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Q8(a)

Is it possible to have sustainable development in India? Cite major environmental issues and suggest a few measures to achieve the sustainability

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Challenges of Social Transformation

Challenges of Social Transformation: Crisis of development: displacement, environmental problems and sustainability; Poverty, deprivation and inequalities; Violence against women; Caste conflicts; Ethnic conflicts, communalism, religious revivalism; Illiteracy and disparities in education.

Core demand of the question

- **Answer whether sustainable development is possible in India:** yes, conditionally
- **Cite major issues:** climate, air, water, forests, land, inequality, energy
- Suggest measures tied to SDGs, FRA, **just transition**, cities, agriculture
- **Keep sociological:** who bears the cost

Revision summary

Sustainable development is possible in India only if growth is decoupled from dumping costs on the poor.

Main issues are climate risk, air and water stress, forest loss, land conversion and inequality.

Guha-Gadgil's sociology of ecosystem people versus omnivores still explains who suffers.

Measures include just energy transition, FRA, crop and city reform, and SDG-consistent budgets.

Possibility is a political path, not a technical guarantee.

Introduction

Sustainable development is **possible in India**, not as a green slogan and not as a freeze on the poor. It is possible as a **politically enforced path**: lower carbon and pollution intensity, restored commons, and a fairer share of ecological space. The obstacles are structural-coal-and-car growth, caste-class dumping of waste, and a development state that still treats nature as a free input.

Body

Major issues

- **Climate:** monsoon instability, heat, Himalayan water towers, and coastal risk. **Air:** Indo-Gangetic winter smog as a class-blind killer that still hits outdoor labour first. **Water:** groundwater mining in Green Revolution belts, polluted rivers, and peri-urban tanker mafias. **Forests and biodiversity:** mining and linear projects versus FRA and Gram Sabha. **Land:** conversion of cultivating fields (Q5a) and displacement. **Inequality:** the rich consume; the poor live beside the dump, the mine, and the floodplain. **Energy:** coal lock-in versus renewable jobs that may not go to the same districts.

- **Sociology adds:** environmentalism of the poor (Guha, Gadgil's omnivores vs ecosystem people), urban middle-class beautification that evicts, and caste in sanitation work. Chipko, Narmada, and Niyamgiri are not "green extras"; they are conflicts over who owns the future of a river or a hill.

Measures

A just **energy transition** with retraining in coal belts; **crop diversification** and procurement that does not mandate paddy where aquifers die; **public transport and compact cities** against exclusionary sprawl; genuine **FRA and PESA**; enforcement against industrial effluent; **SDG-aligned** budgets that treat Goal 13 and Goal 10 together; and making the **polluter** not the ragpicker-pay. NEP and skill policy should include green trades without romanticising unpaid Adivasi conservation. Heat action plans, urban forests, and crop insurance are adaptation; they fail if they ignore informal outdoor labour.

- **Possibility is empirical:** India already runs a huge renewable programme and a huge coal programme. Sustainability is the political choice to stop using the poor as the sink. **Yogendra Singh's** modernity without ecological accounting is incomplete; **Desai's** development path must now count carbon and caste together. SDG reporting without Gram Sabha consent is green letterhead, not a lived village commons.

Flow diagram

Climate air water forest inequality -> Political choice

Political choice -> Conditional sustainability

Just transition FRA compact cities -> Conditional sustainability

Conclusion

Yes, India can develop sustainably if ecological costs stop being assigned by caste and class. The issues are climate, air, water, forest and inequality. The measures are **just transition**, commons rights, and cities that do not export harm to the edge.

Facts & figures

SDGs 2015

UN 2030 Agenda; India maps many schemes to the 17 goals, with uneven ecological performance.

FRA 2006

Community and individual forest rights as a sustainability institution, not only a welfare sop.

Just transition

Shifting from coal without abandoning miners and coal districts to informal poverty.

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