

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XII · CODE 323

Environment and Natural Resources

CUET unit: Contemporary World Politics — Environment,
Resources & Global Politics

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Snapshot

- Establishes how environmental and natural-resource issues moved from "geography" to the centre-stage of world politics from the 1960s onward.
- Anchors the Earth Summit (Rio, 1992), the Brundtland Report (1987), Agenda 21 and the concept of "sustainable development."
- Explains "global commons" (atmosphere, Antarctica, ocean floor, outer space) and the North–South divide on managing them.
- Introduces the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR), UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol (1997), plus India's stand and domestic measures.
- Covers resource geopolitics (oil, water), environmental movements (forest, anti-mining, anti-dam, Narmada Bachao Andolan) and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Environmental issues are no longer the preserve of geographers and naturalists — they have become "central to politics" because the planet's life-support systems are coming under intolerable strain (NCERT §Environmental Concerns, p. 82). The symptoms:

Cultivable land worldwide is barely expanding and existing agricultural land is losing fertility; **grasslands are overgrazed, fisheries over-harvested**, and water bodies depleted and polluted, restricting food production. According to the **UNDP Human Development Report 2016**, 663 million people in developing countries lack safe water and 2.4 billion lack sanitation, causing the death of more than three million children each year (NCERT p. 82). **Natural forests** stabilise climate, moderate water supplies and harbour most terrestrial biodiversity; their destruction and the steady decline of stratospheric ozone (the "ozone hole") endanger ecosystems and human health. **Coastal pollution** from land-based activities is increasing globally; the open sea remains relatively clean but coastal waters are becoming severely polluted (NCERT pp. 82–83).

The political moment of this awareness, NCERT tells us, came in the **1960s**. The **Club of Rome's 1972 book Limits to Growth** dramatised possible resource depletion against rising population, and the newly created **United Nations Environment**

Programme (UNEP) began holding international conferences (NCERT p. 83). The defining institutional moment was the **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development** — the **Earth Summit** — held at **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992**, attended by **170 states, thousands of NGOs and many MNCs** (NCERT pp. 83–84). The intellectual prelude was the **Brundtland Report of 1987, Our Common Future**, which warned that traditional patterns of economic growth were not sustainable in the long term and gave currency to the term **sustainable development**.

At Rio, the **North–South divide** was visible. The **Northern (First World)** states focused primarily on **ozone depletion and global warming**, treating the environment as a stand-alone problem. The **Southern (Third World)** states insisted on the **link between economic development and environmental management** — without development, they argued, the South could not afford the environmental investments the North demanded (NCERT p. 84). The Summit nevertheless produced conventions on **climate change, biodiversity and forestry**, and recommended a sweeping list of development practices called **Agenda 21**. Critics — many from the South — argued that Agenda 21 was biased in favour of **economic growth** rather than ecological conservation (NCERT p. 84).

The **"Global Commons"** are areas outside any state's sovereign jurisdiction that require common governance. The Latin term **res communis humanitatis** captures the idea: these belong to humanity as a whole. NCERT names four: the **earth's atmosphere, Antarctica, the ocean floor and outer space** (NCERT §Protection of Global Commons, p. 85). **Antarctica** alone extends over 14 million sq km — 26 per cent of the world's wilderness, 90 per cent of all terrestrial ice and 70 per cent of the planet's fresh water. Since 1959, activities on the continent have been limited to scientific research, fishing and tourism. The major cooperative agreements on commons are the **1959 Antarctic Treaty**, the **1987 Montreal Protocol** (on ozone-depleting substances), and the **1991 Antarctic Environmental Protocol**; the **ozone hole over Antarctica** was discovered in the **mid-1980s** (NCERT pp. 85–86).

The Rio Declaration (1992) made formal the principle of **"common but differentiated responsibilities"** (CBDR) — accepting that **all states share responsibility** for the global environment but **developed countries bear greater responsibility** given their historical contribution to degradation (NCERT §CBDR, pp. 86–87). The **1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** required parties to act "on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities." On this principle, **China, India and other developing countries were exempted** from the binding greenhouse-gas reduction targets of the **Kyoto Protocol** — agreed in **Kyoto, Japan, in 1997**, which set greenhouse-gas reduction targets for industrialised countries. The greenhouse gases targeted include **carbon dioxide, methane and hydrofluorocarbons** (NCERT p. 87).

The global commons differ from **common property resources** — resources owned and managed by a community whose members share rights and duties for use and maintenance. The Indian example par excellence is the **sacred grove** along the South

Indian forest belt, where village communities have for centuries managed forest tracts under religious sanction (NCERT §Common Property Resources & Sacred Groves box, p. 88).

India's stand is set out at length (NCERT §India's Stand on Environmental Issues, pp. 88–90). India **signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol in August 2002** and **ratified the Paris Climate Agreement on 2 October 2016**. India has one of the world's largest renewable-energy programmes. The Indian argument rests on the **historical responsibility principle**: India's per capita emissions are predicted to rise from 0.9 tonnes in 2000 to **1.6 tonnes by 2030**, still **less than half the 2000 world average of 3.8 tonnes**. India's key domestic measures — the **National Auto-fuel Policy**, the **Energy Conservation Act 2001** and the **Electricity Act 2003** (encouraging renewables).

The section on **environmental movements** (NCERT pp. 90–92) emphasises diversity: forest movements in the South (Mexico, Chile, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brazil), **anti-mining campaigns** (against the Western Mining Corporation in the Philippines), and **anti-dam/pro-river** movements such as India's **Narmada Bachao Andolan**, which is rooted in **non-violence**. The **first anti-dam movement in the North** was the early-1980s campaign to save **Australia's Franklin River**.

Resource geopolitics is the most concrete demonstration of how natural resources shape world politics (NCERT pp. 92–95). The driving question is "who gets what, when, where and how." **Oil** is the single most important resource: **West Asia (the Gulf)** accounts for about **30 per cent of global oil production and 64 per cent of known reserves**, with **Saudi Arabia** holding **a quarter of the world's reserves**, and **Iraq** second. **Water disputes** typically involve **downstream (lower riparian)** states objecting to **upstream (upper riparian)** dams, diversion or pollution — examples include the **Israel-Syria-Jordan** conflict of the 1950s–60s over the Jordan and Yarmuk rivers, and the **Turkey-Syria-Iraq** dispute over the Euphrates.

The **rights of indigenous peoples** (NCERT pp. 95–97). The UN defines indigenous populations as "descendants of peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there." There are roughly **30 crore indigenous people worldwide**; in India they are identified with the **Scheduled Tribes**, around **8 per cent of population**. The **World Council of Indigenous Peoples** was formed in **1975** and became the first of 11 indigenous NGOs to receive consultative status in the UN. NCERT emphasises that indigenous communities — whose traditional lifestyles depend on **subsistence agriculture, hunting, gathering and fishing in close communion with forest and water resources** — have suffered disproportionately from the conversion of common lands into private property, from mining and dam projects, and from forced displacement. Their political demands — recognition as distinct peoples, secure land rights, protection of customary self-governance, and a meaningful voice in international environmental negotiations — are now an integral part of the global environmental conversation.

The overarching analytical thread is that **environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of justice between states and within them**. The Rio model — sustainable development plus CBDR plus common-property recognition — is presented as the practical synthesis of these claims, even though it remains contested. The Indian position, as NCERT presents it, holds together three commitments simultaneously: full participation in the multilateral climate regime (Kyoto in 2002, Paris in 2016); insistence on the historical-responsibility principle so that developing countries' per-capita emissions are not capped at unfair levels; and strong domestic legislation (Energy Conservation Act 2001, Electricity Act 2003, National Auto-fuel Policy) to drive an indigenous transition. Together, these moves position India as both a beneficiary of CBDR and an active claimant in shaping its evolution.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Earth Summit	UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, June 1992, attended by 170 states, thousands of NGOs and many MNCs.	83–84
Agenda 21	A list of recommended sustainable-development practices adopted at the Rio Summit; criticised for being biased toward economic growth.	84
Sustainable development	Approach combining economic growth with ecological responsibility, endorsed at Rio 1992.	84
Global commons (<i>res communis humanitatis</i>)	Areas outside sovereign jurisdiction requiring common governance — atmosphere, Antarctica, ocean floor, outer space.	85
Common but Differentiated Responsibilities	Rio principle that all states share responsibility for the global environment, but developed countries bear greater responsibility due to their historical contribution to degradation.	86–87
UNFCCC (1992)	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; basis for CBDR and exempted developing countries from Kyoto targets.	87
Kyoto Protocol	1997 international agreement (signed in Kyoto, Japan) setting greenhouse-gas-cut targets for industrialised countries.	87
Common property resources	Resources owned and managed by a community whose members share rights and duties — e.g., Indian sacred groves.	88
Brundtland Report (1987)	Our Common Future ; warned that traditional patterns of economic growth were not sustainable in the long term.	84
Indigenous people		95

Term	Definition	Page
	UN definition — descendants of peoples who inhabited the present territory at the time persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived and overcame them.	
Club of Rome	Think tank whose 1972 book Limits to Growth highlighted resource-depletion fears.	83
UNEP	UN Environment Programme; convenes major environmental conferences.	83
Antarctic Treaty (1959)	Limited Antarctic activity to scientific research, fishing and tourism.	85
Montreal Protocol (1987)	International treaty on substances depleting the ozone layer.	85
Antarctic Environmental Protocol (1991)	Reinforced environmental protection regime over Antarctica.	86
Sacred groves	South Indian common-property forest tracts under community management.	88
Energy Conservation Act (2001)	Indian law promoting energy efficiency.	90
Electricity Act (2003)	Indian law promoting renewable energy.	90
Narmada Bachao Andolan	Indian anti-dam, pro-river movement rooted in non-violence.	92
Franklin River campaign	Early-1980s Australian anti-dam movement — first in the North.	92
Resource geopolitics	Politics over who gets what, when, where and how — primarily oil and water.	92
West Asia / Gulf oil	30% of global production; 64% of known reserves.	93
World Council of Indigenous Peoples (1975)	First indigenous NGO with UN consultative status.	97
Scheduled Tribes	Indian designation for indigenous peoples (~8% of population).	97

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Rio Earth Summit timeline** — 1972 **Limits to Growth** → 1987 Brundtland Report → 1992 Rio Summit → 1997 Kyoto Protocol → 2002 India ratifies Kyoto → 2016 Paris Agreement ratified by India (NCERT pp. 83, 84, 87, 88, 90).
- **The North-South divide diagram** in environmental priorities — North: ozone, global warming; South: linkage between economic development and environmental management (NCERT p. 84).

- **Antarctica fact-box** — 14 million sq km area, 26% of world wilderness, 90% terrestrial ice, 70% planetary fresh water (NCERT p. 85).
- **West-Asia oil geography** — ~30 per cent global production, ~64 per cent known reserves; Saudi Arabia = 1/4 world reserves; Iraq second (NCERT p. 93).
- **Process map** — Awareness (§Environmental Concerns) → Rio 1992 (§Environmental Concerns) → Global Commons (§Global Commons) → CBDR + UNFCCC + Kyoto (§CBDR) → Common Property + India's stand (§India's Stand) → Environmental movements (§Environmental Movements) → Resource geopolitics (§Resource Geopolitics) → Indigenous rights (§Indigenous Peoples).

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
1959 Antarctic Treaty	Limited Antarctic activities to scientific research, fishing and tourism	p. 85
1972 Club of Rome — Limits to Growth	Dramatised resource depletion against rising population	p. 83
1987 Brundtland Report — Our Common Future	Warned traditional growth patterns unsustainable; coined "sustainable development"	p. 84
1987 Montreal Protocol	International treaty on ozone-depleting substances	p. 85
1991 Antarctic Environmental Protocol	Strengthened protection of the Antarctic environment	p. 86
1992 Rio Earth Summit	UN Conference on Environment and Development	pp. 83–84
1992 UNFCCC	Framework Convention on Climate Change, embedded CBDR	p. 87
1992 Rio Declaration	Formal acceptance of CBDR principle	pp. 86–87
Agenda 21 (1992)	Sustainable-development practice list adopted at Rio	p. 84
1997 Kyoto Protocol	Targets for industrialised countries; exempted India/China	p. 87
August 2002 — India ratifies Kyoto	India's accession to Kyoto Protocol	pp. 88–90
2 October 2016 — India ratifies Paris Agreement	India's accession to Paris Climate Agreement	pp. 89–90
Energy Conservation Act, 2001	Indian law promoting energy efficiency	p. 90
Electricity Act, 2003	Indian law promoting renewable energy	p. 90

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
World Council of Indigenous Peoples (1975)	First indigenous NGO with UN consultative status	p. 97

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- The Earth Summit was held in **Rio de Janeiro (1992)**, NOT in Stockholm (1972) or Johannesburg (2002).
- The Brundtland Report **Our Common Future** came in **1987**, five years BEFORE the 1992 Rio Summit — students often invert this.
- The **Kyoto Protocol was agreed in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan** (not at Rio); India ratified it in **August 2002**.
- "Global commons" specifically means **atmosphere, Antarctica, ocean floor and outer space** — students often add forests or oceans-in-general, which is wrong.
- CBDR does NOT mean developing countries have no duty; it means developed countries bear greater responsibility because of historical emissions.
- The first anti-dam movement in the North was about the **Franklin River in Australia**, not Narmada — Narmada Bachao Andolan is an Indian (Southern) example.
- **Common property resources ≠ global commons** — common property is community-managed (sacred groves); global commons are outside any state's sovereignty.
- India's per-capita emissions in 2030 are predicted at **1.6 tonnes**, still **less than half the world average of 3.8 tonnes (2000)** — distractors invert this.
- The **2 October 2016** date for Indian ratification of Paris is exact — trap items shift the month/year.
- The Saudi share of world oil reserves is **a quarter (25%)** — not half.
- **Iraq is the second** largest reserves-holder in the Gulf, not Iran.
- **UNDP HDR 2016** is the source of the water-and-sanitation fact sheet (p. 82), not UNEP or WHO.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a regular source of CUET MCQs (typically 1–2 questions per year), with NTA repeatedly testing: the year/venue of the Earth Summit and Kyoto Protocol, the four components of the "global commons," the meaning of "common but differentiated responsibilities," India's stand on Kyoto/Paris and India-specific laws (Energy Conservation Act 2001, Electricity Act 2003), the Narmada Bachao Andolan, and the West-Asia oil-share data. Statement-based and assertion–reason items on CBDR and the North–South divide are especially common.

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.36 (CUET 2023) What does the Latin term "Res Communis Humanitatis" mean?

- A) Global World B) Global Commons C) Global Politics D) Global Resources **Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.37 (CUET 2023) The Rio Summit produced conventions dealing with climate change, biodiversity and recommended a list of development practices called:

- A) Agenda 51 B) Agenda 41 C) Agenda 31 D) Agenda 21 **Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.36 (CUET 2024) When was the Kyoto Protocol signed?

- A) 1992 B) 1995 C) 1997 D) 1999 **Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.37 (CUET 2024) When was the Energy Conservation Act passed?

- A) 1998 B) 1999 C) 2001 D) 2005 **Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.33 (CUET 2025) Match the following: Report/Treaty Y Brundtland Report 1 Antarctic Treaty 1 Antarctic Environmental Protocol 1 Earth Summit Rio 1 Options:

- A) A–IV, B–III, C–II, D–I B) A–III, B–II, C–I, D–IV C) A–IV, B–II, C–I, D–III D) A–III, B–IV, C–I, D–II **Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.36 (CUET 2025) "Limits to Growth" focuses on which environmental concern?

- A) Depletion of Earth's resources B) Ozone depletion C) Coastal pollution D) Water pollution **Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.37 (CUET 2025) Which region is subject to special environmental protection rules?

- A) Argentina B) Australia C) France D) Arctic and Antarctic regions
- Tests:** Environment and Natural Resources **Answer:** Not in extracted key

