



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

Suman was a young, idealistic development officer in a district panchayat. After joining the District, she studied about its social and economic situation. She consulted various plan documents and looked at the social and economic parameters of the district. She found that the district is relatively better off than other districts in terms of irrigation, crop diversification and industry. But its social indicators were poor with high infant mortality rate, high maternal mortality rate and low literacy percentage among women. Based on his analysis, Suman thought that large investments in the social sector will be necessary in order to tackle these problems.

The panchayat was an elected body. It has decided to spend 40% of its budget on minor irrigation. Suman felt that the large allocation to minor irrigation will benefit land owning farmers and starve other social programmes.

What are the ethical issues involved in the case. What are the options available to her and which would be the most appropriate step that can be taken.

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Introduction

The given case indicates the misallocation or inefficient utilisation of the funds by the district panchayat. The collective efforts need to be done by all the stakeholders in order to bring judicious use of the funds by the panchayat.

Body

Ethical dilemma present in the case:

- In this case, the development officer Suman is facing an ethical dilemma between her **professional duty (following the orders of the elected representative)** and using her wisdom to **disobey the orders for the greater good**.
- **Social vs Economic development:** The **social development** is lagging the **economic development** in the district. More funds are needed to be utilised more for social development but the funds are allocated to the already developed/better off sector(irrigation).

Options available to Suman

- She should secretly divert money to social welfare programmes under some pretext.
- She should follow the Panchayat's decision.
- She should discuss matters with elected officials of the Panchayat and try to convince them of the need to accord greater priority to the social sector.
- She should reconcile herself to the economic inequalities and the power structure of the rural society.

Evaluation of the Options

- Suman **should not adopt improper means** in trying to achieve higher spending on the social sector. In fact, she should not give any wrong or improper instructions to her subordinates.
 - She will be **violating the principles of truthfulness and transparency.**
 - Suman is under an obligation to **follow the public policy decision** taken by the elected body.
 - She can try to persuade them to his view. But she should not undermine their policy.
- Suman will be **doing the right thing.** But this is not enough in this case. Since she has studied the development problems of the district in detail, she should explain the position at length to non-officials in the panchayat.
 - Young officers have to cultivate skills of **communication, persuasion and negotiation.** They should not give up on things without trying.
- The third option gives the **correct line of action.** Here, Suman will be trying to persuade the non-officials of the need to give higher priority to social sector schemes.
 - She should not assume, even before trying, that the non-officials will not take her advice.
 - She would succeed partially even if they reduce some outlay on irrigation and divert it to education or health.
 - In a democratic setup, one has to rely on discussions and negotiation.
 - In any case, under the Panchayat system, as decision-making powers on policy matters rest with non-officials, she should not, as a disciplined officer, defy them in this matter.
- The last option is a form of **passive or fatalistic behaviour.** Young officers should avoid such attitudes since they will undermine their initiative in other areas where they can act.

Conclusion

Thus, the most appropriate option for Suman will be the third one. In this way she would be maintaining her professional duty as well as the issue of misallocation of funds be solved. She should also remember that it is a part of her duty to bring in notice of the leaders if any issues come up anytime.

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