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Q19

Achieving sustainable growth with emphasis on environmental protection could come into conflict with poor people's needs in a country like India - Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS I · 15 marks · World's Physical Geography

Salient features of world's physical geography.

Core demand of the question

- **State the possible conflict:** green rules versus poor people's land, fuel, forest
- **Comment with Indian examples:** conservation evictions, coal vs livelihood, transition jobs
- Argue for a just path, not a false choice of growth or people

Revision summary

Conservation, coal closure and land for solar can clash with tribal, miner and grazier livelihoods.

The poor also suffer first from dirty air, bad water and heat, so environment is not only a rich concern.

Conflict is sharp when the poor do not write the rule and do not get a new livelihood.

Forest rights, LPG for indoor air, and planned coal-district jobs are examples of easing the clash.

Sustainable growth in India has to be a **just transition**, not green austerity for the already poor.

Introduction

Sustainable growth means using the environment so that **tomorrow's poor are not poorer**. In a country like India the **today's poor** already live on the forest edge, in a coal district, or by a dirty river. A rule that saves a tiger or a carbon target can look, from that hut, like a **second enclosure**. The conflict is real. It is not the whole story.

Body

Where the clash is sharp

A **protected area** can stop a tribal family from collecting tendu or grazing, after a life in that forest. **Forest Rights Act** cases show the fight between a conservation map and a **patta**. **Coal and thermal** belts employ thousands who will not automatically become solar technicians. A **ban on a dirty kiln** can sack the poorest worker first. **Urban air** policy that raises fuel cost hits the scooter before the SUV. **Large solar parks** on commons can fence graziers. If "environment" is only an urban middle-class good, the poor will treat it as an enemy.

Where the poor need the environment

The same poor drink the **poisoned groundwater**, breathe the **brick-kiln air**, and lose the **fish** when the river dies. A heatwave kills labourers on the open site. **Women** walk farther when the forest is gone. So environmental protection is not a luxury good. It is often **their** health. The conflict is about **who pays for the clean-up** and **who decides**.

Comment

India cannot copy a rich country's sequence of "pollute then treat" without drowning its own deltas. It also cannot impose a **green austerity** on people who never sat in the carbon first class. **Just transition**: coal districts need public jobs before pits close. Forest policy needs **community title plus conservation**. **Ujjwala LPG cut indoor smoke without a lecture**. **That is the comment: the clash appears when policy is blunt**. It eases when the poor are **authors of the green rule**, not its targets.

Sustainable growth without the poor is a gated colony with a solar roof. The poor without environmental protection are a clinic full of poisoned blood. India has to hold both sentences.

Flow diagram

Environmental protection -> Can block forest fuel jobs
Environmental protection -> Needed for poor health
Just transition FRA LPG reskilling -> Can block forest fuel jobs
Just transition FRA LPG reskilling -> Needed for poor health

Conclusion

Green rules can hurt poor people when they take forest, job or cheap fuel without a replacement. The same people also need clean air and water. The way through is a **just transition**, not a choice between growth for some and environment for others.

Facts & figures

Forest Rights Act, 2006

A law meant to recognise forest dwellers' land and use rights, often in tension with protected-area management.

Ujjwala

A cooking-gas scheme that cut household smoke, an environmental health gain for poor women.

Just transition

The idea that workers and districts tied to fossil fuels need public support when the energy mix changes.