

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**Restoring Earth's Right to
'Good Health'**

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RESTORING EARTH'S RIGHT TO 'GOOD HEALTH'

In Context

- The European Court of Human Rights found that Switzerland's actions to curb emissions were inadequate and had failed to protect women against the impacts of climate change.

Global Status

- The latest State of the **Global Climate Report** by the **World Meteorological Organization** reveals that most climate change indicators reached record levels in 2023.
 - ♦ It confirmed 2023 to be the hottest year since it started recording global temperatures.
 - ♦ Records were also broken for ocean heat, sea level rise, Antarctic Sea ice loss and glacier retreat.
- The **health of the planet** is under **extreme stress, impacting people's right to live a healthy life.**
 - ♦ **Some examples include:** Rising global temperatures are increasing water shortages and land degradation, including soil erosion, vegetation loss, wildfires, and permafrost, affecting people's rights to life, health, food, water and adequate standard of living, among other rights. .
- **Air pollution** is considered one of the biggest environmental threats to health resulting in an estimated seven million premature deaths every year in violation of the rights to health and life
- **Impact on vulnerable sections:** Environmental degradation disproportionately impacts persons, groups and peoples already in vulnerable situations.
 - ♦ **Women and girls:** environmental degradation reinforces pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination on issues such as gender-based violence, and rights of access and tenure over land and natural resources.
 - ♦ **Children** experience the effects of environmental degradation more intensely due to food and water shortages, and transmission of diseases.-
 - ♦ **Indigenous Peoples** who often face grave and even life-threatening risks for defending the traditional lands, resources and territories upon which their communities depend for survival, livelihoods and religious and customary practices

Do you know ?

- A report by the London School of Economics and Political Science analysed climate change framework laws across 60 countries, concluding that they have helped establish the strategic direction for national policies that go beyond meeting targets under global environmental conventions.
 - ♦ This includes countries from both the Global North such as Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Finland and South Korea, as well as the Global South such as South Africa and the Philippines.
- These laws have resulted in increased public sector staffing and capacity to deliver climate action, including a significant expansion in public sector resourcing.
- The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution recognizing that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right.

Scenario In India

- As one of the world's fastest growing economies, India has made rapid strides in decoupling emissions from economic growth.
- It has already achieved two of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets, viz. reducing the emissions intensity of its **GDP by 33% to 35% from 2005** level, and **achieving 40% cumulative electric power** installed capacity from non-fossil fuel sources, well ahead of the target year of 2030.

Challenges and Concerns

- The country remains highly vulnerable to climate change.
- More than 80% of its population lives in districts that are at risk of climate-induced disasters.

- Rising temperatures and natural disasters are manifesting into major crises affecting livelihoods and food security, and exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities.

Latest Developments

- **SDGs and localisation model:** India's localisation model for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has successfully integrated the SDGs into local-level planning through multi-tiered and multi-stakeholder processes.
 - ♦ States and territories take ownership by creating their own SDG road maps and monitoring systems, and friendly competition among them spurs innovation and faster progress.
 - ♦ The model also encourages broader participation from businesses, non-governmental organisations, and citizens.
- **One Health initiative:** It has brought together 13 Ministries and departments in the domains of health, environment, science and technology for disease control, research, and pandemic preparedness.
- **The Supreme Court of India** ruled that people have a **right 'to be free from the adverse impacts of climate change'**, citing **Articles 14** (equality before law and the equal protection of laws) and **21 (right to life and personal liberty)** of the Indian Constitution as the sources.
 - ♦ The observation provides several points of departure with the potential to accelerate climate action both on the demand and supply side —
 - on the **demand side**, by invoking a more rights-based approach to climate action, and
 - **on the supply side**, by encouraging integrated approaches and action between government, private sector and civil society.
- **International Mother Earth Day:** Every year since 2009, April 22 is commemorated as International Mother Earth Day.
 - ♦ The idea of 'Mother' Earth has been embedded in India's culture and traditions for centuries, regarding nature as a 'living' entity rather than just a resource.
- In 2022, the **Madras High Court in Tamil Nadu**, while hearing a case on changing the classification of forest land, **declared 'Mother Nature' a 'living being'**, granting it the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities, in order to preserve and conserve it.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Human rights and the environment are intertwined; human rights cannot be enjoyed without a safe, clean and healthy environment; and sustainable environmental governance cannot exist without the establishment of and respect for human rights.
- As human rights and the environment are interdependent, a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is necessary for the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, such as the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation and development, among others.
- At the same time, the enjoyment of all human rights, including the rights to information, participation and access to justice, is of great importance to the protection of the environment
- There is a need for adoption of an overarching regulation on climate change which takes forward the policy-driven approach of climate action in India couched in the National and State Action Plans on Climate Change.
- There is a need to expand One Health approach to the private sector on integrating a rights-based approach to climate action in their core operations.

DAILY MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

[Q] How is the climate crisis increasingly becoming a human rights crisis? What is required to make the right to a healthy environment a reality for all.

