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Q3(c)

Narrate the various ways in which rapid environmental degradation is posing a serious threat to human security. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss how environmental degradation has become a major source of human insecurity, with examples
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

Human security after UNDP 1994 centres people, not only territorial defence.

Climate, pollution, water stress, and ecosystem loss kill and displace without a foreign army.

Bay of Bengal cyclones, Pakistan 2022 floods, and urban air are South Asian exhibits.

COVID-19 linked ecology, health, and later vaccine rules.

Realist State security remains relevant for war; it is incomplete for this class of threat.

Introduction

Human security, as used after the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994, is safety of people in daily life, not only safety of States from invasion. Environmental degradation now produces that insecurity through water, food, disease, and disaster, including in South Asia.

Body

From State security to human security

- Traditional realism, including Waltz, ranked military threats first. Environmental harm was a domestic or scientific issue.
- Human security treats drought, flood, pollution, and epidemic as security problems because they kill, displace, and break livelihoods.
- **Robert Cox's critical theory helps here:** an order that protects capital and great-power stability can still leave people exposed to climate and toxic risk.

How degradation produces insecurity

- Climate change raises heat, cyclone intensity, and glacier melt, which hit farming and coastal cities.
- Deforestation, mining, and air pollution raise respiratory disease and destroy commons that the poor use.

- Water stress between upstream and downstream users, including India-Pakistan Indus politics and India-China Brahmaputra concern, can feed diplomatic conflict.
- Loss of fisheries and soil pushes migration, which then appears as a border and urban security issue.

Examples

- Cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, including events that have struck Odisha, West Bengal, and Bangladesh, show how a "natural" disaster is worsened by degraded mangroves and dense coastal poverty.
- The 2022 Pakistan floods linked monsoon extremes, river management, and mass displacement.
- Delhi's seasonal air quality is a public-health emergency that no army can treat as a foreign enemy.
- **COVID-19** showed how ecological disturbance and global travel can create a health-security shock; vaccine nationalism then appeared at the WTO, treated in Section B.
- Sahel drought and farmer-herder conflict show the same chain in Africa, which also shapes India's development diplomacy there.

Policy implication

- Mitigation, adaptation, disaster management, and climate finance are security policy in this frame, not extras after defence.

Flow diagram

Environmental degradation -> Health food water
 Health food water -> Displacement conflict
 Displacement conflict -> Human insecurity
 UNDP 1994 1994 -> Human insecurity

Conclusion

Environmental degradation is a major source of human insecurity because it destroys health, food, water, and shelter at scale. Examples from South Asian floods and storms, urban air, and global disease show that State military balance does not measure this threat.

Facts & figures

UNDP Human Development Report 1994

Popularised human security as freedom from fear and want, including environmental safety.

Bay of Bengal cyclones

Repeated coastal disasters in India and Bangladesh where mangrove loss and poverty raise death and displacement.

Pakistan floods 2022

Large-scale inundation and internal displacement tied to extreme monsoon and river systems.

Air pollution

North Indian winter air quality as a chronic health-security failure.

COVID-19

A health shock with environmental and global-mobility dimensions, later fought over at the WTO on vaccines.

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