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CURRENT AFFAIRS



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Human-Wildlife Conflict

Context:

A report '**A Future for All – A Need for Human-Wildlife Coexistence**' was recently released by World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and UNEP.

It examined increasing human-wildlife conflict (HWC)

HWC-related killing affects more than 75% of the world's wild cat species, as well as many other terrestrial and marine carnivore species such as polar bears and Mediterranean monk seals, and large herbivores such as elephants.

About:

Human-Wildlife Conflict

- Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) refers to struggles that arise when the presence or behavior of wildlife poses actual or perceived direct, recurring threats to human interests or needs, often leading to disagreements between groups of people and negative impacts on people and/or wildlife.

Causes of Human-wildlife Conflict:

- **Lack of Protected Area:** Marine and terrestrial protected areas only cover 67% globally. About 40% of the African lion range and 70% of the African and Asian elephant ranges fall outside protected areas.
 - In India, 35% tiger ranges currently lie outside protected areas.

- **Wildlife-borne Infections:** Covid-19 pandemic – sparked by a zoonotic disease is driven by the close association of people, their livestock, and wildlife and by the unregulated consumption of wild animals.
 - With closer and more frequent and diverse contact between animals and people, the probability of animal microbes being transferred to people increases.
- **Urbanization:** In modern times rapid urbanization and industrialization have led to the diversion of forest land to non-forest purposes, as a result, the wildlife habitat is shrinking.
- **Transport Network:** The expansion of road and rail network through forest ranges has resulted in animals getting killed or injured in accidents on roads or railway tracks.
- **Increasing Human Population:** Many human settlements coming up near the peripheries of protected areas and encroachment in the forest lands by local people for cultivation and collection of food and fodder etc. therefore increasing pressure on limited natural resources in the forests.

Impacts:

- **Impact on Wildlife And Ecosystems:** HWC can have detrimental and permanent impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity. People might kill animals in self-defense, or as pre-emptive or retaliatory killings, which can drive species involved in conflict to extinction.
- **Impact on Local Communities:** The most evident and direct negative impacts to people from wildlife are injuries and the loss of lives and of livestock, crops, or other property.
- **Impact on Equity:** The economic and psychological costs of living with wildlife disproportionately fall to those who live near that wildlife, while the benefits of a species' survival are distributed to other communities as well.
- **Impact on Social Dynamics:** When a HWC event affects a farmer, that farmer may blame the government for protecting the perpetrator that damages crops, while a conservation practitioner may blame industry and farmers for clearing wild habitats and creating the HWC in the first place.
- **Impact on Sustainable Development:** HWC is the theme in conservation that is strongly linked to the SGDs as biodiversity is primary to sustain the developments, even though it is not explicitly mentioned as one.

Solution:

- **Moving From Conflict To Coexistence:** The goal of HWC management should be to enhance the safety of people and wildlife and to create mutual benefits of coexistence.
- **Integrated and Holistic Practices:** Holistic HWC management approaches allow species to survive in areas where they otherwise would have declined or become extinct.
- All species on our planet also are essential for maintaining ecosystem health and functions.
- **Participation:** The full participation of local communities can help reduce HWC and lead to coexistence between humans and wildlife.

Indian Scenario

- India faces an increasing challenge of human wildlife conflict, which is driven by development pressures and an increasing population, high demand for land and natural resources, resulting in loss, fragmentation, and degradation of wildlife habitats.
- These pressures intensify the interactions between people and wildlife because they often share living space without a clear demarcation of boundaries.
- In India, data from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change shows that over 500 elephants were killed between 2014-15 and 2018-19, most related to human-elephant conflict.
- During the same period, 2,361 people were killed as a result of conflict with elephants.

Some Initiatives:

- **Advisory for Management of HWC:** This has been issued by the Standing Committee of National Board of Wildlife (SC-NBWL).
- **Empower Gram Panchayats:** The advisory envisages empowering gram panchayats in dealing with the problematic wild animals as per the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- **Provide Insurance:** Utilizing add-on coverage under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana for crop compensation against crop damage due to HWC.
- **Augmenting Fodder:** Envisages augmenting fodder and water sources within the forest areas.
- **Take Proactive Measures:** Prescribes inter-departmental committees at local/state level, adoption of early warning systems, creation of barriers, dedicated circle wise Control Rooms with toll free hotline numbers, Identification of hotspots etc.

- **Provide Instant Relief:** Payment of a portion of ex-gratia as interim relief within 24 hours of the incident to the victim/family.

State-Specific:

- In 2018, the Uttar Pradesh government had given its in-principle approval to bring man-animal conflict under listed disaster in the State Disaster Response Fund
- The Uttarakhand government (2019) carried out bio-fencing by growing various species of plants in the areas.
- The Supreme Court (2020) affirmed the right of passage of the Elephants and the closure of resorts in the Nilgiris elephant corridor.
- Odisha's Athagarh Forest Division has started casting seed balls (or Bombs) inside different reserve forest areas to enrich food stock for wild elephants to prevent man-elephant conflict.

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