
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT (ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION MAKING)

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

“By destroying nature, environment, man is committing matricide, having in a way killed Mother Earth. Technological excellence, growth of industries, economical gains has led to depletion of natural resources irreversibly. Indifference to the grave consequences, lack of concern and foresight has contributed in large measures to the alarming position.”

-Justice Arijit Pasayat

In T.N. Godavarman Thirumalpad v. Union of India

Introduction:

Enacted with the intention of safeguarding and enhancing the environment, the Environment Protection Act, 1986 (EPA) specifically seeks to guarantee public participation in environmental decision-making. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure, which mandates that some development projects be examined for possible environmental effects and include provisions for public engagement, is the main tool used to operationalize this obligation. However, despite these provisions, questions remain regarding the actual effectiveness and the various challenges associated with public engagement in these processes in India.

Legal and Regulatory Framework for EIA in India:

The Environment Protection Act, which was passed into law in 1986 with the main objective of protecting and enhancing the environment, is the cornerstone of environmental legislation in India. This law gives the Central Government the authority to create agencies tasked with stopping and managing environmental contamination in all of its manifestations.

Key terms, such as "environment," which includes land, water, and air as well as the relationships between them, living things, and property, are defined broadly in the Act. Additionally, "environmental pollution" and "environmental pollutant" are defined. The Act gives the Central Government broad authority to take any action it thinks is required to protect the environment. This includes the power to impose restrictions on the location of industries in specific areas, set standards for emissions and environmental quality, and create pollution prevention measures. Additionally, important regulatory organizations like the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) were established as a result of the Environment Protection Act. Notably, this Act also established the idea of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is a vital instrument for incorporating environmental factors into planning for development. The most recent amendment to the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 was made in 1991.

The particular steps and prerequisites for environmental clearance have been shaped by a number of EIA Notifications issued under the Environment Protection Act. In 1994, the first EIA Notification established the public hearing procedure and mandated EIA for a specific list of projects. The EIA Notification of 2006 marked a dramatic change by classifying projects into Category A, which required approval from the Central Government, and Category B, which required approval from State-level authorities, in an effort to decentralize the environmental clearance process. This notification gave the public consultation process a clearer framework and introduced a four-stage EIA cycle that includes screening, scoping, public consultation, and appraisal. A reduction in the period allotted for public hearings, exemptions from public engagement for projects considered "strategic," and options for post-facto environmental clearances were among the modifications subsequently introduced by the draft EIA Notification 2020. Due to its potential to weaken public engagement and environmental protections, this draft notification has drawn a lot of criticism. It is also important to remember that the 2006 EIA notification has been amended multiple times, with office memorandums introducing over 100 revisions in only the last five years.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) have released a number of rules and guidelines that supplement the Act and the EIA Notifications. Guidelines for the discharge or emission of pollutants into the environment are outlined in detail in the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986. By publishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and technical guidelines

pertaining to several facets of environmental protection, the CPCB also plays a significant role.

The transition from the 1994 to the 2006 EIA Notification reflects an intention to decentralize environmental governance by empowering state-level authorities. However, this decentralization has also raised concerns regarding the capacity of state-level regulatory bodies to effectively handle their increased responsibilities and the potential for misuse of power. The repeated amendments to the EIA Notification, particularly the debated draft 2020 version, highlight a persistent tension between the goals of promoting ease of doing business and ensuring robust environmental protection alongside meaningful public participation. Provisions within the draft 2020 notification, such as the allowance for post-facto approvals and exemptions from public hearings for certain projects, have been interpreted by some as prioritizing economic development over environmental safeguards, potentially undermining the fundamental objectives of the EIA process.

Provisions and Procedures for Public Consultation in EIA:

The EIA Notifications, particularly the 2006 notification, lay down specific stages and requirements for public consultation. Public consultation is mandated for both Category A and Category B1 projects, which are deemed to have potentially significant environmental impacts. This process primarily involves two key components: first, the solicitation of written comments on the draft EIA report from various stakeholders, and second, the conduction of a public hearing at or in close proximity to the proposed project site. The overarching aim of public consultation is to effectively address the concerns of local individuals and communities who may be directly affected by the project, as well as other interested parties who have a plausible stake in the project's environmental consequences.

The responsibility for organizing and conducting the public hearing rests with the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) or Union Territory Pollution Control Committees (UTPCCs). The notification outlines a structured procedure to ensure that these hearings are conducted in a systematic, time-bound, and transparent manner, thereby facilitating the widest possible public participation. A crucial aspect of this procedure is the requirement that the Executive Summary of the draft EIA report must be made readily available to the public at least 30 days prior to the scheduled date of the public hearing. This provision aims to provide sufficient time for potential participants to understand the key findings and potential impacts of the project before voicing their concerns.

The public consultation process encompasses several important steps, including the notification of the public hearing, ensuring public access to the EIA report and related documents, the conduct of the public hearing itself, and the subsequent consideration of the feedback received from the public. Adequate publicity for the public hearing, including details about the date, time, and venue, is essential to ensure broad participation. The EIA report and its summary are expected to be accessible to the public, often through online portals and other means. The feedback and concerns raised during the public consultation are intended to be duly considered and incorporated into the final EIA report, which then forms a crucial part of the appraisal process for environmental clearance.

However, the EIA framework also includes certain exemptions and special provisions regarding public consultation for specific types of projects. For instance, projects involving the modernization of existing irrigation facilities or the expansion of roads and highways that do not necessitate any additional land acquisition are typically exempted from the requirement of public consultation. The contentious draft EIA Notification 2020 had proposed further exemptions, notably for projects categorized as having "strategic considerations" as determined solely by the Central Government. Additionally, Category B2 projects, which are generally smaller projects with potentially less significant environmental impacts, are not required to undergo either a full EIA study or a public consultation process.

While the 2006 EIA Notification establishes a framework for public consultation, the numerous exemptions and the proposed reduction in consultation timelines within the draft 2020 notification point towards a potential trend of limiting public engagement in environmental decision-making. The exemptions granted to certain project categories and the shortened timeframe for public feedback in the draft 2020 notification suggest a possible prioritization of expediting project clearances, which could potentially compromise the principles of environmental democracy. Furthermore, the effectiveness of public consultation is intrinsically linked to the quality of information presented in the EIA report and the ease with which this information can be accessed and understood by the affected communities. If the EIA reports lack local language translations and are extremely technical, or not readily accessible to the public, the very individuals and communities that the public consultation process aims to engage may be unable to participate meaningfully and articulate their concerns effectively.

Research problem:

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 (EPA), enacted with the objective of protecting and improving the environment, explicitly aims to ensure public involvement in environmental decision-making. This mandate is primarily operationalized through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, which requires certain development projects to undergo scrutiny for their potential environmental consequences and includes clauses for public participation. However, despite these provisions, questions remain regarding the actual effectiveness and the various challenges associated with public engagement in these processes in India.

Several sources indicate a disparity between the legislative intention of fostering public participation and the practical realities of its implementation. While the EPA recognizes the right to a clean environment and promotes public involvement, concerns have been raised about the extent to which this participation genuinely influences environmental outcomes. For instance, the EIA process, a key mechanism for incorporating public views, has been criticized for its inefficiencies and delays. Moreover, public hearings, intended to be a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns, are often described as perfunctory exercises with limited impact on the final fate of projects. Barriers such as limited legitimate spaces for engagement, the provision for only one-time participation, and restricted avenues for appeal further undermine the potential for meaningful public involvement.

The absence of sufficient public knowledge and comprehension of environmental issues and the complexities of the EIA process is a recurrent theme in the analysis of public engagement under the EPA. This ignorance can seriously impair citizens' capacity to participate in consultations and hold polluters responsible. Empirical evidence from studies conducted in India, such as in the state of Rajasthan, reveals that the public often possesses limited knowledge about proposed projects and the reasons for seeking environmental clearance. Arrangements for public hearings have also been found unsatisfactory, and there is a prevalent perception among the public that their input has minimal influence on the decision-making process. The language used in EIA reports is often inaccessible to the interested community, further diminishing the effectiveness of participation. This suggests that public involvement may, at times, be treated as a mere formality to comply with regulatory requirements rather than a genuine effort to incorporate public concerns. Consequently, the central research problem that emerges is: despite the legal mandate for public participation in environmental

decision-making under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, and its implementation through the Environmental Impact Assessment process, the extent to which this participation is meaningful, effective, and genuinely influences environmental outcomes in India remains questionable due to various challenges including limited awareness and procedural inadequacies.

Review of Literature:

1. Article: “Environmental Democracy and the Role of Public Participation in EIA” by Joshi and Banerjee (2018)¹

Joshi and Banerjee explore the theoretical foundations and putting public involvement in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process into practice. Their study, which includes case analyses from India and Southeast Asia, argues that public participation is a cornerstone of environmental democracy but remains largely symbolic in many regions. They identify common challenges such as lack of transparency, inaccessible information, and limited community outreach by authorities. The article emphasizes that meaningful engagement requires more than legal provisions; it needs proactive efforts to empower local communities through capacity building and timely dissemination of information.

2. Article: “Barriers to Effective Participation in Environmental Decision-Making” by Mukherjee and Das (2019)²

Mukherjee and Das analyze the key obstacles that prevent effective public involvement in EIA processes across developing countries, with a focus on India. Their research identifies language barriers, low environmental literacy, and procedural opacity as recurring impediments. Using survey data and focus group discussions, they highlight that vulnerable and marginalized communities are often excluded from consultations, resulting in environmental injustices. The authors propose reforms such as multilingual documentation, community awareness drives, and decentralization of hearing venues to improve inclusivity in environmental governance.³

¹ Joshi, R., & Banerjee, S. (2018). *Environmental democracy and the role of public participation in EIA*. *Environmental Policy Review*, 22(3), 145–162.

² Mukherjee, A., & Das, P. (2019). *Barriers to effective participation in environmental decision-making: A study of the EIA process in India*. *Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, 14(2), 87–105.

Article: “Digital Platforms as Tools for Civic Engagement in Environmental Governance” by sRamesh and Iyer (2021)³

Ramesh and Iyer assess the impact of digital tools—like online portals, mobile apps, and social media—in enhancing public engagement in EIAs. They find that digital platforms have expanded access to environmental information and enabled quicker dissemination of EIA reports. However, the study cautions that digital literacy and internet access disparities can exacerbate existing inequalities. The authors suggest that digital strategies should complement—not replace—traditional methods such as community meetings and paper-based notifications, especially in rural or underserved regions.

4. Article: “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Public Hearings in India’s EIA Framework” by Singh and Thomas (2020)⁴

Singh and Thomas critically evaluate the structure and outcomes of public hearings under India’s EIA Notification, 2006. Based on data from multiple hearings in Maharashtra and Odisha, the authors reveal that hearings are often poorly advertised, dominated by elite voices, and conducted in ways that discourage active local participation. Their analysis shows that while public hearings are legally mandated, their format often lacks genuine deliberation. The authors call for reforms such as independent monitoring bodies, flexible scheduling, and post-hearing feedback mechanisms to ensure that hearings serve their democratic function.

5. Book: *Public Participation in Environmental Decision Making: Global Trends and Indian Perspectives* by Ananya Roy (2022)⁵

In this comprehensive book, Ananya Roy provides an in-depth examination of global best practices in public participation and contrasts them with Indian EIA procedures. The book’s first section reviews participatory models in countries like Canada and South Africa, which emphasize transparency and early-stage involvement. The second section critiques India’s procedural shortcomings, including limited legal enforcement and tokenistic consultations. In the final section, Roy proposes a multi-pronged approach to reform—combining legal

³ Ramesh, V., & Iyer, L. (2021). *Digital platforms as tools for civic engagement in environmental governance*. *Environmental Governance Quarterly*, 9(1), 52–69.

⁴ Singh, T., & Thomas, M. (2020). *Evaluating the effectiveness of public hearings in India’s EIA framework*. *Indian Journal of Environmental Law*, 11(4), 211–230

⁵ Roy, A. (2022). *Public participation in environmental decision making: Global trends and Indian perspectives*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

amendments, institutional accountability, and grassroots capacity building—to make public participation more inclusive, effective, and equitable.

Objective of the Study:

Examining the scope, efficacy, and difficulties of public involvement in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process is the main goal of this research. The study specifically seeks to:

1. Determine how much the general public knows about the EIA process and the sources that contribute to this knowledge.
2. Evaluate the accessibility and comprehensibility of EIA-related documents and reports among diverse communities.
3. Identify barriers and limitations faced by the general public, including marginalized groups, in participating effectively in the EIA process.
4. Analyze the role of feedback methods and the perceived impact of public input on ultimate decision-making.
5. Explore the role of NGOs and digital platforms in enhancing public participation and outreach.
6. Recommend practical measures to improve inclusivity, transparency, and effectiveness in public engagement within the EIA framework.

Research Questions:

1. How well-informed and aware is the general public about the EIA process and their opportunity to participate?
2. How frequently and effectively do public hearings take place in selected case studies or regions?
3. What are the socioeconomic, linguistic, geographic, and political obstacles that prevent effective public participation?

4. To what extent do marginalize or affected communities (tribal groups, women, rural populations) engage in and influence the EIA process?
5. How can public participation, transparency, and accountability be enhanced?
6. How can technology (e.g., digital platforms, GIS mapping, online hearings) be leveraged to improve access and engagement in the EIA process?

Hypothesis:

More environmentally sustainable and socially just outcomes of environmental decision-making in India are positively connected with the degree and caliber of public engagement in the Environmental Impact Assessment process, which is required by the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Significance of the study:

This research holds significant relevance across academic, societal, and policy spheres.

1. From an Academic Perspective, it will contribute to the existing scholarship on environmental law and policy in India by providing a focused and in-depth analysis of the practical implementation and effectiveness of public participation provisions as mandated by the Environment Protection Act, 1986. By examining the interplay between the legal framework and on-the-ground realities, this study will engage with ongoing scholarly debates concerning the role and impact of public participation in environmental governance and its ultimate influence on environmental outcomes.
2. From a societal perspective, effective public participation is fundamental to ensuring environmental justice and fostering sustainable development. This research will illuminate the challenges encountered by the public in their efforts to engage with environmental decision-making processes in India. By identifying these obstacles, the study can potentially inform strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing public involvement, empowering citizens to protect their environmental rights, and promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmental governance.
3. In terms of policy relevance, the findings of this research are expected to offer valuable

insights for policymakers in India. A thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the current legal and procedural framework for public participation under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, and the Environment Protection Rules, 1986, is crucial for evidence-based policy formulation. This study may pinpoint specific areas within the legal framework or the implementation of the EIA process that require reform or strengthening to ensure more meaningful, effective, and impactful public involvement in environmental decision-making. The recommendations emanating from this research could contribute to the development of more robust and participatory environmental governance mechanisms in India.

Limitation:

Conducting research on public participation in environmental decision-making under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, in India presents several potential limitations.

1. Access to comprehensive and easily understandable information about proposed projects and the EIA process can be a significant constraint.
2. The technical and legalistic language often employed in EIA reports makes it challenging for the general public and, consequently, for researchers to fully grasp the potential environmental and social impacts.
3. Furthermore, the effectiveness of public participation is often influenced by a complex interplay of contextual factors that can be difficult to control or account for in research. These factors include the prevailing socio-political landscape, the level of environmental awareness among the public, and the genuine willingness of project proponents and government authorities to consider and incorporate public input.
4. Establishing a direct causal link between public participation and actual environmental outcomes poses an inherent methodological challenge due to the influence of numerous other variables.
5. Moreover, the very definition and measurement of "effective" public participation can be subjective and context-dependent. Practical limitations such as the cost and time-intensive nature of conducting in-depth non-doctrinal research, including interviews and surveys across diverse geographical locations, may also impact the scope and scale

of the study.

6. Additionally, the potential for public participation processes to sometimes reinforce existing power imbalances or become mere symbolic exercises without substantive impact adds another layer of complexity to the research.
7. The scattered nature of existing empirical evidence on the benefits of participatory governance further underscores the challenges in drawing broad generalizations.
8. Finally, opposition from certain stakeholders who may view enhanced public participation as a hindrance to development projects could also pose a limitation in terms of access to data and willingness to participate in the research.

Anticipated Findings:

Based on the existing literature and the analysis of research snippets, this study anticipates several key findings. It is likely that the research will reveal that while the Environment Protection Act, 1986, and the EIA process mandate public participation, the actual implementation often falls short of ensuring meaningful engagement and genuine influence on environmental decision-making. Specific challenges such as limited access to comprehensive and understandable project information, a perceived lack of capacity among the public to effectively engage with complex EIA reports, and procedural limitations within public hearing processes are expected to be highlighted.

The study may also find a positive correlation between EIA projects that exhibit higher levels and quality of public participation and more favorable environmental and social outcomes, as perceived by the local communities and other relevant stakeholders. This would suggest that when public concerns are adequately considered and addressed, the resulting environmental decisions are more likely to be environmentally sustainable and socially equitable. Furthermore, the research might uncover variations in the effectiveness of public participation across different project sectors, geographical regions, and the specific nature of the development projects undertaken.

CHAPTER II - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a non-doctrinal, mixed-methods approach to comprehensively

examine public participation in environmental decision-making under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. This approach will integrate both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject. A case study approach will be adopted, focusing on a carefully selected number of EIA projects across different sectors and regions in India. This methodology will allow for an in-depth exploration of the public participation processes, the challenges encountered, and the perceived environmental and social outcomes in specific real-world contexts.

Data Collecting Instrument:

To gather rich and varied data, several instruments will be utilized. The primary instrument is a Google Form questionnaire (available at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScb0EMSSkg1FgoqGT2eUG-q8MmH0axKqPfMLfDNoEOX6NxPw/viewform?usp=dialog>), comprising 30 closed-ended questions. These cover: basic demographics (age, gender, education status) and public awareness, levels of participation, and perceived influence.

Data Collection Method:

The questionnaire was distributed online via social media and email, residents of Tamil Nadu. Respondents accessed the form link, provided informed consent, and completed the survey anonymously. Data collection remained open for three weeks, with reminder prompts issued at one-week intervals to maximize participation. The aim will be to obtain a sample size of 100-150.

Sample and Size:

A convenience sample of 101 individuals participated. This sample size balances breadth of input with manageability for statistical analysis

Variables:

Independent Variable: Level and Quality of participation

This includes factors such as:

- Degree of public awareness about EIA

- Accessibility and clarity of EIA reports
- Participation in public hearings
- Inclusivity (representation of marginalized groups, gender balance)
- Opportunities for meaningful feedback and consultation

Dependent Variable: Environmental and Social outcomes

This includes:

- Environmental protection outcomes (e.g., mitigation of harmful project impacts)
- Inclusion of community concerns in project decisions
- Equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens
- Representation of local and marginalized interests in final decisions

Sampling Techniques:

Convenience sampling was employed, selecting respondents based on availability and willingness to complete the online questionnaire. While non-random, this method efficiently captured diverse perspectives across age, gender, education status.

Data Analysis:

Collected data were exported from Google Forms into a spreadsheet. Quantitative data gathered through closed-ended survey questions will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the levels of public awareness, participation rates, and perceptions of influence on environmental decision-making. Quantitative analysis involved calculating frequencies and percentages for each response category. Cross-tabulations assessed how demographics influenced perceptions and attitudes. No open-ended responses were included; all questions were closed-ended to streamline statistical summarization. To examine the relationship between the level and quality of public participation and the perceived environmental and social outcomes, correlation analysis may be employed. Furthermore, regression analysis could be utilized to explore the extent to which the independent variables (level and quality of

participation) predict the dependent variables (environmental and social outcomes), while also considering the potential influence of mediating or moderating factors identified in the study. The integration of findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses will provide a more robust and nuanced understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of public participation in environmental decision-making under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

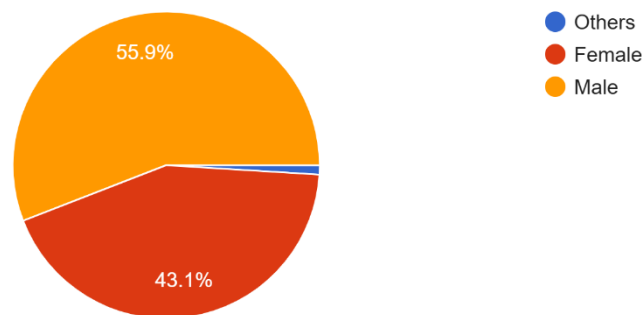
CHAPTER III - RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INFERENCES

Research Findings:

General Questions

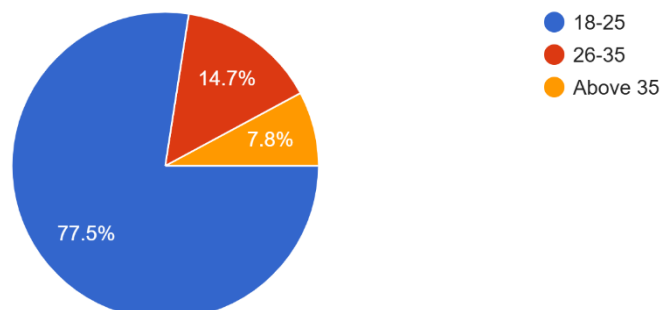
Gender

102 responses



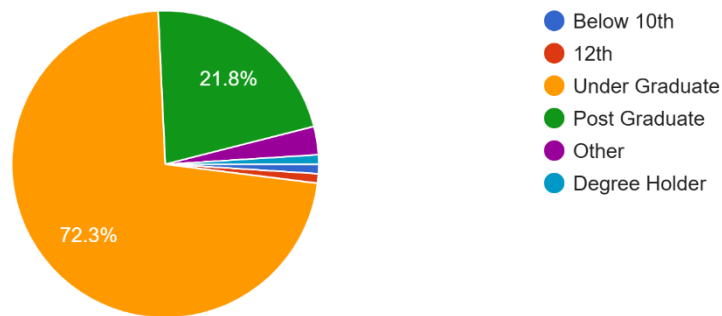
Age

102 responses



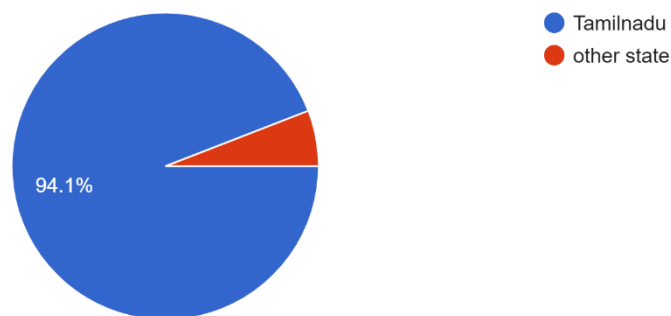
Education Status

101 responses



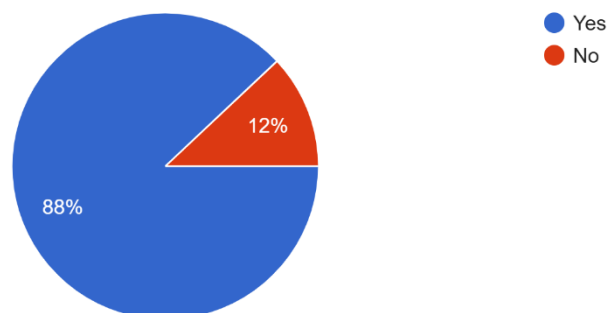
Where do you live?

102 responses



Have you heard of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) process?

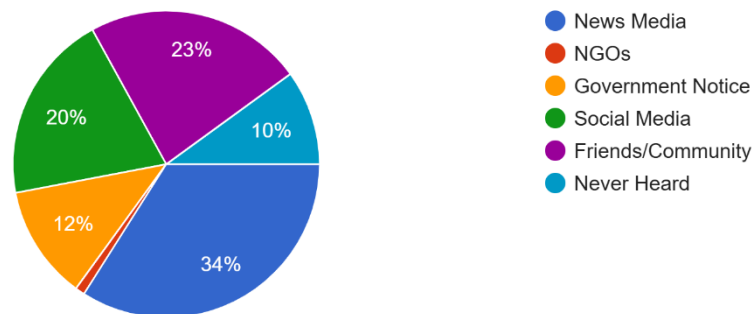
100 responses



Out of the 100 members, 88 members heard about the “Environment Impact Assessment” and 12 were not aware of the Environment Impact Assessment.

How did you first hear about EIA?

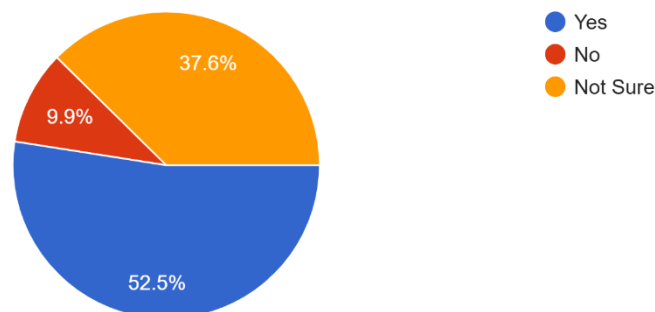
100 responses



Out of 100 members, 34 members came to know about the Environment Impact Assessment through News Media, 23 heard from Friends/community, 20 heard from social media, 12 heard from Government Notice, 1 heard from NGO and 10 never about the EIA.

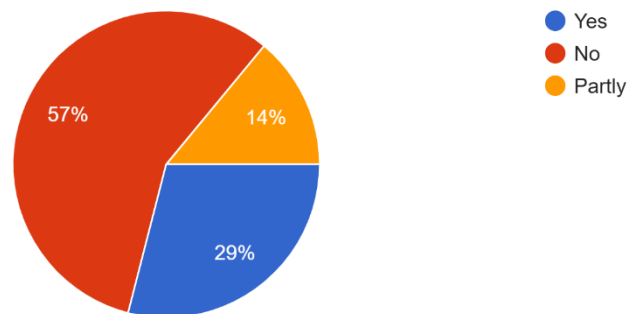
Are EIA Documents available in a language you understand?

101 responses



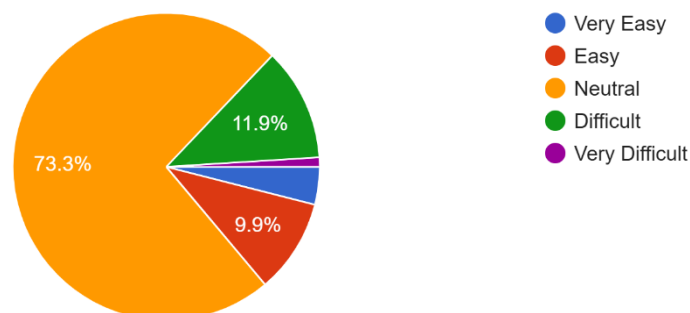
Out of 101 responses, 53 members expressed that EIA Documents available in a language that they can understand, 38 expressed that they are not sure about the availability of the EIA Documents in the language that they can understand and 10 expressed that EIA Documents are not available in the language that they can understand.

Have you ever read or reviewed an EIA Report
100 responses



Out of 101 responses, 58 neither read or nor reviewed the EIA Report, 29 read/reviewed the EIA Report and 14 expressed that they partly read/reviewed the EIA Report.

How easy is it to understand an EIA Report?
101 responses



Out of 101 responses – the following responses regarding understandability of EIA Report

74 members– Neutral

12 members– Difficult

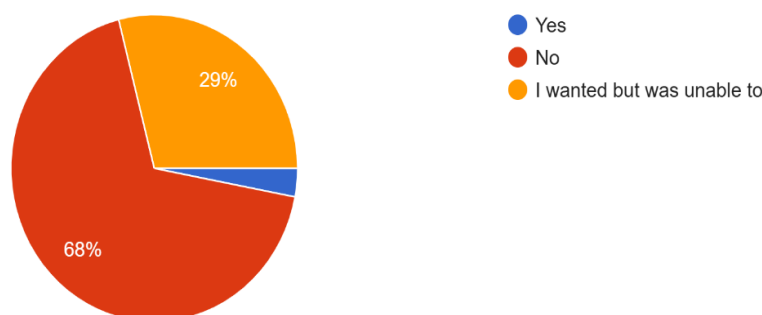
10 members – Easy

4 Members – Very Easy

1 Member – Very Difficult

Have you ever participated in an EIA Public Hearing?

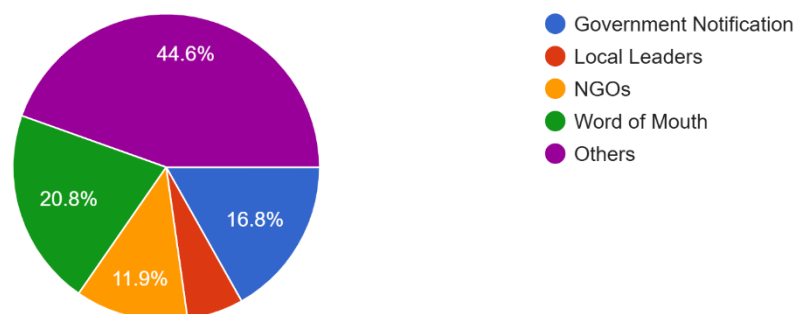
100 responses



Out of 101 responses, when it comes to participation of Public Hearing regarding Environment Impact Assessment – 69 members were not participated, 29 members wanted to participate but was unable to do it and only 3 members were participated.

How did you learn about the public hearing?

101 responses



Out of 101 responses,

45 members were learned from “Others”

21 members were learned from “Word of Mouth”

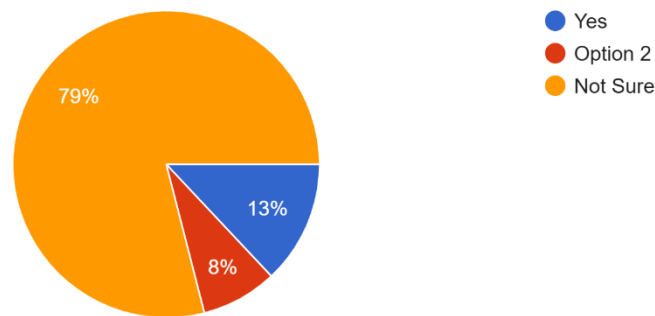
17 members were learned from “Government Notification”

12 members were learned from “NGO’s”

6 members were learned from “Local Leaders”

Were your concerns considered in Final Decision?

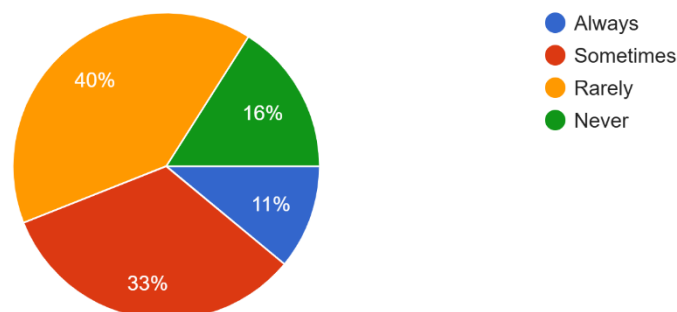
100 responses



Out of 100 responses, 79 members expressed that they are not sure that their concerns are considered in Final Decision Making, 13 members responded that their decisions is considered in Final Decision, 8 members expressed that their decision are not considered in Final Decision Hearing.

Are Local Communities sufficiently consulted before approving large projects?

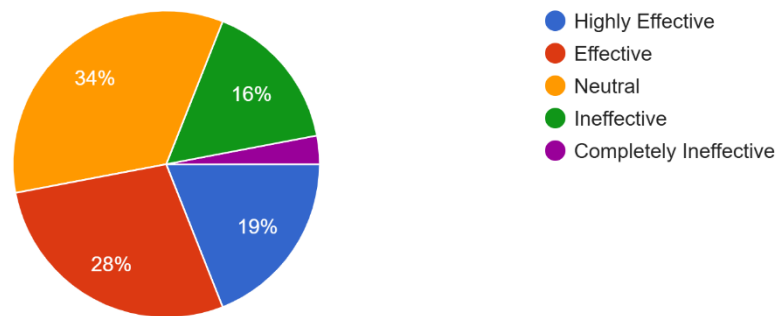
100 responses



Out of 100 responses, 40 members expressed that local communities are rarely consulted before approving large projects, 33 expressed that sometimes that local communities are consulted, 16 expressed that local communities never consulted and 11 members expressed that always the local communities are consulted before approving large projects.

How effective are public Hearings in protecting environmental rights?

100 responses



When it comes to effectiveness of Public Hearing in terms of protecting environmental rights—

34 Members responded that – Neutral

28 Members responded that – Effective

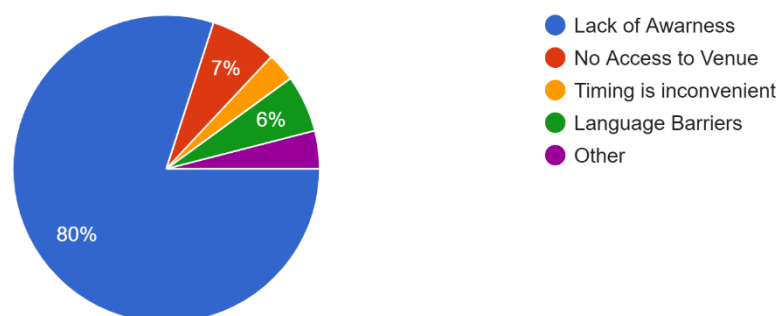
19 Members responded that – Highly Effective

16 Members responded that - Ineffective

4 Members responded that – completely ineffective.

What Challenges do people face in attending EIA hearings?

100 responses

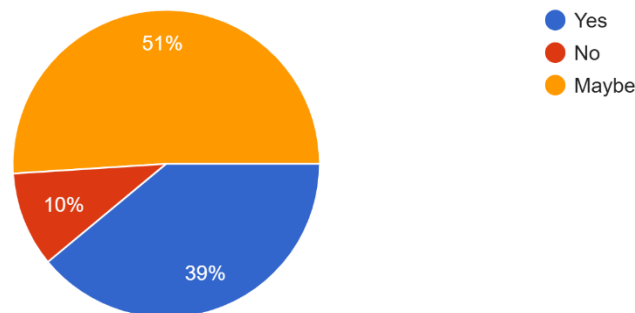


When it comes to challenges in terms of attending Environment Impact Assessment Public Hearings – 80 members responded that there is lack of awareness, 7 members expressed that

they don't have the access to venue, 6 members expressed that there is language barrier, 5 expressed other reasons and 2 members responded that timing is inconvenient for them.

Do you feel your opinion can influence environmental decisions?

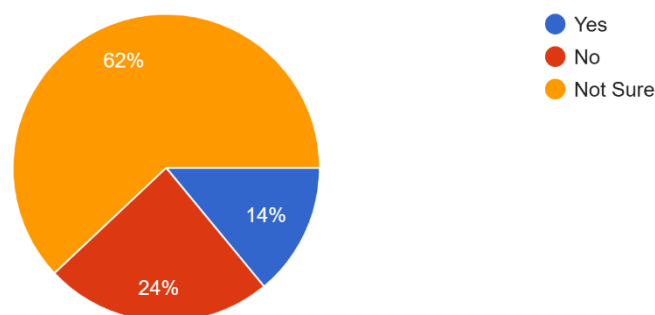
100 responses



Out of 100 responses, 51 felt their opinion maybe influence environmental decisions, 39 felt that their opinion will influence environmental decisions and 10 felt their opinion will not influence environmental decisions.

Are women and marginalized groups adequately represented in EIA Consultations?

100 responses



Out of 100 responses, when it comes to representation of Women and Marginalized Groups in EIA Consultation

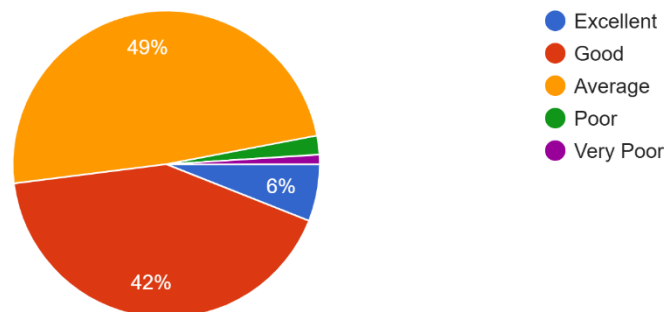
62 members responded that they are "not sure"

24 members responded that "No"

14 Members responded that “Yes”

How do you rate the role of NGOs in spreading EIA Awareness?

100 responses



Out of 100 responses, when it comes to role of NGO's in spreading EIA Awareness

49 members responded that “Average”

42 members responded that “Good”

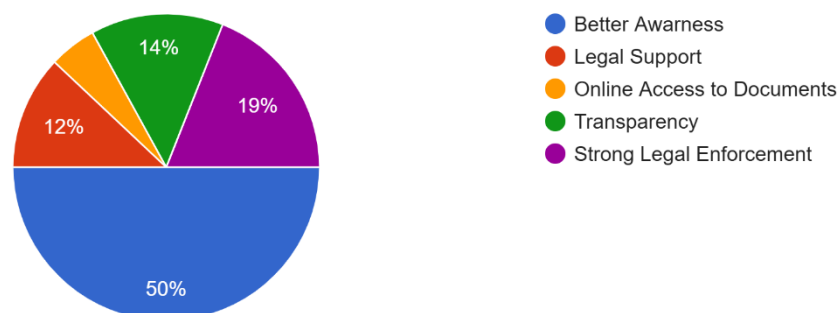
6 members responded that “Excellent”

2 Members responded that “Very Poor”

1 member responded that “Poor”

What would improve public participation in EIA Process

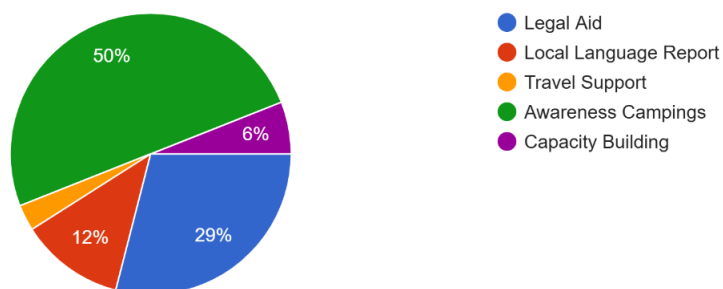
100 responses



When it comes to improvement of Public Participation in Environment Impact Assessment

50 members expressed require better awarness about EIA, 18 expressed that require strong legal support, 12 member expressed that legal support is required, 14 members expressed that transparency is required and 6 expressed that the document regarding EIA need to be accessed through Online Platforms.

What kind of support do people need to participate in Environment Decision making?
100 responses



When it comes to support that people require to participate in Environment Decision making

50 members responded that “Awarness Campings” required

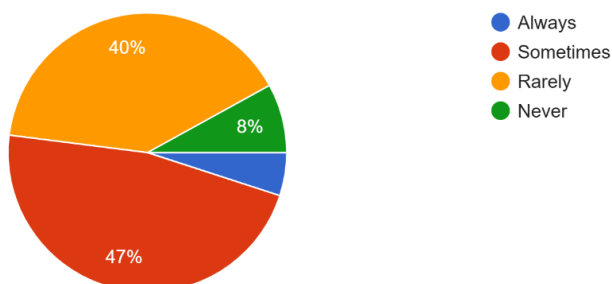
29 members responded that “Legal Aid” required

12 members responded that “Local Language Report” required

6 members responded that “Capacity Building” required

3 members responded that “Travel Support” required.

Do you believe the government takes environmental concerns seriously?
100 responses



When it comes to Public Opinion about government concern over environment

47 members responded that – “Sometimes”

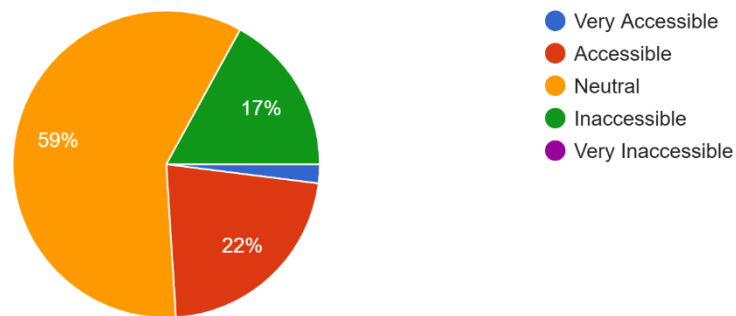
40 members responded that – “Rarely”

8 members responded that – “Never”

5 members responded that – “Always”

How would you describe the accessibility of EIA-related information?

100 responses



When it comes to accessibility of Environment Impact Assessment related information-

59 members responded that “Neutral”

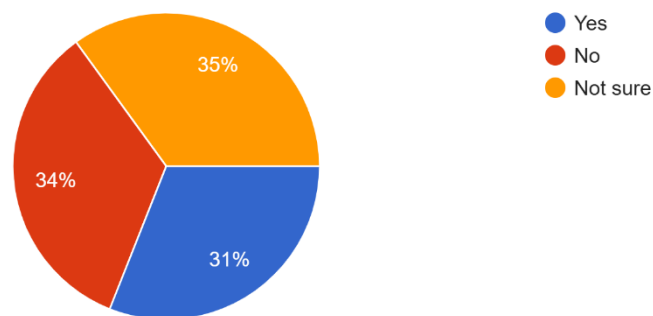
22 members responded that “Accessible”

17 members responded that “Inaccessible”

2 members responded that “Very Accessible”

Do you feel safe in expressing dissent in public hearings?

100 responses



When it comes to expressing dissent in Public Hearing –

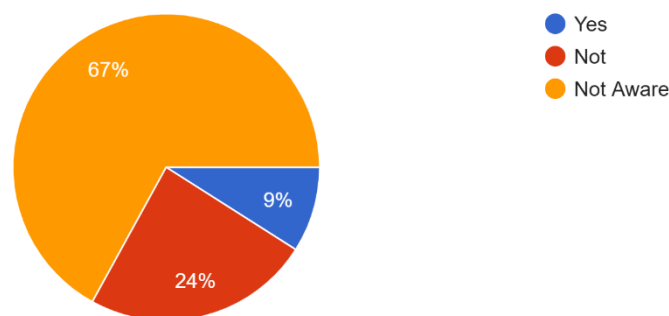
35 members expressed that “Not Sure”

34 members expressed that “No”

31 members expressed that “Yes”

Is there a feedback mechanism post-hearing?

100 responses



When it comes to feedback mechanism post-hearing –

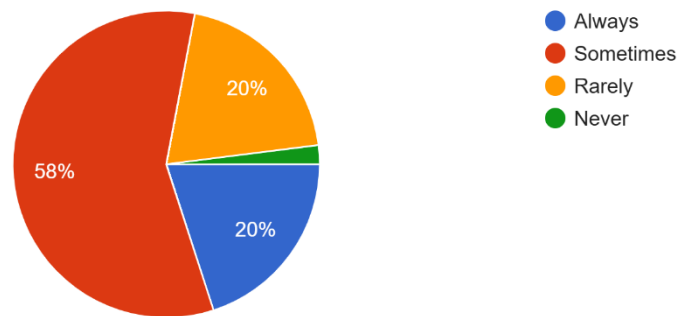
67 members expressed that “Not Aware”

24 members expressed that “Not”

9 members expressed that “Yes”

Do EIA process reflect environment justice?

100 responses



When it comes to EIA process reflect environment justice

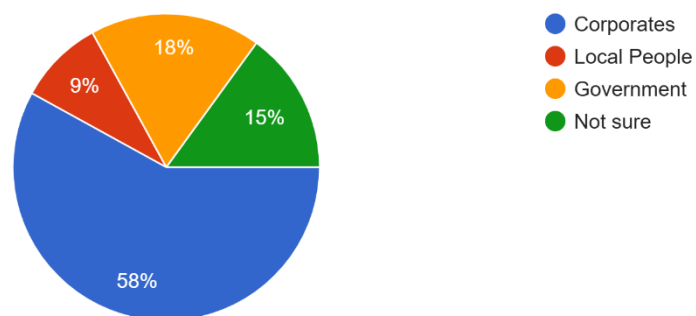
58 members expressed that “Sometimes”

20 members expressed that “Rarely”

20 members expressed that “Always”

Who benefits most from EIA exemptions or fast-tracks clearances?

100 responses



When it comes to EIA exemptions or fast-track clearances –

58 members expressed that “Corporates” got benefited.

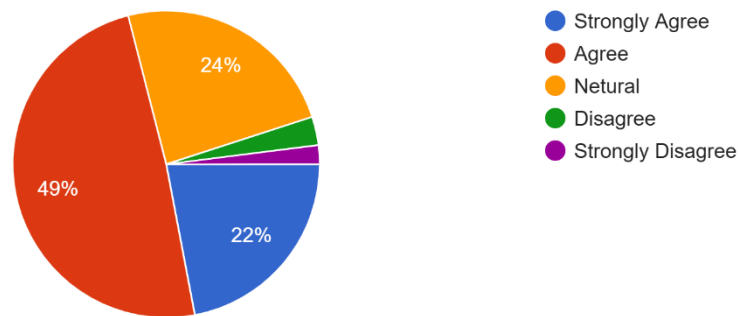
18 members expressed that “Government” got benefited.

15 members expressed that they are “not sure” got benefited.

9 members expressed that “local people” got benefited.

Do you think digital platforms can enhance participation in EIA?

100 responses



When it comes, role of digital platform in terms of enhancing public participation in EIA

49 members responded that “Agreed”

24 members responded that “Disagree”

22 members responded that “Strongly Agree”

3 members responded that “Strongly Disagree”

2 members responded that “Diagree”

Research analysis:

1. Awareness of the EIA Process

The study revealed a high level of awareness among respondents, with 88% of the 100 participants indicating they had heard of the EIA, while 12% had not. This is a positive indicator, but the source of information varied significantly.

- 34% learned about EIA through news media, making it the most influential medium.
- 23% through friends/community, and 20% via social media, indicating informal and digital platforms play a vital role.

- Only 12% were informed via government notices, and just 1% via NGOs, which suggests a need for stronger institutional outreach.

2. Accessibility and Language Barrier

Out of 101 respondents:

- 53% believed EIA documents are in a language they understand.
- 38% were unsure, and 10% found them unavailable in an understandable language.

This highlights a gap in effective communication and the need for multilingual availability of EIA documentation to ensure inclusivity.

3. Engagement with EIA Reports

Engagement with the actual content was low:

- 58 respondents had not read the EIA report.
- Only 29 had read it, and 14 had partially reviewed the report.

When it came to understanding:

- A majority (74) remained neutral.
- Only 14 found it easy or very easy, while 13 found it difficult or very difficult.

This indicates either a lack of motivation, poor accessibility, or complexity in language and structure of the reports.

4. Public Hearing Participation

- 69 respondents did not participate in the public hearings.
- 29 wanted to but couldn't, indicating potential barriers.
- Only 3 participated.

The top challenges cited were:

- Lack of awareness (80 responses)
- Venue access issues (7)
- Language barriers (6)
- Inconvenient timing (2)

These barriers highlight critical shortcomings in inclusivity and logistical planning of the public hearing process.

5. Sources of EIA Information

Multiple sources contributed to awareness:

- 45 learned through "others"
- 21 through word of mouth
- 17 through government notifications
- 12 through NGOs

This again emphasizes a need to formalize and strengthen NGO and government outreach.

6. Influence on Decision-Making and Consultation

- 79% were unsure if their concerns were considered in the final decisions.
- Only 13% felt included, while 8% felt excluded.

On consultation of local communities before approving large projects:

- 40% said rarely
- 33% said sometimes

- 16% said never
- Only 11% said always

These findings reflect a significant perception of exclusion and the decision-making process's lack of openness.

7. Perception of Public Hearing Effectiveness

- 34 rated public hearings as neutral
- 28 as effective, and 19 as highly effective
- 16 said ineffective, and 4 said completely ineffective

This shows a polarized opinion and an overall lukewarm confidence in the effectiveness of public hearings.

8. Support Required for Better Participation

Participants cited the following needs:

- Awareness campaigns (50)
- Legal aid (29)
- Local language reports (12)
- Capacity building (6)
- Travel support (3)

This highlights the multi-dimensional support required to enhance civic engagement in environmental decisions.

9. Representation and Inclusivity

On representation of women and marginalized groups:

- 62 were not sure
- 24 said no, and only 14 said yes

This suggests an unclear or weak presence of vulnerable groups in EIA consultations, a key indicator of environmental justice gaps.

10. Role of NGOs and Digital Platforms

NGO role in EIA awareness:

- 49 rated it average
- 42 as good
- Only 6 said excellent, and 3 rated it poor or very poor

Digital platforms:

- 49 agreed they enhance participation
- 22 strongly agreed
- 24 disagreed or strongly disagreed

This indicates moderate to strong support for using digital tools but still a need to expand reach and usability.

11. Government Concern and Feedback Mechanisms

On government concern over the environment:

- 47 said sometimes
- 40 said rarely
- Only 5 said always

On feedback mechanisms:

- 67 were not aware of any
- 24 said there was none
- 9 acknowledged a feedback mechanism

These results demonstrate a lack of accountability and openness following the hearing as well as mistrust of the government's goals.

12. Environmental Justice and Exemptions

- 58 said EIA sometimes reflects environmental justice
- 20 said rarely
- 20 said always

On who benefits from EIA exemptions:

- 58 said corporates
- 18 said government
- 15 were not sure
- Only 9 said local people

This underscores a widespread perception of corporate favoritism in environmental decision-making.

CHAPTER IV – RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Recommendations:

1. **Strengthen awareness** through targeted campaigns in local languages.
2. **Enhance accessibility** of EIA reports—digitally and in simplified formats.
3. **Institutionalize support mechanisms** such as legal aid, travel support, and community

facilitation.

4. **Ensure inclusion** of women and marginalized groups through quotas and outreach.
5. **Leverage digital platforms** while bridging the digital divide.
6. **Improve transparency** with clear feedback systems and follow-up communication post-hearing.
7. **Limit fast-track clearances** and prioritize community concerns in approvals.

Conclusion:

The hypothesis — *“The level and quality of public participation in the Environmental Impact Assessment process, as mandated by the Environment Protection Act, 1986, are positively correlated with more environmentally sustainable and socially equitable outcomes of environmental decision-making in India”* — is partially proved by the findings of this study. While the research indicates a high level of general awareness about the EIA process and growing support for digital tools and awareness campaigns, actual public engagement remains limited. Most respondents had not read EIA reports, few participated in public hearings, and many felt unsure or excluded from the decision-making process. Additionally, concerns around language barriers, lack of transparency, weak feedback mechanisms, and underrepresentation of marginalized groups highlight critical flaws in the implementation of participatory mechanisms. Although a connection between meaningful participation and environmental justice is recognized in theory, the current quality and inclusivity of participation are insufficient to consistently yield socially equitable and environmentally sustainable outcomes. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported in principle, but real-world practices fall short of realizing its full potential.

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