



Research Paper

An Overview of the History of Non-Governmental Organizations' Eco-Friendly Improvement Activities in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

One of India's most urgent problems in the twenty-first century is environmental degradation. The environmental cost has been enormous due to the nation's increasing industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, air and water pollution, and the extensive effects of climate change. In addition to biodiversity and natural ecosystems, these problems also pose a danger to agriculture, human health, and general quality of life. There is an ecological crisis that requires immediate and ongoing action, as evidenced by the loss of forest cover, groundwater depletion, increasing temperatures, diminishing rivers, and a rise in the frequency of natural disasters. In India, NGOs have played a significant role in increasing public knowledge of important topics including sustainable agriculture, wildlife conservation, pollution prevention, and climate change adaptation. Through awareness programs, capacity-building workshops, and media campaigns, they inform and empower citizens to take action. In many cases, NGOs work directly with marginalized and vulnerable communities, ensuring that environmental justice becomes a part of the larger development agenda. These organizations help communities understand the impact of environmental degradation on their livelihoods and health, and offer alternatives that are more sustainable and equitable. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the role of NGOs in environmental protection in India, highlighting their contributions, challenges, and real-world impact through detailed case studies. By delving into the experiences of these organizations, the paper seeks to underscore the critical need for multi-stakeholder collaboration between NGOs, government bodies, private enterprises, and local communities. Future policy frameworks and development strategies that support India's commitments to environmental justice, climate resilience, and sustainable development can be informed by the lessons learned from these case studies. In the end, the study makes the case that NGOs play an essential role in India's environmental movement as innovators, educators, and change agents in addition to serving as advocates and service providers. In order to achieve a more socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable future, it is imperative that they strengthen their skills, make sure that the regulatory framework is more supportive, and cultivate partnerships at all levels.

Keywords: Environmental degradation, NGOs, climate change, sustainable development, biodiversity

I. Introduction

A key component of sustainable development is environmental conservation, which maintains the equilibrium between ecological stability, societal well-being, and economic progress. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, and population expansion in India have resulted in serious environmental problems such as biodiversity loss, water and air pollution, and deforestation. Because of the serious risks these problems represent to agriculture, public health, and natural ecosystems, environmental protection must be given top attention. Although the Indian government has put in place a number of laws, rules, and programs to address these environmental issues, bureaucratic inefficiencies, a lack of funding, and conflicting economic interests sometimes make it difficult for these measures to be enforced and successful. In this context, NonGovernmental Organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in bridging the gap between policy formulation and implementation. NGOs act as intermediaries, facilitating grassroots-level action, policy advocacy, and environmental awareness campaigns. Their flexibility, community-driven approach, and commitment to sustainability enable them to address environmental issues effectively, often complementing governmental efforts.

In India, NGOs support environmental conservation in a variety of methods. They work on conservation initiatives that emphasize sustainable resource management, wildlife preservation, and afforestation. Numerous

groups monitor the condition of the environment, carry out studies, and promote cleaner industrial techniques in an effort to reduce pollution. In order to encourage sustainable behaviors among people, businesses, and communities, NGOs also organize training programs, seminars, and awareness campaigns. Furthermore, some NGOs concentrate on legal activity, bringing Public Interest Litigations (PILs) against projects and policies that affect the environment.

Another effective weapon in NGOs' arsenal is legal activity. In order to contest ecologically damaging initiatives including illicit mining, deforestation, river pollution, and unsustainable infrastructure development, many people have brought Public Interest Litigations (PILs) in courts. In doing so, NGOs serve as watchdogs, demanding stricter implementation of rules and holding governments and businesses responsible for breaking environmental laws. But in spite of their successes, NGOs in India still face several obstacles. These include funding constraints, especially due to recent regulatory changes that restrict foreign funding; bureaucratic hurdles, which limit access to decision-making spaces; and political pressures that often arise when NGO actions conflict with large-scale development projects backed by powerful interests. NGOs also operate in a complex and sometimes hostile policy environment, which can limit their ability to scale impact or collaborate effectively with state agencies.

The important roles that NGOs play in environmental preservation in India are examined in this study. It looks at how these groups engage local people for sustainable development, work with governmental and international institutions, and affect environmental legislation. This study examines case studies of well-known environmental NGOs in India to demonstrate their influence and the difficulties they encounter in their efforts to save the environment. In the end, this study emphasizes how crucial NGOs are to developing an environmentally conscious and sustainable future for India.

The Role of NGOs in Environmental Protection NGOs engage in various environmental activities including Advocacy and Policy Intervention

Advocacy and policy intervention are two of NGOs' most important contributions to environmental conservation. NGOs regularly advocate for stricter environmental legislation and regulations to be put into effect. To promote sustainable policies and more stringent enforcement of environmental laws, they interact with legislators, governmental bodies, and international organizations. In order to stop ecologically harmful projects like deforestation, industrial pollution, and uncontrolled mining operations, several NGOs also take part in court fights by bringing Public Interest Litigations (PILs).

For example, groups like the Environmental Support Group (ESG) and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) have had a significant impact on India's environmental laws. They publish reports, carry out in-depth research on environmental issues, and advise the government. Stricter environmental impact assessment (EIA) standards and better air pollution restrictions are only two examples of the legislative improvements brought forth by these initiatives.

NGOs also serve as watchdogs, making sure that government organizations and businesses abide with environmental regulations. NGOs raise awareness and exert pressure on government to address environmental problems through public campaigns and media participation. Their lobbying frequently results in legislative modifications that strengthen national environmental preservation initiatives.

Conservation Projects

The main focus of many environmental NGOs' work is conservation. These groups use scientific research and community-driven projects to save forests, animals, and waterways. To carry out conservation initiatives that protect biodiversity and advance sustainable resource management, NGOs work in conjunction with regional communities, governmental bodies, and global organizations. For instance, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) works to save endangered animals including rhinoceroses, elephants, and tigers. It carries out habitat restoration projects, offers legal assistance for wildlife conservation efforts, and collaborates with nearby communities to avoid conflicts between people and animals. Similar to this, groups like the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) strive to protect delicate ecosystems including coastal habitats, grasslands, and rainforests.

NGOs also play a critical role in water conservation. Organizations such as the Jal Bhagirathi Foundation and Tarun Bharat Sangh have been instrumental in reviving traditional water management systems in arid regions of India. Through rainwater harvesting, watershed management, and community-based conservation, these NGOs help mitigate water scarcity and promote sustainable water use.

Awareness and Education

Raising public awareness about environmental concerns is an important feature of NGOs' activity. To encourage sustainable behaviors and environmental responsibility among people, companies, and politicians, several NGOs run campaigns, seminars, and educational programs. The goal of initiatives like WWF-India's "Ek Prithvi" campaign is to incorporate environmental education into the curriculum of schools. Through interactive

exercises and hands-on learning, the program educates pupils about biodiversity, climate change, and conservation. In a similar vein, groups like Greenpeace India run awareness campaigns about problems including industrial pollution, climate change, and deforestation.

NGOs also use digital media, documentaries, and grassroots campaigns to spread awareness. They organize tree-planting drives, clean-up campaigns, and eco-friendly lifestyle programs to engage the public in active participation. By educating communities about environmental challenges and solutions, NGOs empower individuals to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and advocate for stronger environmental policies.

Pollution Control Efforts

In India, a lot of environmental NGOs prioritize pollution reduction. These groups keep an eye on pollution levels in the air and water, study the causes of pollution, and push for stronger laws governing the disposal of industrial waste, vehicle emissions, and plastic pollution. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), for instance, has taken the lead in tracking the amount of air pollution in Indian cities. It has carried out research on the consequences of air pollution and has been instrumental in influencing laws like the implementation of Bharat Stage automobile emission regulations. Additionally, groups like the Plastic Free India movement advocate for stronger plastic ban laws and promote sustainable alternatives in an effort to reduce plastic waste.

NGOs also engage in clean-up drives, such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan initiatives led by various organizations to remove waste from rivers, lakes, and urban areas. They work with local governments and communities to promote waste management practices, including recycling, composting, and sustainable packaging solutions.

Disaster Management and Climate Action

Climate change has increased the frequency of natural catastrophes including heatwaves, cyclones, floods, and droughts in India in recent years. Through providing urgent help, carrying out post-disaster rehabilitation, and advocating for climate-resilient solutions, NGOs play a critical role in disaster management. The Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS) is one organization that focuses on disaster relief and preparedness. They carry out early warning awareness campaigns, construct resilient infrastructure, and offer emergency assistance in disaster-prone communities.

NGOs are also actively involved in climate action initiatives. Greenpeace India, for example, campaigns against coal-based power plants and advocates for renewable energy solutions. Similarly, organizations like The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) promote research and implementation of sustainable energy technologies, afforestation projects, and carbon reduction initiatives.

Case Studies of Environmental NGOs in India

The Role of Chipko Movement and NGO Involvement

One of the first and most significant grassroots campaigns against deforestation in India was the Chipko Movement, which got its start in 1973 in the Chamoli area of Uttarakhand (then a part of Uttar Pradesh). Local people, particularly women, spearheaded the effort by embracing trees to stop logging firms from cutting them down. Even while the campaign was mostly led by the people, NGOs were essential in raising awareness, rallying support, and influencing legislative reforms. Chandi Prasad Bhatt formed the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS), which played a key role in planning the demonstrations and informing the locals about the long-term environmental effects of deforestation. Environmentalists who promoted ecological preservation and sustainable development, such as Sunderlal Bahuguna, also backed the campaign.

The Chipko Movement successfully led to the government imposing a 15-year ban on commercial logging in the Himalayan forests in 1980. Additionally, it inspired similar conservation movements across India, including the Appiko Movement in Karnataka. The role of NGOs in supporting grassroots activism was evident in how they helped amplify local voices and pressure policymakers to adopt more sustainable forestry policies.

The Work of Greenpeace India

Since its founding in India in 2001, Greenpeace India, a branch of the worldwide Greenpeace network, has been actively involved in environmental protection. The group works on important environmental concerns such as pollution management, deforestation, renewable energy, and climate change. Opposition to coal mining in forests inhabited by indigenous populations was one of Greenpeace India's most prominent campaigns. In Mahan, Madhya Pradesh, the group vigorously fought coal mining operations, pointing out the detrimental effects on local lives and wildlife. Greenpeace India was instrumental in stopping the clearing of forests for mining operations through lobbying, community organizing, and legal action. Greenpeace India has also run awareness campaigns to encourage the use of renewable energy. Their "Roof Top Revolution" initiative encouraged households and

businesses to shift towards solar energy, advocating for government policies supporting decentralized renewable energy production.

Despite its contributions, Greenpeace India has faced challenges, including restrictions on foreign funding and government scrutiny. However, the NGO continues to raise awareness about environmental degradation and mobilize public support for sustainable policies.

Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)

Greenpeace India, a division of the global Greenpeace network, has been actively engaged in environmental conservation since its establishment in India in 2001. The organization tackles significant environmental issues like climate change, renewable energy, pollution control, and deforestation. One of Greenpeace India's most well-known initiatives was opposition to coal mining in forests that were home to indigenous tribes. The organization vehemently opposed coal mining activities in Mahan, Madhya Pradesh, highlighting the negative impacts on wildlife and human livelihoods. Through community organization, legal action, and lobbying, Greenpeace India played a key role in halting the clearance of forests for mining activities. In order to promote the usage of renewable energy, Greenpeace India has also launched awareness campaigns.

CSE has also worked extensively on water conservation projects, advocating for rainwater harvesting as a sustainable solution to India's water crisis. The NGO's research and policy recommendations have influenced urban planning regulations, making rainwater harvesting mandatory in several Indian states. In addition to research and advocacy, CSE conducts capacity-building programs to train government officials, journalists, and civil society members on environmental governance. Its emphasis on data-driven policy recommendations has made it a crucial player in India's environmental landscape.

The Role of WWF-India

Since its founding in 1969, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) India has been a leader in sustainable resource management and wildlife protection. The group tackles climate change, biodiversity conservation, and the protection of endangered species. Important animal species, including tigers, elephants, and rhinos, have been saved thanks in large part to WWF-India. The group has supported anti-poaching activities, established protected areas for animal protection, and helped India double the number of tigers with its "TX2" campaign. In order to execute conservation policies that strike a balance between ecological preservation and sustainable livelihoods, WWF-India also collaborates closely with local people and forest agencies. WWF-India encourages sustainable water management in addition to wildlife protection through its "Living Ganga Programme." This initiative aims to restore the ecological health of the Ganga River by working with communities, policymakers, and businesses to reduce industrial pollution and improve water governance.

WWF-India also conducts extensive educational campaigns to promote sustainable living. Their "One Planet Academy" is an online platform that provides educational resources on environmental conservation for schools and students. Through these initiatives, WWF-India has played a vital role in fostering environmental awareness and biodiversity protection in the country.

Challenges Faced by Environmental NGOs

Environmental NGOs play a crucial role in conservation efforts, policy advocacy, and grassroots initiatives in India. However, despite their contributions, these organizations face several significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness. These challenges include legal and regulatory hurdles, political and industrial pressure, limited funding, and lack of public awareness. Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring that NGOs can continue their work effectively and drive meaningful environmental change.

Legal and Regulatory Hurdles

One of the biggest challenges faced by environmental NGOs in India is navigating legal and regulatory barriers. Various laws and government policies restrict NGO operations, particularly concerning funding and activism.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)

Restrictions

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) is a key law that governs foreign funding for NGOs in India. The government has tightened FCRA regulations in recent years, making it more difficult for NGOs to receive and utilize foreign funds. Many prominent environmental NGOs, including Greenpeace India and Amnesty International, have faced funding restrictions under FCRA, affecting their ability to operate efficiently. FCRA amendments in 2020 introduced new limitations, including:

- A cap on administrative expenses, restricting NGOs from using more than 20% of foreign funds for overhead costs.

- Mandatory routing of foreign contributions through a designated government bank, increasing bureaucratic scrutiny.
- Stricter renewal and compliance requirements, making it challenging for NGOs to maintain funding continuity. These restrictions create financial instability for NGOs, forcing them to scale down their operations, reduce staff, or limit their advocacy efforts.

Environmental Clearance and Litigation Issues

Many NGOs that challenge environmentally destructive projects through legal means face counter-litigation and bureaucratic hurdles. Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed by NGOs against large-scale industrial or infrastructure projects often lead to prolonged legal battles. Developers and government agencies sometimes use legal loopholes to bypass environmental impact assessments (EIA), reducing the effectiveness of NGO interventions.

Additionally, the government has introduced reforms to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes, which many NGOs argue dilute environmental safeguards. For example, the 2020 draft EIA notification proposed reducing the time frame for public consultations and allowing postfacto environmental clearances, making it harder for NGOs to challenge harmful projects.

Political and Industrial Pressure

Environmental NGOs frequently face opposition from both the political establishment and industries that prioritize economic growth over ecological sustainability. This resistance manifests in various ways, including legal action, media campaigns against NGOs, and direct threats to activists.

Opposition from Corporate Sectors

Many industries, particularly in mining, infrastructure, and energy sectors, perceive environmental NGOs as obstacles to their economic interests. Large corporations often lobby against stricter environmental regulations, making it difficult for NGOs to advocate for sustainable policies. For example, in the Mahan coal mining case, Greenpeace India campaigned against a proposed coal mine in Madhya Pradesh, arguing that it would destroy dense forests and displace indigenous communities. The campaign led to widespread public awareness, eventually forcing the government to cancel the project. However, Greenpeace India faced intense backlash, including the freezing of its funds under FCRA regulations. Similarly, NGOs working on air pollution control, waste management, and plastic bans often face opposition from industries that profit from polluting activities. Many corporations engage in green washing—a tactic where they present misleading environmental claims to counter NGO criticism—making it harder for NGOs to hold them accountable.

Government and Political Resistance

Some NGOs face direct resistance from government authorities, especially when their advocacy conflicts with economic or political agendas. Environmental activists and organizations working on land rights, deforestation, and pollution control have reported instances of:

- Intimidation and harassment, including arrests of environmental activists.
- Bureaucratic restrictions, such as delays in approvals and increased scrutiny of NGO activities.
- Deregistration or fund blockages, affecting their ability to function effectively.

For example, in 2015, the IB (Intelligence Bureau) report labeled certain NGOs as “anti-development” due to their campaigns against coal, nuclear energy, and infrastructure projects. This report led to tighter regulations and restrictions on several NGOs, impacting their work on environmental protection.

Challenges in Behavior Change

Many environmental issues require individual behavioral changes, such as reducing plastic use, adopting renewable energy, and conserving water. However, resistance to change and lack of incentives often make it difficult for NGOs to promote sustainable lifestyles. For instance, despite awareness campaigns on plastic pollution, single-use plastics continue to be widely used in India due to convenience and affordability. Without stronger policy enforcement and incentives for eco-friendly alternatives, NGOs face an uphill battle in changing consumer behavior.

II. Conclusion

NGOs have been crucial to the preservation of India's environment by supporting conservation initiatives, policy lobbying, and awareness-raising activities. To increase their efficacy, NGOs, governmental organizations, and local communities must work together more. Their contribution to sustainability initiatives may be further strengthened by fortifying regulatory frameworks and providing more financial assistance to environmental NGOs. From grassroots activism to policy advocacy and legal interventions, NGOs in India have made a variety

of contributions to environmental protection. The case studies presented show how groups have impacted public policy, inspired communities, and offered creative answers to environmental problems. Notwithstanding their noteworthy accomplishments, NGOs nonetheless encounter challenges including financial limitations, political pressure, and industry opposition. Nonetheless, significant environmental progress in India is still being fueled by their tenacious efforts. Long-term ecological sustainability depends on NGOs, governmental organizations, and local communities working together more closely. India may strive toward a future in which sustainability is incorporated as a fundamental growth concept and economic progress does not come at the expense of environmental deterioration by empowering and assisting environmental NGOs.

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