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Q15

What are environmental pressure groups? Discuss their role in raising awareness, influencing policies and advocating for environmental protection in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 15 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- Define environmental pressure groups
- Show how they raise awareness, shape policy and advocate in courts and streets in India
- Give named movements, statutes and cases
- **Add a limit:** voice without a monopoly on the public interest

Revision summary

Environmental pressure groups organise to change ecological decisions of State and firms.

- **Awareness:** Chipko, Silent Valley, CSE and climate networks.
- **Policy:** EPA, FRA, NGT, EIA contests, PESA and mining consent.
- **Advocacy:** Mehta cases, Godavarman, Niyamgiri, Narmada and later climate-rights litigation.
- **Limits:** urban bias versus FRA communities, science errors, FCRA chill; they are one constitutional voice, not the ministry.

Introduction

Environmental pressure groups are organised publics that try to change what the State and firms do to land, air, water and species. They are **interest groups with an ecological claim**, from a Himalayan mahila mandal hugging trees to a Delhi think tank drafting an EIA comment. In India they have used **yatra, science, and the writ petition** more than the paid lobbyist's dinner.

Body

Awareness

Chipko (Uttarakhand) and **Appiko** (Western Ghats) made forest felling a moral picture. **Silent Valley** taught a generation the word rainforest. **CSE** and **Down to Earth**, **Kalpavriksh**, and student climate networks translate IPCC into Hindi and municipal smog. Media-savvy groups now use AQI apps the way an older generation used a folk song. Awareness is not noise: it creates the **constituency** without which a ministry will not spend political capital.

Influencing policy

- **Pressure changed statutes and notifications:** the **Wildlife (Protection) Act** after early conservation lobbies; **EPA 1986** after Bhopal; **FRA 2006** after tribal and forest movements

collided with fortress conservation; **NGT Act 2010**; coastal and EIA notifications (and the 2020 draft EIA fight, where comments and protests slowed a dilution). **PESA** and Gram Sabha consent in mining (**Samata, Niyamgiri**) are policy wins that began as local resistance plus lawyers. Groups sit on some **expert appraisal** and **pollution control** consultations - unevenly, but the door exists because they pushed it.

Advocacy

M.C. Mehta litigation (Ganga, Delhi gas, Taj, oleum) invented a style of **continuing mandamus**. **T.N. Godavarman** turned the Supreme Court into a forest regulator for years. **Vellore, Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action**, and later **climate petitions** (including the Court's recognition of a right against climate harm in **M.K. Ranjitsinh, 2024**, in the bustard/overhead-line setting) show advocacy as **law-making by judgment**. Street advocacy - **Narmada, POSCO, Sterlite, Great Nicobar** debates - raises costs for a poorly done hearing.

- **Limits:** groups can be **urban and species-first**, slighting tribal livelihood (the old fortress-versus-FRA split). They can err on science. **FCRA** has shrunk some internationalised NGOs. The State may co-opt a famous face and ignore the Gram Sabha. Pressure groups are a voice in **Article 19**, not the Environment Ministry.

A mature Republic uses them as **early warning**, then decides with both ecology and equity on the table.

Flow diagram

Pressure groups -> Awareness
 Pressure groups -> Policy FRA NGT EIA
 Pressure groups -> PIL NGT streets
 PIL NGT streets -> Law and consent

Conclusion

Environmental pressure groups in India teach, lobby and sue. Chipko to NGT to Niyamgiri is a single craft with many tools. They work when they bring local fact to national law; they fail when they replace the village or the voter.

Facts & figures

NGT Act, 2010

Created a specialist forum that environmental groups use alongside High Courts and the Supreme Court.

Niyamgiri, 2013

Supreme Court required Gram Sabha consent for mining affecting Dongria Kondh religious and forest rights.

M.K. Ranjitsinh (2024)

Supreme Court recognised a right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change in a conservation-infrastructure conflict.

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