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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Human-Wildlife Conflict Is a Crisis of Forest Governance

 **DOWN TO EARTH**1 July 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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Human-Wildlife Conflict Is a Crisis of Forest Governance


Down to Earth 1 July 2026 **GS3**

Source: ujyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"When an elephant enters a village, we blame the elephant. But the corridor it once used may now be a mine or a plantation. Is the conflict really with the animal, or with how we govern the forest?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  **Down to Earth**


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WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Human-wildlife conflict is rising across India, with **over 500 people** dying each year in wildlife encounters and nearly **80% of protected areas** bordered by human settlements. The reflex is to blame the animal. But broken corridors, land-use change and the dilution of community rights point to a **forest-governance failure**. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **conservation, the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and community-led governance**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Conflict is manufactured by **habitat fragmentation and corridor loss**, not animal aggression. The **Forest Rights Act, 2006** was meant to make communities conservation partners, but poor implementation, closed FRA cells and unaligned older forest laws keep the bureaucracy on a pre-FRA, exclusionary track. Denying rights alienates the people conservation needs. The fix: real FRA implementation, corridors and community-led conservation.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Human-wildlife conflict	Negative encounters between people and wild animals	Costs lives, crops and support for conservation
Forest Rights Act, 2006	Recognises forest-dwellers' rights, including CFR	The instrument for community-led governance
Community Forest Resource rights	Community control over managing forest resources	Turns residents into stewards, not trespassers
Corridor / fragmentation	Broken links between habitat patches	Forces animals into human spaces

THE ANALYSIS: A GOVERNANCE CRISIS, NOT AN ANIMAL PROBLEM

- ❶ **The conflict is manufactured.** Fragmentation, corridor loss and land-use change push wildlife into settlements; the driver is land governance.
- ❷ **The FRA is under-implemented.** Poor rollout, closed FRA cells and pending claims mean rights on paper are not rights in practice.
- ❸ **The laws never aligned.** The Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (<https://ujjiyari.com/legislation/wildlife-protection-act-1972/>) were not realigned with the FRA, so exclusionary logic persists.
- ❹ **Alienation weakens conservation.** Denying rights loses the community's early warning, stewardship and anti-poaching cooperation.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

over **500 human deaths** a year in wildlife encounters; nearly **80% of protected areas** bordered by settlements. **Key laws: Forest Rights Act, 2006** (Recognition of Forest Rights Act); **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**; **Indian Forest Act, 1927**; **Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) / forest-conservation law**. **Institutions: Ministry of Tribal Affairs** (FRA nodal), **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**, **Gram Sabha** (recognises claims), **National Board for Wildlife**. **Concept:** Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights; fortress vs community-led conservation; wildlife corridors; ecosystem services.

THE DEBATE

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Argument that it is a governance crisis: Conflict follows fragmentation and rights denial; genuine FRA implementation and community-led conservation address the root, since exclusion breeds resentment exactly at the edges where conflict occurs.

Argument for strict protection: Exclusionary protection of core habitats is credited with saving tigers and elephants; expanding rights inside forests risks **encroachment** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/encroachment/>) and diluting conservation gains.

Balanced verdict: Keep core habitats well protected, but the buffer and edge, where most conflict happens, need communities as partners. The choice is not protection versus rights, it is fortress logic versus governance that makes people allies of the forest.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

When a visible problem (an animal in a village) keeps recurring, resist treating the symptom (relocate or cull) and trace the system that produces it (corridors, land use, rights, institutions). Reframing a symptom as a governance failure changes the whole solution set, from managing animals to fixing institutions.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Development + land-use change -> habitat fragmentation + corridor loss -> animals pushed into human spaces -> conflict + deaths -> reflex: blame/relocate the animal -> but FRA under-implemented + laws unaligned + rights denied -> communities alienated -> conservation loses its partners -> fix: real FRA + CFR rights + corridors + community-led conservation -> people as forest allies

THE WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Implement the FRA where it matters.** Recognise individual and Community Forest Resource rights in and around protected areas; reopen and staff FRA cells.
- ❷ **Realign the laws.** Harmonise the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 with the FRA so the bureaucracy follows one logic.
- ❸ **Protect corridors and compensate fast.** Secure wildlife corridors and deliver quick, fair compensation for crop and life loss to keep communities on side.
- ❹ **Make communities partners.** Fund community-led conservation, early-warning systems and shared benefits so residents are stewards, not adversaries.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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Argue that human-wildlife conflict is a symptom of forest-governance and rights failure, and that FRA implementation plus community-led conservation, not fortress exclusion, is the durable answer.

“India cannot fence its way out of human-wildlife conflict.”

Forest Rights Act, 2006; Community Forest Resource rights; Gram Sabha’s role; Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972; Indian Forest Act, 1927; Ministry of Tribal Affairs as FRA nodal; wildlife corridors.

How should the state balance the rights of forest-dwelling communities against wildlife protection? Is exclusion ever justified, and at what cost to trust?

UPSC has asked on the FRA, tribal rights and conservation models. This editorial ties them into a single governance argument.

Forest Rights Act, tribal welfare, protected areas, wildlife corridors, community conservation, land-use policy.

Sources: *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in>), *Ministry of Tribal Affairs* (<https://tribal.nic.in>), *MoEFCC* (<https://moef.gov.in>)

Source: Human-Wildlife Conflict Is a Crisis of Forest Governance — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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Rising human-wildlife conflict stems less from animal behaviour than from failures of forest governance, fragmented habitats, broken corridors and the dilution of community forest rights, and the durable answer is genuine implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and community-led conservation rather than top-down, fortress models.

 **SUPPORTING**

- Habitat fragmentation, corridor loss and land-use change push animals into human spaces, so the conflict is manufactured by land governance, not by the animals.
- Denying or diluting community forest rights alienates the very people whose traditional stewardship and cooperation conservation depends on, weakening early warning and anti-poaching support.
- Legal incoherence between the FRA and older forest laws leaves the forest bureaucracy following the pre-FRA logic, so rights on paper do not become governance in practice.

 **COUNTER**

Some argue that strict, exclusionary protection of core habitats is what has saved tigers and elephants, and that expanding community rights inside forests risks encroachment and undermines conservation gains.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Implement the FRA in and around protected areas, recognise community forest resource rights, align older forest laws with the FRA, invest in corridor protection and quick compensation, and make communities partners rather than trespassers in conservation.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

"Human-wildlife conflict in India is a symptom of forest governance failure, not of animal aggression." Critically examine, with reference to the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and community-led conservation. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

When an elephant enters a village or a leopard strays into a town, the instinct is to blame the animal. But the corridor it once used may now be a mine, a plantation or a highway.

Human-wildlife conflict is less a story of animal aggression than of how India governs its forests.

BODY

The scale is serious: over 500 people die each year in wildlife encounters, and nearly four-fifths of India's protected areas are ringed by human settlements. The proximate causes are structural, habitat fragmentation, corridor loss and land-use change that push animals into human spaces.

That makes the conflict a product of land and forest governance, not of the animals. The deeper failure is institutional.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 was meant to correct a historical injustice and make forest-dwelling communities partners in conservation, but its implementation has been poor, and in places actively rolled back, with FRA cells closed and claims left pending. Crucially, the older Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and forest-conservation law were never realigned with the FRA, so the forest bureaucracy still operates on a pre-FRA, exclusionary logic.

Denying rights alienates the communities whose traditional stewardship, early warning and anti-poaching cooperation conservation actually needs. The fortress-conservation reply, that strict protection saved tigers, contains a truth, but exclusion also breeds resentment and worse outcomes at the edges where most conflict happens.

The answer is not less protection but better governance: community forest resource rights, corridor protection, quick compensation, and communities treated as partners, not trespassers.

CONCLUSION

India cannot fence its way out of human-wildlife conflict. Genuine FRA implementation, corridor protection and community-led conservation address the governance failure at the root, making people allies of the forest rather than adversaries of the animal.


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