



Critically Examine How ESZs Marginalize Local Interests Proving Detrimental to Conservation in the Long Run. Illustrate With Example. (250 Words / 15 M) (GS-3 Environment)

Approach:

1. Introduction – two approaches to conservation.
2. Mention the main contentious provision of ESZ guideline.
3. Elaborately discuss the local opposition taking an example.
4. Conclusion.

The conservation debate has been broadly divided into two approaches on the role of human beings in conservation – (a) the **exclusionary approach** is based on the separation of human beings from nature; (b) the **inclusive approach** is based on the premise that conservation intricately depends on the relationship between human beings & their environment. The failure of exclusionary approach has laid stress on **participatory models of conservation** at present. In India, areas rich in biodiversity, particularly **National Parks** are governed largely by **exclusionary approach – conflict among resident populations over restrictions affecting their livelihood**, bringing **socio-ecological changes** in the region.

The ESZ dispute brings to light some **critical issues of environmental regulation** in India.

ESZ guidelines: the **National Wildlife Action Plan** stipulated that state governments should declare land falling within **10 km of boundaries** of national parks / wildlife sanctuaries as eco fragile zones under the **Environmental (Protection) Act 1986**. ESZ's purpose is to **provide more protection to protected areas by acting as a transition zone**. Now, this 10 km boundary **encompasses many habitations and important cities**, adversely affecting the developmental works. The protected areas are based on the **core-buffer model** – thus, a question arises, if parks already have buffer zones then why do we need ESZs ?

Local apprehensions : locals contend that **buffer zones already restricts many activities**; the existing park regulations have adversely affected their traditional practices. So, they believe that **ESZ regulation will worsen their sustenance**.

For e.g., the local communities under the **ESZ Sangarsh Samiti in Corbett National Park** have demanded scrapping the implementation of the guidelines and raising other livelihood issues. Different villages have joined the group based on issues impinging their survival & everyday needs. A reflection on them highlights the different **social realities** that environment regulations have created in the landscape.

- The villages are of two types – **traditional** and other **resettled from the core zone**. The **Traditional villages** do not dispute over their status, are **revenue villages**. Some of the **resettled villages** have got the **revenue village status**, but others having **forest village status** have been fighting for revenue status. The status of forest village



deprives them of many developmental activities – no schools, healthcare, electricity or water connection. Also, such villages are **denied making pucca houses, claim dried or felled trees in their courtyard, make fencing around their houses or claim compensation for crop loss.**

- Few forest lands deemed as property of government, have been **sold to private entities** for making **resorts**, creating **outsider intrusion**. E.g. **Dhikuli village** – the dominance of mass tourism has rapidly **increased land prices**. Land prices in the area prior to ESZ was 50-60 lakh/bigha, which have increased manifold.
- Many **revenue villagers** have **profited** from this but unknowingly or indirectly promoting **unsustainable practices** in the area. The **ESZ did not permit change of land use from agriculture to commercial under the Zamindari Abolition Act**, but when commercial use happened villagers became furious on the ESZ issue.
- Although government has promoted **ecotourism**, **little has translated** on ground. ESZ **do not restrict current tourism practices** or **put restriction on vehicular pollution** in the area.

Thus, locals have been made to sacrifice their rights & privileges, by privileging outside interests.

A deeper understanding shows the **social changes** due to **modern environmental discourse, dominance of market in the form of tourism** are disturbing local ecological & social realities in which locals play an active role. **Simply scrapping ESZ will not resolve local socio-ecological issues**. There is a need for **rethinking the impacts** of environmental policies at the local level, the **prospects of local participation** and most importantly, **prospects of alternate income opportunities** for successful conservation initiatives.