

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 20 marks

Examine the main problems and challenges involved in looking after environmental concerns in world politics.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intra routes

R1 environment once peripheral → now the archetypal borderless global issue → **Buzan**: central to the security agenda

R2 a borderless problem handled through a state system → each government answers to national interest first → managing it is structurally hard

Body flow

Hardin's tragedy of the commons → responsibility diffused, states free-ride → no consensus across development levels → short-term gain vs long-term sustainability → North-South divide → **Dauvergne**: improve the environment vs reform an unfair system → **Guha**: empty-stomach environmentalism, emissions without representation → historical responsibility + CBDR

Counter-view

agreements are reached and institutions *do* exist (cooperation not impossible) → but weak enforcement, diluted responsibility (**CSE**: Paris, Katowice finance) and US withdrawal (**Ban Ki-moon**) blunt them

Conclusion routes

R1 obstacles are political, not technical → reconciling national interest with a shared planet

R2 IPCC: 1.5°C budget exhausted by 2030 even under Paris → urgency demands a common-good, differentiated approach

Environmental issues once sat on the periphery of world politics. Today the environmental crisis is the archetypal global issue, its effects crossing every border & touching the whole planet.

Barry Buzan places the environment at the centre of the security agenda. But the difficulty of managing it is structural. A borderless problem must be handled through a state system in which each government answers to its own interest.

This mismatch is criticised by Garrett Hardin's "tragedy of the commons." Shared resources i.e. the atmosphere, the oceans are degraded because responsibility is diffused and no single state bears the cost of restraint & has reason to free-ride. Consensus is therefore hard to build among states at different levels of development, where short-term economic gain competes with long-term sustainability.

There is the North-South divide. According to Dauvergne, the North treats the goal as improving the global environment, while the South treats the problem as an unfair global system. Ramachandra Guha calls the southern stance "empty stomach environmentalism" and the Global South a "victim of emissions without representation".

Even where agreement is reached, weak enforcement undermines it. Ban Ki-moon argues that the US's withdrawal makes finance harder to raise, given that it is the second-largest polluter.

The obstacles are therefore political, not technical. With the IPCC finding the 1.5°C carbon budget exhausted by 2030 under Paris, a common-good, differentiated approach is the only realistic path.