



Mains Practice Question

Q. How has India's approach to environmental governance evolved since the Stockholm Conference 1972? Also highlight their impacts on biodiversity conservation. (150 words)

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by highlighting the significance of 1972 Stockholm Conference
- Give Evolution of India's Approach to Environmental Governance post 1972 Stockholm Conference
- Highlight the Impacts of Evolving Governance on Biodiversity Conservation
- Delve into persisting issues,
- Conclude suitably with a way ahead.

Introduction

The **1972 Stockholm Conference** marked a turning point in global environmental governance, shaping India's environmental policies to **prioritise sustainable development and biodiversity conservation**.

- Over the decades, India's environmental governance has progressed from **establishing foundational laws to incorporating international agreements**, community participation, and innovative conservation strategies.

Body

Evolution of India's Approach to Environmental Governance

- **1970s-1980s: Foundation of Environmental Legislation**
 - The **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974** established pollution control boards for managing water quality.
 - The **Forest Conservation Act, 1980** imposed restrictions on deforestation and the diversion of forest land.
- **1990s: Strengthening Legal Frameworks**
 - Following the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** empowered the government to regulate pollution across air, water, and land.
 - The **Wildlife Protection Amendment, 1991** expanded the list of protected species and increased penalties for poaching.
- **2000s: Integration of International Conventions**
 - The **Biodiversity Act, 2002** regulated access to biological resources and promoted benefit-sharing with local communities.
 - The **Forest Rights Act, 2006** recognized the rights of forest-dwelling communities, enabling their participation in conservation efforts.
 - The **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), 2008** included initiatives like the Green India Mission for biodiversity conservation.

- **2010s: Community-Centric Governance**
 - The **National Green Tribunal (NGT), 2010** provided a platform for addressing environmental grievances and enforcing environmental protection laws.
- **2020s: Innovative, Climate-Responsive Strategies**
 - **CAMPA, 2020** directed funds from deforestation permits toward afforestation efforts.
 - The **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem** focused on preserving the biodiversity of the Himalayan region.
 - The **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023** expands the scope of forest conservation, introduces exemptions for development and security projects, and **empowers local communities through ecotourism and wildlife initiatives.**

Impacts of Evolving Governance on Biodiversity Conservation:

- **Expansion of Protected Areas and Biodiversity Hotspots:** India has expanded its protected areas and has **998 Protected Areas**, which constitutes **5.28% of the country's total geographical area.**
 - **Example:** The establishment of the **Western Ghats as a UNESCO World Heritage Site** has enhanced efforts to conserve endemic species.
- **Successful Species Conservation Programs** India's flagship conservation programs have helped revive the populations of endangered species like tigers, elephants, and rhinoceroses.
 - **Example: Project Tiger**, initiated in 1973, led to a rise in the tiger population and India is now home to more than **70% of the world's wild tigers.**
- **Promoting Traditional Knowledge and Community Conservation** Biodiversity governance has increasingly integrated traditional knowledge and community participation in conservation practices.
 - **Example:** The **Nagoya Protocol** commitments and **People's Biodiversity Registers** empower local communities to document and protect indigenous biodiversity, supporting the sustainable use of medicinal plants and local flora.
- **Climate-Resilient Biodiversity Strategies:** Integrating climate concerns into biodiversity conservation has enabled India to address the ecological impacts of climate change.
 - **Example:** The **National Mission on Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystems** has introduced adaptive conservation techniques for high-altitude species impacted by rising temperatures.
- **Improved Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Mechanisms:** Through the National Green Tribunal, environmental compliance has improved, enabling better protection of ecosystems.
 - **Example:** NGT interventions led to enhanced protection of the **Aravalli Range in Rajasthan**, home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, by halting illegal mining activities.

However, despite these advancements, issues persist like:

- Recent **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023** allows exemptions for infrastructure projects, threatening biodiversity.
- **Biodiversity (Amendment) Act, 2021** removes the direct role of local communities in determining benefit sharing provisions and weakens local governance in conservation.
- Projects like the **Char Dham Highway** and mining in **Hasdeo Aranya** have led to habitat loss and species endangerment.

Conclusion

India's environmental governance has **evolved significantly since the Stockholm Conference**. This evolution has positively impacted biodiversity conservation. However, to ensure long-term ecological sustainability, India must continue **adapting its policies to meet emerging environmental challenges, particularly those posed by climate change and habitat loss.**

