



Case Study - 22: Development vs Environmental and Human Rights

You are the Managing Director of Metro Rail Corporation (MRC) of a metropolitan city and you have received orders and funding for construction of the metro track and a parking space in a densely forested area of the city with houses of few underprivileged families as well in it.

For the construction, the forest has to be cleared and the families have to be moved to some other place. The locals have started a protest after knowing about the order. They are highly raged about cutting down thousands of trees and the affected families have also joined them because the forest holds emotional value for them.

On the other hand, the minister who directly controls the MRC is pressuring you to start the felling process as soon as possible. You know that going against his orders will have serious repercussions.

(a) What are the ethical issues involved and the options available to you in such a situation?

(b) Also, suggest a course of action you would like to follow. (250 words)

Solution

Being the Managing Director of the Metro Rail Corporation, my foremost duty is to maintain the sustainability of project along with fulfilling my constitutional and ethical duty towards the environment and the underprivileged.

As per **Gandhian philosophy**, the public servants are the trustees of natural resources, therefore the development process should be inclusive of the voice of all without compromising on future developmental needs.

Stakeholders Involved

- Government
- Underprivileged people living in the forest area
- Members of Civil Society protesting against environmental damage
- Metro Rail Corporation
- Future commuters

The ethical issues involved

- **Development vs Environment:** As the population in cities is increasing, infrastructural development is essential to accommodate the growing demand, but environmental protection is a necessity for the sustainability of life which cannot be neglected at any cost.
- **Rights of Underprivileged:** Development cannot be done at the cost of marginalised section and their rights should be safeguarded at any cost. So, evicting people' from their homes is not **just treatment**.

The various options available are

- **Starting the felling of trees and eviction process as per the orders:** This option allows me to fulfil my duty of following the administrative orders. But it violates the universal virtue by exploiting nature and legal rights of underprivileged.
- **Stop the felling of trees and eviction orders:** It may fulfil my duty towards the environment and will reflect my ethical concerns towards the marginalized people. However, I may face punitive actions for not discharging the official orders as the minister is personally involved in the case.
- **Forming a committee to resolve the issue:** It will provide an opportunity to incorporate the views of different stakeholders and arrive at a peaceful solution. It will make the development process more **inclusive**.

In such circumstances, it would be necessary to ensure the **sustainability of the project** so that needs and rights are not compromised on either side.

Firstly, proper **two-way communication** should be established between the protestors and authorities so that both sides get a due chance to present their views.

Secondly, a proper plan for **rehabilitation of underprivileged** (to be evicted) should be put into action in order to safeguard their rights, along with taking care of their livelihood and adequate compensation. For this purpose, the **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Fund** could be utilized.

Thirdly, the design of the project should be reconsidered in order to cause minimum harm to the environment. A pooled fund could be created, where a certain percentage of revenues earned from the project could be used for environmental restoration.

- In fact, the protestors should be motivated to help local authorities to create an even bigger green patch in the city and **Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAMPA Fund)** could be used by the local government for afforestation.

Finally, the political and public pressure can be averted by forming an independent committee involving the members from civil society, environment experts, design engineers and government representatives to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

Development needs in this dynamic world cannot be compromised but environmental protection as mandated by **Directive Principles of State Policy** is also a State responsibility, therefore a proper balance between the two is essential for a **peaceful existence**.