




Be Mains Ready

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Q. Disasters are not an 'act of God' alone, but are also determined by human interventions.
Comment. (250 Words)

26 Nov 2021 | GS Paper 3 | Disaster Management

Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Introduce by writing disaster as natural phenomena and an 'act of God'.
- Discuss how human interventions with nature are causing or accentuating the intensity of disasters.
- Give a way forward.
- Conclude suitably.

Answer

A disaster is a sudden, calamitous event that seriously disrupts the functioning of a community or society and causes human, material, and economic or environmental losses that exceed the community's or society's ability to cope using its own resources. Disasters such as earthquakes, Cyclones, Flood, Drought are natural and an act of God.

However, concluding from events such as Chamoli Flash Floods 2021 and flood in Kedarnath in 2013, it wasn't actually the god but human interventions with the natural environment that led to severe losses.

Disaster not only an act of God but human induced

- **Environmental degradation:** Removal of trees and forest cover from a watershed area have caused soil erosion, expansion of flood plain area in upper and middle course of rivers and groundwater depletion.
- **Developmental process:** Exploitation of land use, development of infrastructure, rapid urbanization and technological development have caused increasing pressure over the natural resources.
- **Political issues:** War, nuclear power aspirations, fight between countries to become super power and conquering land, sea and skies. These have resulted into a wide range of disaster events such as Hiroshima nuclear explosion, Syrian civil war, growing militarisation of oceans and outer space.
- **Industrialization:** This has resulted in warming of earth and frequency of extreme weather events has also increased.

- **No Stringent Policies:** Studies have flagged ice loss across the Himalayas has been rapidly melting thus increasing the dangers to densely populated catchments, but any hard and fast policy response has been lacking.
- **Lack of Proper Training Programs:** There were no awareness programs or training provided to the people about disaster management by the government in case of the recent Uttarakhand floods.
- **Ignorance by Government:** A 2012 expert group appointed by the government had recommended against the construction of dams in the Alaknanda-Bhagirathi basin, including on the Rishiganga and in “the periglacial zone,” but the recommendations were ignored.
 - Similarly, ignorance of the Kerala government in terms of regulation of mining, quarrying and dam construction in ecologically sensitive places, led to massive floods and landslides in 2018 and 2019.
- **Ineffective Satellite Monitoring:** Despite possessing remarkable satellite capabilities, India still hasn’t been able to use such imagery effectively for advance warning.

Way Forward

- **Budgetary Allocation:** A vital step should be explicitly including policies for climate mitigation in the government budget, along with energy, roads, health and education.
 - Specifically, growth targets should include timelines for switching to cleaner energy.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Even if major economies speed up climate mitigation, such catastrophes will become more frequent due to the accumulated carbon emissions in the atmosphere. Climate adaptation is the way forward here.
 - India’s Central and State governments must increase allocations for risk reduction, such as agricultural innovations to withstand droughts.
 - In case of fire prone areas, an area can be divided into pockets so as to prevent any massive spread of fire.
- **Detailed Studies:** Detailed studies should be conducted to understand which of the regions are prone to disasters.
 - Such research should feed into Environmental Impact Assessment reports and guide decisions on developmental projects.
- **Setting up Early Warning Systems:** This has to be coupled with plans to quickly evacuate local communities to safer regions.
 - Any disaster events do not occur all of a sudden; there are ample indications which, if monitored earlier, can help save a significant number of lives and other damages.

Disasters can not be stopped but well-preparedness and strong climate change mitigation policies can definitely help prevent a huge amount of loss.