

# The Role Of The National Green Tribunal (NGT) In Environmental Protection

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## Abstract

*This paper delves into the critical role of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in strengthening environmental protection mechanisms within India's legal system. The NGT, established in 2010, was designed to fill the institutional gap in environmental adjudication by offering a dedicated forum for the resolution of disputes concerning environmental rights and obligations. Its mandate extends to applying specialised knowledge and legal principles such as the polluter-pays principle, the precautionary principle, and sustainable development. By reviewing several landmark judgments, the paper highlights how the NGT has influenced regulatory compliance and shaped environmental governance across diverse sectors, including industrial emissions, waste management, and ecological conservation. It further examines the institutional strengths of the NGT, including expedited hearings and technical expertise, while also critically evaluating the challenges it faces, such as jurisdictional ambiguity, inconsistent enforcement, and limited resources.*

*Moreover, the paper analyses the socio-legal impact of NGT decisions on local communities and environmental activists. It underscores how public interest litigation and civil society participation have enhanced the tribunal's reach and effectiveness. Through empirical evidence and legal analysis, the research illustrates the NGT's role in setting environmental precedents. It also addresses concerns around institutional independence and consistency in judgment enforcement. Ultimately, this paper proposes reform pathways to fortify the NGT's future as a central pillar of India's environmental rule of law.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental protection has emerged as a global necessity due to the accelerating threats posed by pollution, deforestation, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the depletion of natural resources. These challenges have significant repercussions not only on ecosystems but also on human health, water security, food systems, and economic stability. In the context of India, the situation is particularly alarming given the rapid pace of industrialisation, urbanisation, and infrastructural development that often occurs at the expense of ecological sustainability. The impact of environmental degradation is disproportionately felt by vulnerable populations, including rural communities, tribal groups, and low-income urban dwellers who rely directly on natural resources for their livelihoods.

Recognising the urgent need for a specialised legal mechanism to address environmental violations, the Government of India established the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2010 through the enactment of the National Green Tribunal Act. The NGT was envisioned as a quasi-judicial body with the mandate to provide prompt and effective remedies in environmental matters, thereby easing the burden on regular courts that often lack the technical expertise to handle complex ecological disputes. This institution reflects India's commitment to uphold the right to a clean and healthy environment as part of the broader constitutional right to life under Article 21.

The formation of the NGT also aligned India with its international obligations under multilateral environmental agreements such as the Rio Declaration of 1992, which emphasises access to justice in environmental matters. With jurisdiction over cases arising under multiple environmental statutes, the tribunal combines legal and scientific expertise to ensure that both procedural and substantive justice is delivered efficiently.

This paper aims to analyse the evolving role of the NGT in India's environmental governance framework. It

examines the institutional structure and operational mandate of the tribunal, evaluates its contributions through key judgments, assesses its effectiveness in delivering justice, and identifies the primary challenges it faces in implementation and enforcement. Furthermore, the study outlines strategic reforms that could strengthen the tribunal's capacity and ensure its continued relevance in promoting environmental justice in the years to come.

## **2. Background of Environmental Adjudication in India**

Before the establishment of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), environmental matters in India were adjudicated primarily through the constitutional writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and various High Courts, under Articles 32 and 226 of the Indian Constitution, respectively. These provisions enabled individuals and public interest groups to seek judicial remedies for the violation of fundamental rights, especially the Right to Life under Article 21, which has been expansively interpreted to include the right to a clean and healthy environment.

The Indian judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, has historically played a crucial role in shaping environmental jurisprudence through a series of landmark rulings. Notable among these are *M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India*, which addressed issues such as industrial pollution, vehicular emissions, and river contamination; and *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum vs. Union of India*, which introduced the concepts of sustainable development and the precautionary principle into Indian environmental law. These cases were milestones in promoting judicial activism and public interest litigation (PIL) as tools for environmental protection.

Despite these progressive rulings, the regular court system faced inherent limitations in effectively resolving environmental disputes. The increasing complexity of such cases, which often required scientific data interpretation, technical assessments, and environmental impact analysis, posed challenges for traditional courts that lacked specialised knowledge. Additionally, environmental cases were often delayed due to the courts' overwhelming dockets filled with civil, criminal, and administrative matters, leading to substantial backlogs and a failure to provide timely justice.

Acknowledging these challenges, the Law Commission of India, in its 186th Report, recommended the establishment of special environmental courts with judicial and technical members. The report emphasised the need for dedicated forums to ensure the effective and efficient resolution of environmental disputes. Furthermore, India's international commitments, particularly under Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, obligated the country to ensure access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters.

These domestic and international developments created the impetus for institutional reform, eventually leading to the enactment of the National Green Tribunal Act in 2010. This Act paved the way for the formation of the NGT as a specialised body designed to overcome the procedural and technical inadequacies of conventional courts. The NGT's creation represented a shift toward more scientific, informed, and expeditious environmental adjudication within India's legal and administrative framework.

## **3. Formation and Mandate of the NGT**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) was established through the enactment of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, as a response to the increasing inadequacies observed in India's traditional judicial system when dealing with environmental matters. The need for a specialised body became evident as environmental issues grew more complex, often requiring technical and scientific evaluation that regular courts were ill-equipped to handle. These challenges called for a judicial forum that could deliver fast, informed, and enforceable decisions in disputes involving environmental harm and natural resource management. The NGT's formation, therefore, marked a significant evolution in India's environmental governance and legal system. The primary objective of the NGT is to serve as an expert adjudicatory authority specifically tasked with addressing civil cases involving substantial questions relating to the environment, including violations of legal rights under environmental laws. Its dual mandate—to provide both original and appellate jurisdiction—makes it a comprehensive forum for a wide range of environmental disputes. This dual structure allows the tribunal

not only to hear fresh matters but also to review decisions made by government authorities or regulatory bodies. Importantly, its decisions carry the same authority as those issued by civil courts and are enforceable unless stayed or overturned by the Supreme Court of India, to which appeals can be made within 90 days of a judgment.

The NGT exercises jurisdiction over cases arising from seven core environmental statutes, which collectively serve as the legislative foundation for environmental regulation in India:

- **The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974:** Focuses on preventing and controlling water pollution, regulating discharges from industries, and maintaining water quality standards.
- **The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** Controls the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes and promotes the preservation of forest ecosystems.
- **The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:** Seeks to monitor and reduce air pollution from various sources, including vehicular emissions and industrial activities.
- **The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Acts as an umbrella legislation providing overarching authority to regulate activities that pose threats to environmental quality.
- **The Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Aims to conserve India's rich biodiversity and ensure equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biological resources. ("Shankar IAS Summary: Act And Policies - EduRev")

The tribunal is further empowered to grant relief, compensation, and restitution in environmental cases. It may award compensation for harm caused to individuals, property, or the environment itself. This includes not just punitive action against violators, but also restorative measures to rehabilitate degraded ecosystems. Such powers enable the NGT to act as both a protective and corrective mechanism, offering victims of environmental harm not only judicial recognition but also tangible remedies.

Crucially, the NGT is guided by three foundational principles of international environmental law, which are now firmly embedded in Indian jurisprudence:

- **Polluter-Pays Principle:** Holds that the entity responsible for causing pollution must bear the costs of managing and remedying the environmental damage, thereby internalizing environmental externalities.
- **Precautionary Principle:** Advocates for preventive action in cases where scientific evidence about potential harm is inconclusive, emphasizing the importance of avoiding risks before they materialize.
- **Principle of Sustainable Development:** Balances environmental protection with developmental needs, promoting long-term ecological integrity without compromising the needs of future generations.

The operational design of the NGT reflects a strong emphasis on efficiency and decentralisation. The tribunal is mandated to resolve cases within six months of their filing, offering an expedited process compared to the often prolonged timelines in conventional courts. This feature is especially important for environmental cases, where delays can lead to irreversible damage.

To improve regional access to environmental justice, the NGT functions through a Principal Bench in New Delhi, supplemented by regional benches in Bhopal, Pune, Chennai, and Kolkata. These regional benches help bring the tribunal closer to affected communities, reducing geographical and procedural barriers to justice.

#### 4. Landmark Judgments by the NGT

Since its inception, NGT has delivered a series of significant judgments that have reshaped environmental governance in India. These rulings have not only enforced compliance with existing environmental regulations but have also established important legal principles, contributing to the evolution of a robust body of environmental jurisprudence. The tribunal has demonstrated a consistent commitment to balancing development with ecological protection, and its decisions have had lasting impacts on policy enforcement and public awareness.

- **Sterlite Industries Case (2013):** In this landmark judgment, the NGT ordered the closure of Sterlite

Industries' copper smelting plant in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu. The plant had been the subject of numerous complaints regarding hazardous emissions, particularly the release of sulfur dioxide gas, which posed severe health risks to residents. The tribunal relied on extensive expert reports and data to conclude that the plant had repeatedly violated environmental norms. The decision sent a strong message that economic and industrial interests cannot override public health and environmental safety. It underscored the tribunal's authority and willingness to take decisive action against large corporate entities responsible for environmental harm.

- **Illegal Sand Mining Case, Uttar Pradesh (2013):** In a significant judgment on large-scale unauthorised mining of sand in the river beds of UP, the NGT responded on a petition highlighting violations of environmental norms and the failure to obtain necessary clearances. The tribunal has put an immediate halt to all such mining activities without Environmental Clearance (EC) and slammed the authorities for not implementing the law. Referring to ecological destruction, drying of water bodies, and the disruption of the local economy, the NGT stressed on sustainable development and the protection of the environment. The judgement led to more rigorous enforcement of minor mineral mining and empowered civil society in overseeing the extractive industry.
- **Almitra H. Patel vs. Union of India (2014):** This case was a watershed moment in addressing the systemic failure of municipalities across the country in managing solid waste. Almitra Patel, a long-standing environmental activist, had previously petitioned the Supreme Court, and the matter was later taken up by the NGT. The tribunal scrutinised the implementation of the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2000, and found widespread non-compliance. It issued strict directives to municipal bodies to prepare and execute time-bound action plans for scientific waste disposal. The NGT also emphasised that failure to manage waste violated the citizens' fundamental right to a clean and healthy environment, which is protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. The judgment not only imposed fines on defaulting authorities but also directed regular monitoring, thus elevating the standard for municipal accountability.
- **Art of Living Foundation Case (2016):** The tribunal dealt with the environmental degradation caused by the World Culture Festival organised by the Art of Living Foundation on the ecologically sensitive Yamuna floodplains in Delhi. Without proper environmental clearance, large-scale construction and temporary infrastructure were erected, resulting in irreversible damage to the wetland ecosystem. The NGT imposed a fine of ₹5crore (50 million) on the foundation as environmental compensation. It highlighted the importance of following due environmental procedures even for cultural and spiritual events, thereby reinforcing the principle that no individual or organisation is above environmental law. The case set a precedent for requiring strict compliance with environmental regulations for large public gatherings.
- **Vizag Gas Leak Case (2020):** In one of its most significant Suo Moto interventions, the NGT responded to the tragic gas leak from the LG Polymers plant in Visakhapatnam, which resulted in the loss of several lives and exposed thousands to toxic fumes. The tribunal immediately took cognizance of the incident and constituted an expert committee to assess the situation. It imposed an interim fine of ₹50 crore (500 million) on the company for environmental damage and directed a comprehensive safety audit of the facility. The judgment reflected the tribunal's proactive approach to environmental disasters and its commitment to ensuring corporate accountability and preventive measures.

These landmark decisions underline the NGT's proactive and assertive role in environmental governance. Through these cases, the tribunal has not only imposed penalties but also introduced systemic reforms by directing administrative bodies to improve compliance, transparency, and long-term environmental planning. By interpreting environmental laws and enforcing accountability, the NGT has emerged as a vital institution in safeguarding India's ecological interests.

## 5. Effectiveness of the NGT in Environmental Governance

The NGT has emerged as a pivotal institution in India's environmental governance framework. Established with a unique blend of legal authority and scientific expertise, the NGT has strengthened environmental enforcement and made significant strides in advancing environmental justice. Its effectiveness can be understood through several key dimensions that distinguish it from traditional judicial forums.

- **Expedited Justice:** One of the most distinguishing features of the NGT is its emphasis on timely adjudication. While conventional courts are often plagued by delays due to a wide array of pending cases, the NGT operates under a mandate to dispose of cases within six months from the date of filing. This commitment to swift resolution is vital in environmental matters where delays can result in irreversible damage. Through this model, the NGT ensures that judicial redress is not only available but also timely, preserving ecological balance and mitigating prolonged harm to ecosystems and human populations.
- **Enhanced Accessibility:** The tribunal has expanded access to justice by allowing a broad range of stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, community groups, public-spirited individuals, and even those not directly affected, to bring forth environmental grievances. This inclusive standing framework has democratised environmental litigation, empowering marginalised communities and civil society actors to actively participate in the protection of natural resources. The procedural flexibility of the NGT also eliminates technical legal barriers that often limit access in conventional courts.
- **Technical Expertise:** Another critical strength lies in the NGT's composition, which includes both judicial members and expert members with backgrounds in environmental science, engineering, forestry, and ecology. This multidisciplinary bench allows for informed, evidence-based decision-making that incorporates scientific understanding alongside legal reasoning. The ability to assess Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), pollution data, and biodiversity reports has enabled the tribunal to render judgements that are technically sound and practically enforceable.
- **Precedent-Setting Judgments:** The NGT has helped shape India's environmental jurisprudence by institutionalizing and reinforcing core environmental principles. These include the **polluter-pays principle**, which holds violators financially responsible for remediation; the **precautionary principle**, which emphasizes risk avoidance in the face of scientific uncertainty; and **sustainable development**, which promotes long-term ecological balance while allowing economic progress. These principles have become central to legal interpretations and administrative actions, influencing broader regulatory practices.
- **Public Accountability and Transparency:** The tribunal has introduced mechanisms to ensure greater accountability among public authorities and corporate entities. In numerous cases, the NGT has required periodic status reports, appointed oversight committees, and mandated compliance with specific environmental standards. This has compelled urban local bodies, state governments, and industries to act more transparently and in alignment with statutory obligations. The practice of holding public hearings and publishing detailed judgments has also contributed to a culture of openness and scrutiny.
- **Influence on Policy and Regulation:** Through its jurisprudence, the NGT has played an indirect but powerful role in shaping environmental policy. Its orders have prompted revisions of waste management protocols, air and water quality standards, and land-use regulations. In several instances, ministries and pollution control boards have modified their rules and enforcement strategies in response to tribunal rulings. The tribunal's decisions often highlight implementation lapses, thereby pressuring administrative bodies to improve governance frameworks.
- **Empirical Indicators of Impact:** Quantifiable outcomes from the NGT rulings provide evidence of its effectiveness. Data published by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and various state pollution control boards indicate reductions in pollution levels,

enhanced compliance with environmental norms, and closure of non-compliant industries following the NGT intervention. For example, improvements in air quality indices in metropolitan cities like Delhi and actions taken on unscientific solid waste disposal practices are directly linked to the NGT directives.

## 6. Socio-Legal Impact of NGT Decisions

- **Empowerment of Local Communities**

**Access to Justice:** The NGT has facilitated easier access to justice for the public, locals in rural and marginalised areas in particular, to take recourse to the law to stop environmental damage without having to spend much money on lawyers.

**Awareness and Mobilisation:** Tribunal processes and the successes have increased awareness about environmental rights and mobilised grassroots and citizens' participation.

- **Building Civil Society and Activist Networks**

**Legitimation for activism:** Environmental activists have held up the NGT's decisions as the seal of approval for the causes they champion, invoking them in their campaigns, protests and awareness-building.

**Strategising Litigation:** Through its active use of PILs, by routing issues into the ambit of the NGT, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have sought to encourage strategic, not reactive, environmentalism.

- **Influence of Policies and Accountable Institutions**

**Policy Shaping Decisions:** The rulings (on topics ranging from air pollution in Delhi to illegal mining and river pollution) have forced governments to rewrite environmental rules and apply regulations with greater vehemence.

- **Administrative Reforms:** NGT has also pushed pollution control boards and like regulatory bodies to act, which would invariably help in prising open their bureaucratic set minds and bringing about reforms.

By democratising environmental justice, the NGT has emerged to be an important socio-legal institution. Circumventing merely the courtroom, its dynamism through civil society engagement and strategic PIL filing spills into governance, public narrative and environmental responsibility. Still, the tribunal's lasting impact will rely on strong enforcement and weighing development against ecological sustainability.

## 7. Challenges Faced by the NGT

Despite its critical role in environmental governance, the NGT faces a range of institutional, operational, and legal challenges that constrain its effectiveness. These challenges hinder the tribunal's ability to deliver consistent, timely, and enforceable decisions across India. Understanding these obstacles is essential for identifying areas that require structural and policy reform to strengthen the NGT's capacity to function as a robust environmental adjudicatory body.

- **Infrastructural and Logistical Limitations:** One of the foremost limitations is the uneven functionality of the NGT's regional benches. While the Principal Bench is located in New Delhi, regional benches in places like Pune, Chennai, Bhopal, and Kolkata often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, limited staff, and delayed appointments of members. In many instances, regional benches are either partially functional or remain inactive for extended periods. This not only increases the workload on the Principal Bench but also imposes an undue burden on litigants from remote areas who must travel long distances to access environmental justice. Such logistical barriers undermine the fundamental objective of ensuring accessible and equitable legal redress.
- **Financial Constraints:** The tribunal operates on a constrained budget, which restricts its operational autonomy. Limited financial resources impact the NGT's ability to conduct thorough site inspections, hire technical consultants, hold frequent hearings, and maintain technological infrastructure. The lack of funds also hinders the development of supporting institutions such as monitoring and enforcement wings. As a result, the tribunal's capacity for proactive intervention,

research, and field-based environmental assessments is significantly compromised.

- **Jurisdictional Ambiguity:** The NGT's powers are limited to civil cases arising under seven specific environmental laws. It does not have jurisdiction over criminal provisions, including those under the Indian Penal Code or statutes that have indirect environmental implications. Furthermore, the extent of its appellate and supervisory authority has been questioned in higher courts, leading to occasional judicial interference. A key example is the *Madurai Bench Bar Association vs. Union of India* case, where concerns were raised about the appointment process, tenure, and qualifications of NGT members. These concerns cast doubt on the tribunal's independence and have led to legal uncertainties about the enforceability of its orders.
- **Compliance and Enforcement Issues:** While the NGT has issued several important orders, their implementation often encounters resistance. The tribunal lacks a dedicated enforcement mechanism and must rely on central and state pollution control boards and other administrative bodies to execute its decisions. In many cases, non-compliance goes unchecked due to bureaucratic inertia or political pressure. A notable example is the repeated violation of the NGT orders related to illegal sand mining, where local enforcement agencies have failed to act despite clear directives. This weakens the deterrent value of the NGT rulings and erodes public confidence in its authority.
- **Lack of Public Awareness:** A significant barrier to the NGT's widespread use is the general lack of awareness among citizens, especially those residing in rural, tribal, and environmentally vulnerable regions. Many people are unaware of the tribunal's existence, its mandate, or the process for filing environmental grievances. This lack of outreach limits the NGT's effectiveness as a public access forum and excludes affected communities from seeking justice for environmental harm.
- **Limited Deterrence:** Although the NGT has imposed penalties in numerous cases, critics argue that the fines levied are often not proportional to the environmental damage caused, particularly when dealing with large corporations. In some instances, the cost of non-compliance is less than the cost of adherence to environmental norms, which undermines the tribunal's ability to serve as a credible deterrent. Without substantial economic consequences or follow-up enforcement, repeat violations may persist.

## 8. Proposed Reforms and the Future of the NGT

To strengthen the National Green Tribunal's capacity as a dedicated institution for environmental justice, a comprehensive and multi-dimensional reform strategy is necessary. These reforms must not only enhance the tribunal's own institutional framework but also address systemic gaps within the broader ecosystem of environmental governance in India. Strengthening the NGT is essential to ensure it continues to function efficiently, equitably, and independently in the face of increasing environmental challenges.

- **Statutory Amendments:** One of the primary areas of reform is the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 itself. Amendments should be introduced to expand the jurisdiction of the NGT, enabling it to address civil disputes arising under additional environmental laws beyond the current set of seven statutes. Moreover, the scope of its appellate authority must be clearly defined to minimise judicial ambiguity. Explicit provisions should be included to ensure the tribunal's institutional independence, particularly concerning the appointment, tenure, and conditions of service for both judicial and expert members. These safeguards will help insulate the NGT from executive influence and maintain its credibility as a neutral adjudicatory body.
- **Infrastructure and Staffing Improvements:** Several regional benches of the NGT currently suffer from limited infrastructure, irregular hearings, and understaffing. Investments should be made to modernise these benches with adequate courtroom facilities, progressivities, digital infrastructure, and professional support staff. A consistent and transparent appointment process must be implemented to ensure the timely selection of qualified judicial and expert members. Furthermore, appointments should prioritize interdisciplinary diversity, including expertise in air quality management, biodiversity conservation, hydrology, public health, and waste management. This

would enhance the tribunal's ability to evaluate technical evidence and make well-rounded decisions.

- **Strengthened Monitoring and Compliance Mechanisms:** The efficacy of any judicial order depends on its implementation. Therefore, the NGT should be equipped with a dedicated compliance wing to follow up on the execution of its orders. This unit should work closely with State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs), district administrations, and environmental regulatory authorities to monitor compliance. Integrating Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing tools, and satellite monitoring can provide the tribunal with real-time data to verify on-ground adherence to its rulings. Timely feedback loops and reporting systems will ensure accountability and reduce the prevalence of non-compliance.
- **Digital Reforms and Transparency:** The tribunal's internal operations should be supported by a robust digital infrastructure. Comprehensive e-filing systems, real-time hearing portals, and public access databases for case tracking would improve the accessibility and efficiency of the NGT. All rulings, compliance reports, and hearing schedules should be published regularly on its website to ensure procedural transparency. Digital archives of past judgments would also support legal research and allow citizens to better understand the tribunal's precedents and reasoning.
- **Increased Funding and Capacity Building:** To function effectively, the NGT requires stable and sufficient financial resources. An independent Environmental Protection Fund should be established to finance compliance actions, expert consultations, research support, and technology integration. This fund can be sourced from fines levied by the NGT, contributions from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) budgets, and green bonds. In addition, regular capacity-building workshops and training programs should be organized for tribunal members and their staff. These programs can focus on developments in environmental science, international environmental law, and climate-related risks to improve the quality and relevance of adjudication.
- **Enhanced Public Outreach and Education:** Public participation in environmental litigation can be significantly increased by raising awareness about the NGT's mandate, jurisdiction, and procedures. Targeted outreach programs, particularly in ecologically sensitive and marginalised regions, can inform communities about their rights and the avenues available for redress. Civil society organisations, environmental advocacy groups, and academic institutions should be encouraged to facilitate legal literacy initiatives. These efforts will bridge the information gap and enable affected populations to proactively engage with the tribunal.

If implemented holistically, these reforms can enhance the credibility, capacity, and impact of the NGT, solidifying its position as a central pillar in India's environmental governance structure. By strengthening both its adjudicatory and administrative functions, the NGT can serve as a model for specialised environmental tribunals globally and ensure that India's commitment to environmental justice is upheld in both principle and practice.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The creation of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) marks a significant milestone in India's journey toward institutionalising environmental justice. As a specialised judicial body, the NGT was conceptualised to bridge the gaps left by conventional courts in addressing the technical, urgent, and interdisciplinary nature of environmental disputes. Its establishment reflects the country's acknowledgement that protecting the environment requires not only legal commitment but also expert-driven, timely, and accessible mechanisms to resolve ecological conflicts. Over the years, the NGT has made notable contributions to India's environmental governance landscape. Through its landmark judgments, it has not only penalised environmental offenders but also set important legal precedents and influenced national and state-level policy reforms. The tribunal has empowered ordinary citizens, civil society organisations, and environmental advocates by offering a platform for redress that is less formalistic and more participatory than traditional courts. Its insistence on the application of key environmental principles—such as the polluter-pays principle,

the precautionary principle, and sustainable development—has advanced the integration of environmental ethics into legal practice. The tribunal's orders have prompted regulatory agencies to strengthen their enforcement strategies and have contributed to increased public awareness regarding environmental rights and responsibilities. Its interventions have been particularly impactful in matters relating to industrial pollution, deforestation, waste management, and environmental clearance procedures. In doing so, the NGT has reinforced the constitutional mandate of the Right to Life under Article 21, which encompasses the right to a healthy environment. However, the NGT's success has been hampered by various challenges. Systemic inefficiencies such as limited infrastructure, underfunding, irregular regional bench operations, and delays in member appointments hinder the tribunal's outreach and functionality. Jurisdictional ambiguities and the absence of direct enforcement mechanisms dilute the impact of its decisions, while the lack of compliance from local and state authorities continues to be a serious bottleneck. Additionally, the low level of public awareness, especially in environmentally vulnerable communities, limits the potential for widespread civic engagement with the tribunal. To ensure that the NGT fulfils its founding mandate, it is imperative to address these institutional weaknesses through a coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach. Strengthening the tribunal's financial, operational, and legal foundations will be critical. Legislative reforms to clarify jurisdiction, ensure independence, and enhance enforcement capabilities must be prioritised. Furthermore, investments in infrastructure, technology, training, and public outreach can significantly boost the tribunal's effectiveness. The future of the NGT will largely depend on the commitment of stakeholders, including the legislature, judiciary, executive, and civil society, to invest in its long-term potential. If adequately supported and reformed, the NGT can evolve beyond a forum for legal redress and become a dynamic, proactive institution that not only resolves environmental disputes but also guides India's transition toward sustainable and inclusive development. Its success will ultimately be measured by its ability to uphold environmental justice for current and future generations.

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