

## **Growth and Sustainability - Kerala, Uttarakhand Disasters**

### **What is the issue?**

The floods and disaster in Kerala and Uttarakhand highlight a common cause that is to do with the development models adopted.

### **What caused the recent disasters?**

- Climate change is, undoubtedly, at the root of the rain-wreaked havoc that Kerala and Uttarakhand are seeing.
- Anthropogenic climate change is a key reason for such extreme weather events.
- However, the devastation in Kerala and Uttarakhand cannot wholly be attributed to climate change alone.
- The development models adopted in the states have certainly exacerbated the risks from climate change.

### **What is the case with Kerala?**

**Madhav Gadgil report** (2011) - Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) - Key Recommendations

- The Gadgil Committee divided the Western Ghats into 3 ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ).
- These are the highest (ESZ1), high (ESZ2) and moderate sensitivity (ESZ3) zones. This is in addition to the Protected Areas managed under acts such as the Wildlife Protection Act.
- It suggested that ESZ1 and ESZ2 would be largely 'no-gone' zones.
- So mining, polluting industries as well as large-scale development activities, including new railway lines are restricted in these.
- It also objected to new dams, thermal power stations or massive windmill farms or new townships in ESZ1.
- The panel however recommended giving larger say for local communities and gram sabhas on matters relating to the ecology of these regions.
- It also called for -
  1. stricter regulation on tourism
  2. phasing out of plastics and chemical fertilisers
  3. a ban on diversion of forest land into non-forest applications
  4. a ban on conversion of public lands into private lands

### **Kasturirangan committee**

Rejecting the Gadgil report, the government appointed a new committee under the chairmanship of K Kasturirangan to "examine" the WGEEP report.

- The Kasturirangan committee did away with the graded approach in terms of ecological

sensitivity.

- It instead divided the Western Ghats into 'cultural lands' (where there are currently human settlements) and 'natural lands'.
- It recommended declaring cultural lands into ecologically sensitive area (ESA). This spanned around 60,000 sq-km or 37% of the total area.
- It had proposed an area of 13,000 sq km as ESA. But under pressure from the Kerala government, the notified area was brought down to less than 10,000 sq km.

## Implications

- Nearly 40% of the granite quarries in Kerala in 2014-15 were located in ecologically sensitive areas.
- Significantly, a quarter of them were in the Gadgil committee-earmarked extremely sensitive ESZ1.
- The present disaster could not have been completely avoided, but the severity could have significantly been reduced, if not for the rejection of WGEEP's proposed zoning.

## What is the case with Uttarakhand?

- Development and other economic activity in the region without much thought given to vulnerabilities of ecology and topography.
- Increase in hydel power projects, encroachment of streams, glaciers, etc, for construction, roads, etc.
- The Lakhwar Multipurpose dam that had been shelved in 1992 recently received a key approval from the Centre, despite objections from experts.
- The Center has also made it easier for work to proceed in seven hydel power projects in Uttarakhand, notwithstanding criticism from experts.

The development imperative vis-a-vis population pressures cannot be wished away, but certainly can be balanced against needs of ecology and geography.

## Reference:

1. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/growth-sustainability-kerala-uttarakhand-disasters-testimony-of-failure-to-do-this/2353497/>
2. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/kerala-floods-man-made-or-natures-fury/article24762090.ece>