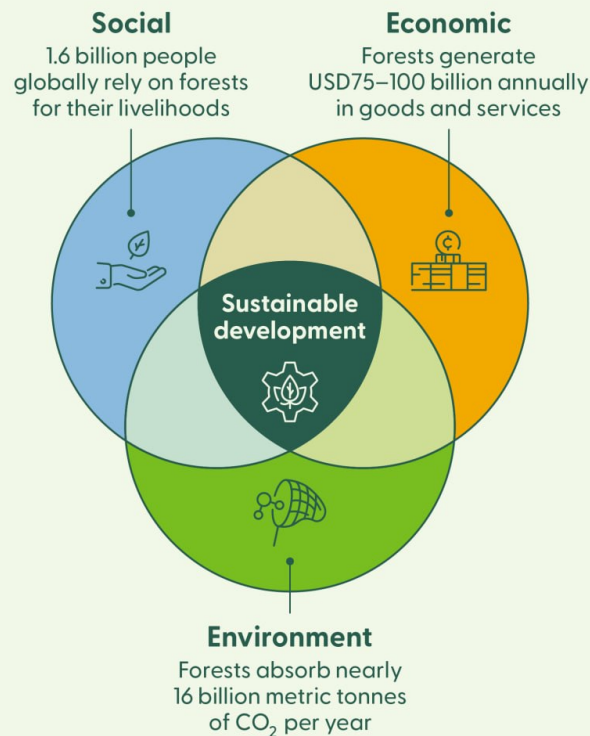
(c) What substantial alternatives or policy interventions can be proposed to ensure that both environmental integrity and human dignity are protected ? (250 words, 20 marks)

Direction: Intro-----Stakeholders + Ethical issues + explain each question ----- Conclusion.

Introduction:

Start with sustainable development & this case presents a classic conflict between human welfare and environmental ethics.

The 3 pillars of sustainable development



Source: WRI, IUCN, Woodwell Climate Research Center

Main Body

Stakeholders Involved

- Respective Government (State & Centre)
- People in that region
- Forest and Wildlife associated there.

Key Ethical Issues involved

- Compassion, Justice, Sustainability, Precaution, Accountability, Transparency, Inter-generational Equity, etc.

(a) Can deforestation be ethically justified?

Yes, it can be ethically justified – under strict conditions	No, it cannot be ethically justified – especially in an ecologically sensitive forest
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• Providing basic human needs - Food, clothing and shelter. • If no reasonable alternative land is available, limited diversion of forest land. • Public interest • Took mitigation works like compensatory afforestation, ecological restoration, etc. • Last-resort approach - non-forest alternatives have genuinely not been available.	• Destroying a forest directly threatens long-term food and water security. • Violation of Intergenerational Equity - The current generation does not "own" these age-old trees and biodiversity. • Affects the rights of tribal communities who rely on this forest for livelihood. • Animals and ecosystems have an intrinsic right to exist. • Using wildlife conflict as an excuse to clear forests blames the victims of habitat fragmentation. • Irreversible ecological loss • Explore the availability of alternatives
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(b) Socio-economic, administrative and ethical challenges

Socio-economic challenges

- Poverty vs conservation
- Livelihood dependence
- Human-wildlife conflict
- Inter-generational inequality
- Unequal distribution of costs

Administrative challenges

- Identifying suitable land.
- Conducting environmental and social impact assessments.
- Coordinating between various departments (Forest, Revenue, Tribal Welfare, Housing, etc)
- Preventing encroachment.
- Ensuring rehabilitation and compensation.

Ethical challenges

- Human dignity vs environmental sustainability
- Present generation vs future generations
- Individual welfare vs common good
- Developmental justice vs ecological justice
- Administrative efficiency vs due process
- Rights of homeless people vs rights of forest-dependent communities
- Utilitarianism vs rights-based ethics

The administrator must avoid both environmental absolutism and developmental absolutism.

(c) Alternatives and policy interventions

- Afforestation measures
- Identify alternative land

- Vertical and compact housing – Multistory building in existing urban spaces.
- Inclusive decision-making – Include tribal communities, forest-dependent households, environmental experts, NGOs, etc.
- Human-wildlife conflict management
- Eco-sensitive housing
- Strengthen livelihood security – like ecotourism facilities.
- Provide compensation (Eco-compensation).

Conclusion:

Give a neutral conclusion.

Mention that we can create human settlements everywhere, but can't create forests and forest-based ecosystems everywhere.

Best ethical approach: Not “Environment vs Development”, but “Development with minimum ecological harm.”

