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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. 'Common but Differentiated responsibility' is the sustainable way forward to tackle climate change. Examine. (250 words)

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Approach:

- Explain the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities.
- Explain its significance in tackling climate change.
- List challenges in its implementation.

Introduction

Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) is a principle within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that acknowledges different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change. The principle of CBDR is enshrined in Earth Summit 1992, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

- CBDR is based on two elements of responsibilities- one is the common responsibility of all the states to cater to the concerns of environmental protection and sustainable development and the other is of differentiated responsibility enabling the states to act, for environment protection, in their national capacity and as per their national priority.
- The principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' evolved from the notion of the 'common heritage of mankind'.

The principle recognizes historical differences in the contributions of developed and developing States to global environmental problems and differences in their respective economic and technical capacity to tackle these problems.

Body

CBDR is a sustainable way to tackle climate change for the following reasons

- **Economic:** CBDR facilitates the need for developed states to provide technological and financial assistance to the developing states for combating climate and at the same time also saves developing states the cost of engaging in stringent carbon cut regulations, thereby indirectly helping to build their economies in order to close the gap with the developed states.
- **Equity:** It focuses on equity rather than equals, and does not undermine the interest of any country or group of countries, rather focuses on a middle path beneficial to all.
- **Democratic:** Based on CBDR, countries need to develop their own Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) which is framed at Central, State, and grassroots levels. This is a multi-stakeholder exercise which is essentially democratic for its bottom-up approach.

- **Ethical:** CBDR is an expression of general principles of equity in international law. It recognizes the historical correlation between higher levels of development and a greater contribution to the degradation of global environmental resources and enables the sharing of responsibility accordingly.
- **Justice:** CBDR not only focuses on climate change mitigation but also understands the developmental needs of most vulnerable. The greatest impacts of climate change are felt by developing countries, whilst the greatest per capita GHG emissions are concentrated in developed countries. In this context, it is important that the developed nations should also take on the greatest brunt of the performance of climate change mitigation.

Challenges

- The major challenge in the application of the CBDR principle in the present day international climate regime is the difficulty of negotiation or achieving of a consent.
- The developed countries and the Least Developing Countries want the principle to dilute to bring in more commitments and responsibility on the major developing countries; whereas the developing nations advocate following the strict language of the framework convention and the protocol.

Way Forward

Sacrifices must be made to mitigate climate change and the big polluters need to undertake a greater share of responsibility. The 'big' states seem to prioritize economic gains in climate change mitigation while the small states are bent on playing the 'blame game'. However, every stakeholder needs to realize that the CBDR is still a potent tool to achieve collective viable climate change solutions.