



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

Shradha Sharma is a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. She has been working for the past 20 years and has a reputation for being honest, competent, and impartial. Her department has been tasked with granting environmental clearances to a large corporation that wants to build a new factory in a forest area.

Shradha Sharma knows that the project could have serious environmental impacts, including deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. She also knows that the corporation has a history of flouting environmental norms and regulations in other parts of the country.

Shradha Sharma is under intense pressure from the corporation to grant the clearance, as it would create thousands of jobs and bring in large investments. On the other hand, she is also under pressure from environmental activists and NGOs who are urging her to reject the clearance, citing the potential environmental and social costs.

Shradha Sharma is facing dilemma between her duty as a public servant to promote development and create jobs, and her duty to protect the environment and safeguard the interests of the local communities. She has to decide whether to grant or reject the environmental clearance, and her decision will have far-reaching consequences.

Q. What factors should Ms. Sharma consider in making her decision? What are the possible solutions to this ethical dilemma, and what are the trade-offs involved in each solution?

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Approach

- Start your answer by briefly explaining the case.
- Discuss about various stakeholders and ethical issues & dilemmas involved in the case.
- Discuss the decision-making factors, possible solutions and tradeoffs involved in the case.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

The case revolves around Shradha Sharma, a senior civil servant working in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, where she is tasked with granting environment clearance to large corporation for setting up a factory. Further she faces pressure from both corporate and climate activist, thereby creating ethical dilemma for Shradha, whether to accept or reject the proposal.

Body

- **Stakeholders Involved:**
 - Shradha Sharma, senior civil servant
 - The corporation,
 - The local community,

- Environmental activists and NGOs,
- Society at large,
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

▪ **Ethical Issues Involved:**

- **Conflict of interest:** Ms. Sharma is under intense pressure from the corporation to grant the clearance, which raises concerns about conflict of interest.
- **Transparency and fairness:** The decision to grant environmental clearance must be transparent and fair, with an open and participatory decision-making process.
- **Social justice:** The project's potential impact on the local communities raises ethical questions about social justice and the rights of indigenous communities.
- **Integrity and honesty:** Ms. Sharma has a reputation for being honest, competent, and impartial, which raises ethical questions about the importance of integrity and honesty in public service.

▪ **Factors should Ms. Sharma consider in making her decision:**

- **Environmental impact:** Ms. Sharma should evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project, including deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution.
 - She should also consider the long-term ecological consequences of the project, as well as the impact on local communities.
- **Social impact:** She should assess the impact of the project on the local communities, including the displacement of people and disruption of their livelihoods.
- **Corporate track record:** Ms. Sharma should investigate the past record of the corporation regarding environmental norms and regulations in other parts of the country.
 - If the corporation has a history of flouting rules, it may not be a good candidate for a new project in a sensitive ecological zone.
- **Economic benefits:** Ms. Sharma should also consider the potential economic benefits of the project, such as job creation, and the amount of investment that the corporation is willing to bring to the region.
 - She should also consider the impact of the project on the local economy and the broader social and economic development of the region.
- **Legal obligations:** Ms. Sharma must comply with the laws and regulations of her department and the country. She should ensure that the corporation meets all legal requirements before granting environmental clearance.

▪ **Possible solutions to this ethical dilemma include the following:**

- **Grant the Environmental Clearance with Conditions:** Ms. Sharma could grant the environmental clearance but **impose stringent conditions** on the corporation to minimize the environmental impact of the project.
 - The conditions could include compensatory afforestation, pollution control measures, and social welfare measures for the local communities.
 - **Trade-offs:** Trade-offs involved in this situation include the possibility of the corporation not fulfilling the conditions, leading to **long-term environmental damage**.
 - It may also harm the reputation of the department if the project fails to meet environmental norms and regulations.
- **Reject the Environmental Clearance:** Ms. Sharma could reject the environmental clearance, citing the potential environmental and social costs of the project.
 - This decision would protect the environment and safeguard the interests of the local communities.
 - **Trade-offs:** Trade-offs involved in this solution include the **loss of potential economic benefits**, such as job creation and investment.
 - It may also result in legal challenges from the corporation, and it may **negatively impact the image of the department as being anti-development**.
- **Seek Expert Opinion:** Ms. Sharma could seek expert opinion from ecologists, environmentalists, and other **relevant stakeholders** like Environmental activist, NGOs and local community and further leverage environmental impact assessment to make an informed decision.
 - This approach would involve engaging with all stakeholders and **weighing all the options before making a decision**.
 - **Trade-offs:** If the environmental impact assessment report suggest that there is

degradation of environment then the corporation would be encouraged to identify an alternative location for the factory that would not cause significant environmental damage or harm local communities.

- If the environmental impact assessment report grant approval for the project and suggest that there would be no or very little harm to the environment, then the clearance should be given as it would generate employment and increase the economic output of that area.

Conclusion

Ms. Sharma should go with the last solution that is to seek expert opinion by involving all stakeholders and follow proper rules and regulations, while taking everyone in confidence that her decision is in the public interest and aligned with her duty as a public servant to **balance the competing interests of economic development and environmental protection.**

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