



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the reasons and situations that lead to a conflict of interest for a public servant and ways to resolve them. (150 words)

03 Oct, 2019 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Explain the concept of 'conflict of interest'.
- Give reasons and situations that lead to conflict of interest.
- Give measures to be adopted to avoid conflict of interest.

Introduction

Conflict of interest situation arises when there is an actual or apparent conflict between public duty and private interest of a public official. In such a situation, an official's private interests could improperly influence the performance of official duties. Conflict of interest reduces public trust and confidence in the integrity and impartiality of public functionaries.

Body

Public servants face conflict of interest due to the nature of their work:

- **Personal and professional responsibilities:** Public servants may be approached by near and dear ones to take favourable decisions which may put him in conflict with his line of duty.
 - For example: public servant in charge of giving out contracts for a certain project will face a conflict of interest if one of the applicants is a relative or friend.
- **Conflict due to moral values:** A public servant's responsibility may demand him to take decisions which are at conflict with his own values.
 - For example- in land acquisition cases, a civil servant may prefer not to harm scheduled tribes but due to pressure from higher authority he will have to evict them from their lands.
- **Conflicting Organizations:** A public servant may be associated with other organizations like NGOs/ welfare societies with apparently conflicting objectives and this might put him in certain conflict of interest.

Civil servants need to properly handle such conflicting interests and situations. This can be done by following the principles mentioned below:

- **Enhanced transparency and objectivity** in decision making and declaring one's conflict of interest to the concerned authorities to recuse one from any conflicting situations. There is a need **to reduce discretion and codify procedures.**
- **Ensuring high ethical conduct:** As a civil servant, one has to adhere to the standards of civil service values like impartiality, efficiency, integrity and must show exemplary behavior.

Conclusion

Therefore, the moral obligation on public officials requires that the authority entrusted to them be exercised in the public interest. The trust on civil servants should be maintained for efficient and effective governance.

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