



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discussing the main challenges in upholding highest ethical standards in civil services, suggest effective measures to overcome such challenges.

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Approach

- Introduce by explaining the importance of upholding highest ethical standards in civil services.
- Discuss the areas of concern for in maintaining such ethical standards by civil servants.
- Suggest effective measures to overcome such challenges.

Introduction

Civil servants are the pivot between state and people. They are accountable to both the political executive and the citizen. Upholding the highest ethical standard is paramount for civil servants because the state machinery rests upon their shoulders; they have to maintain ideals and lead by example to sustain the system's trust.

Civil service is the steel frame on which the edifice of public administration is based upon. If this steel frame is corroded through corruption and low moral standards, the state machinery implementing policies and welfare measures and addressing grievances will collapse.

Body

Challenges For Civil Servants In Maintaining High Ethical Standards

- **Balancing Individual obligations and organisations' obligations:** Conflict between an individual's privately held convictions and obligations as determined by her organisation.
- **Dealing with conflict of opinions:** It is challenging when a public servant to resolve stark conflicts between what he/she is required (by her senior officials) to do and what he/she really thinks is right.
- **Dilemmas in Information sharing:** Dealing with situations when a public servant has to decide whether to keep information secret that might be embarrassing to the government of the day or reveal it in the public interest.
- **Balancing service obligation and accountability towards the public:** It's challenging when a public servant finds certain indications of deliberate inefficiency, protection of incompetence, extravagant and unreasonable use of public funds, deployment of government equipment and machinery for personal use, subjective criteria used in recruitment or in the award of government grants or licenses.
- **Resolving conflict in conscience and prevailing political ideology:** It is challenging to decide to what extent should a public servant support the political ideology practised by the current government.
- **Balancing private life and public life:** When a person accepts public service employment, it's challenging to determine how much should he/she subordinate or abdicate his/her claims to private life, property and values.

Measures to uphold high ethical standards among civil servants:

- A dedicated unit to oversee violations of the Code of Ethics & Code of conduct by government officials be set up both at the state and centre level.
- Mandatory declaration of assets and liabilities of government employees, accompanied by proper auditing.
- Establishment of Independent Anti-Corruption Agency.
- Citizens Advisory Boards to incorporate ideas of the common public welfare among civil servants.
- Mandatory Social Audit of all government programs, for example, Meghalaya has passed a law for social audit of government programs.
- An important requisite for ensuring probity in governance is the absence of corruption. The other requirements are effective laws, rules and regulations governing every aspect of public life and, more important, effective and fair implementation of those laws, etc.
- Apart from laws and policies, the government should also focus on bringing behavioural change in government employees so that they can easily empathise with the problem of masses.
- Adopting Citizen Charters to increase the ethical standards by ensuring compulsory organisational effectiveness and performance. Making commitments public could ensure adherence to ethicalities of service delivery standards.

Conclusion

Thus, to have high ethical standards, a public servant needs to develop an inner sense of professional responsibility. A strong emphasis should be laid on values like empathy, compassion, integrity and will to serve humanity at large. Encouraging a sense of responsibility and focusing on the greater good for larger interest can guide the actions of a public servant and can resolve most of the challenges in the way of carrying out its ethical obligations.