



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

Vikram is an environmental officer working with a state government's department responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations in the construction and industrial sectors. Recently, a large real estate company has proposed a new residential complex on the outskirts of the city, and Vikram's department is tasked with evaluating the environmental impact of the project. The company has submitted the required Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, which states that the construction will have minimal impact on the local environment.

While reviewing the report, Vikram notices several discrepancies and omissions. Key details about the impact on local wildlife, soil quality, and water sources have either been underrepresented or completely ignored in the report. Vikram's initial analysis suggests that the construction could have significant adverse effects on the local ecosystem, but the developers have provided a large donation to a local charity that Vikram's department is associated with. The charity has funded several environmental initiatives in the past, and Vikram is aware that this donation will enhance the department's reputation and attract further funding.

Furthermore, Vikram's superior, the head of the department, has publicly praised the development as a much-needed project for the city's growth and has hinted that the real estate company might receive expedited approval if the environmental report is favorable.

Vikram feels torn between his duty to uphold environmental regulations, his concern about the long-term ecological consequences, and the pressure to support the development in exchange for future funding opportunities for his department.

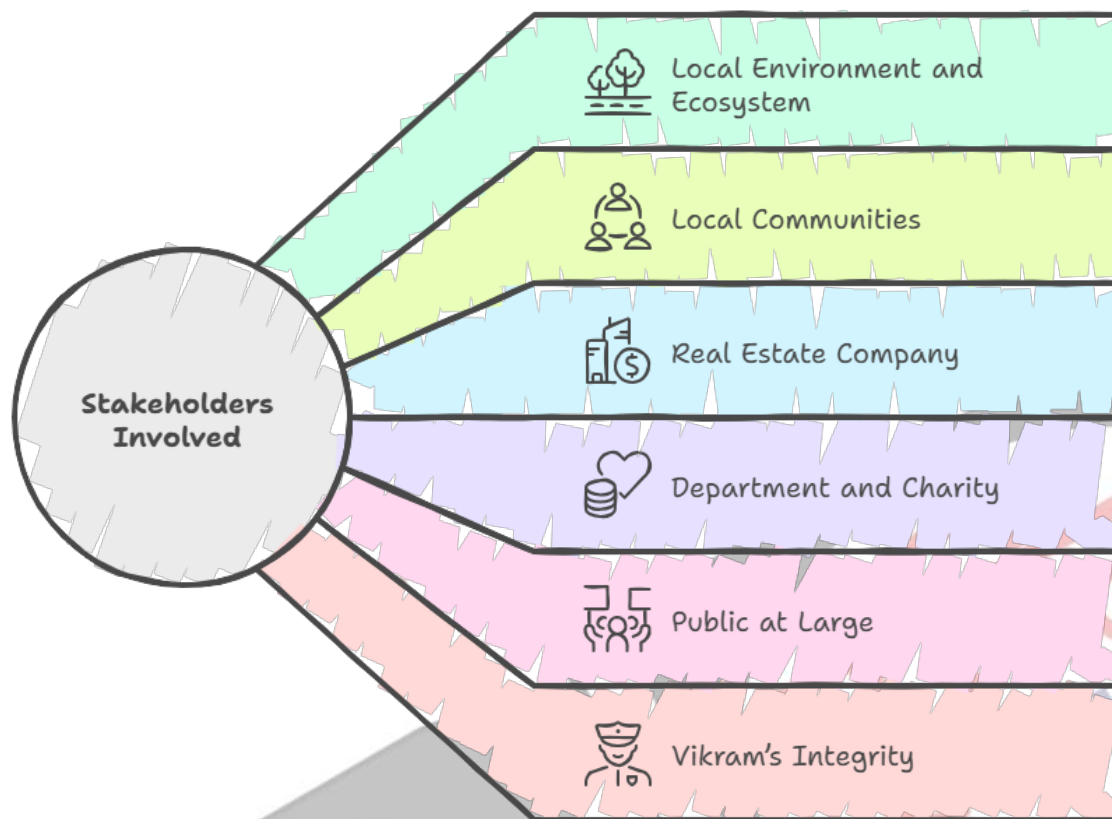
Questions:

- a) What should Vikram's course of action be in this situation to ensure the integrity of the environmental review process?
- b) How can Vikram justify his decision if the real estate company pressures him to approve the report despite the discrepancies?
- c) How do personal interests and external pressures compromise environmental ethics in this case, and what measures can be taken to prevent such conflicts in future projects?

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Introduction:

Vikram, as an environmental officer, faces a classic ethical dilemma involving a conflict between **professional duty and external pressures**—both institutional and personal. His decisions must balance **ecological sustainability, administrative integrity, and public interest** while maintaining **ethical standards** of governance.



a) What should Vikram's course of action be in this situation to ensure the integrity of the environmental review process?

- **Detailed Re-evaluation of EIA Report:** Vikram should prepare a **factual and evidence-based assessment** pointing out the discrepancies.
 - **Use scientific data, satellite imagery,** or expert consultation to substantiate environmental concerns.
- **Document Everything Objectively:** Maintain a detailed record of observations and communications to avoid personal liability.
 - This ensures accountability and protects against arbitrary decisions.
- **Raise Concerns Internally and Professionally:** Communicate findings to the **department head** through an internal report.
 - Present the case as a matter of **public interest and long-term ecological damage**, not personal opinion.
 - Avoid emotional or accusatory language; stay within **official and ethical decorum**.
- **Suggest Mitigation Measures and Alternatives:** Recommend that the project be approved **only with stringent environmental safeguards**.
 - Propose a **revised EIA**, additional environmental audits, or site-specific **mitigation plans** (like buffer zones, water conservation strategies).
 - This aligns with **sustainable development** rather than outright obstruction or blind approval.
- **Leverage Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** Use provisions under the **Environmental Protection Act, EIA Notification (2006)**, or Biodiversity Act to justify scrutiny.
 - If internal redressal fails, consider involving an independent appraisal committee or regulatory authority (e.g., State Environment Impact Assessment Authority).

- **Maintain Ethical Conduct Regarding the Donation:** Recommend **clear separation** of the donation from regulatory evaluation.
 - Donations to a charity, while beneficial, must not influence statutory duties. Transparency in funding is essential to avoid conflicts of interest.
- **Escalate Responsibly, if Needed:** If pressure becomes unethical or the process compromised, consider **whistleblower channels**, but only after exhausting internal mechanisms.

b) How can Vikram justify his decision if the real estate company pressures him to approve the report despite the discrepancies?

When facing pressure from vested interests like the real estate company, Vikram must justify his stand using a blend of legal reasoning, ethical duty, and public interest. His justification must be professional, fact-based, and rooted in the principles of good governance and sustainable development.

- **Legal and Regulatory Justification**
 - **Statutory Duty:** Vikram can cite his **mandate under the Environmental Protection Act, 1986** and the **EIA Notification, 2006**, which require accurate and comprehensive environmental assessment.
 - **Due Process:** The presence of discrepancies makes the EIA report non-compliant. Any approval under such conditions would be legally questionable.
 - **Public Accountability:** Government officers are liable for decisions taken in disregard of rules; approval without due diligence may attract **legal or disciplinary action**.
- **Ethical and Professional Justification**
 - **Integrity and Impartiality:** Vikram must explain that his role is to be an impartial evaluator, not an enabler of flawed assessments.
 - **Public Trust:** Justifying his stand as one that upholds the **citizens' right to a clean and safe environment**, as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution.
 - **Conflict of Interest:** Any decision influenced by donations or pressure would compromise **ethical standards** and public trust in governance.
- **Evidence-Based Explanation**
 - Present **documented discrepancies** (e.g., missing data on water sources, wildlife impact) to the company.
 - Offer a **clear, technical rationale** on why the report cannot be approved in its current form.
 - Emphasize that correction and resubmission are possible and welcome.
- **Constructive Alternative**
 - Reassure the company that this is **not a rejection of the project**, but a call for a more **responsible and law-compliant approach**.
 - Suggest steps like commissioning a **revised EIA** or incorporating environmental safeguards.
 - Highlight that proper compliance will speed up later approvals and reduce litigation risks.

c) How do personal interests and external pressures compromise environmental ethics in this case, and what measures can be taken to prevent such conflicts in future projects?

Personal Interests and External Pressures Compromising Environmental Ethics:

- **Violation of Stewardship Responsibility:** According to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, humans are "members of the land community, not its conquerors."
 - Vikram's potential complicity in overlooking environmental harm contradicts this ethical responsibility of stewardship over nature.
- **Subversion of the Precautionary Principle:** Despite clear **risks to biodiversity and water sources**, pressure to expedite approvals ignores the **precautionary principle**, which urges action even in the absence of full scientific certainty to prevent irreversible harm.
- **Conflict of Interest and Loss of Objectivity:** Personal gain through charity funding or departmental image enhancement may bias decision-making, violating utilitarian ethics by prioritizing short-term gains over **long-term public welfare**.
- **Disregard for Intergenerational Equity:** Greed-driven development compromises the right of future generations to a safe and stable environment, violating the principle of **intergenerational**

equity, which stresses fairness across time.

- **Anthropocentric Thinking Over Ecocentric Ethics:** External pressures encourage anthropocentrism (human-centered development), ignoring deep ecology principles that advocate for the intrinsic value of all life forms, not just human utility.

Measures to Prevent Such Conflicts in Future Projects

- **Institutional Mechanisms for Accountability: Independent EIA Review Boards** with third-party experts can reduce conflict of interest.
 - Mandatory public disclosure of donations and affiliations to prevent undue corporate influence.
- **Ethical Capacity Building:** Incorporate environmental ethics and moral reasoning (**e.g., Leopold's Land Ethic, Peter Singer's Animal Rights**) in civil service training to foster values of integrity, transparency, and ecological responsibility.
- **Legal and Regulatory Reforms:** Strengthen penalties under the **Polluter Pays Principle** for willful data omissions.
 - Enforce strict compliance under the **Environmental Protection Act, 1986** and **EIA 2006 Guidelines**.
- **Public Participation and Transparency:** Public hearings and community involvement in project review ensure democratic oversight.
 - **Ecofeminist insights** remind us to consider how environmental degradation disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations (**e.g., water-scarce women-led communities**)
- **Promote Sustainable Development:** Encourage need-based development (e.g., renewable energy, sustainable urbanization) over greed-driven exploitation.
 - Implement **climate-sensitive urban planning**, balancing ecological conservation with developmental goals.

Conclusion:

Guided by the philosophy of **Deep Ecology**, Vikram must recognize that **nature is not merely a resource to be managed, but a living system with intrinsic value**, independent of human utility. Upholding environmental ethics, in this sense, is not just a professional responsibility but a moral imperative—to act in alignment with the ecological whole and preserve the balance between human development and nature's right to thrive.