

Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development: Expanding the Dimensions of Access to Justice

Ajay Kumar,

Ph. D. Research Scholar,

Department of Laws,

Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India

Abstract

Environmental justice and sustainable development are deeply interconnected concepts that have emerged as central pillars in contemporary legal and policy discourse. While sustainable development emphasises balancing environmental protection with economic growth and social equity, environmental justice focuses on the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Access to justice plays a crucial role in achieving both objectives by ensuring that individuals and communities especially marginalised groups can effectively enforce environmental rights. This paper explores the evolving dimensions of environmental justice within the framework of sustainable development and examines how access to justice has expanded beyond traditional legal remedies. It analyses constitutional provisions, judicial trends, international frameworks and institutional mechanisms that contribute to strengthening environmental governance. The paper also highlights persistent challenges such as procedural barriers, lack of awareness and inequality in access. It concludes with recommendations for enhancing participatory governance, strengthening legal institutions and integrating technology to promote inclusive environmental justice.

Keywords: Environmental justice, Sustainable Development, Climate change, Pollution etc.

1. Introduction

The rapid speed of industrialisation, urbanisation and economic development in recent decades has placed unprecedented pressure on natural resources and ecological systems. Increasing levels of air and water pollution, deforestation, climate change and biodiversity loss have not only threatened environmental sustainability but have also deepened socio-economic inequalities. These environmental harms are often disproportionately borne by marginalised communities, thereby raising critical concerns about fairness, equity and justice in environmental governance. In this context, the concepts of environmental justice and sustainable development have emerged as essential frameworks for addressing the complex relationship between development and environmental protection.¹

Environmental justice seeks to ensure equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, while also promoting inclusive participation in environmental decision-making processes. It emphasises that no individual or community should suffer a disproportionate share of environmental risks due to socio-economic or political disadvantages.² Sustainable development, as articulated in the Brundtland Report, focuses on meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, thereby integrating environmental protection with economic growth and social equity.³ These two concepts are inherently interconnected through the principles of inter-generational and intra-generational equity, forming the normative basis for modern environmental law and policy.⁴

Access to justice plays a pivotal role in operationalising both environmental justice and sustainable development. Traditionally confined to judicial remedies, the scope of access to justice has expanded significantly to include access to information, public participation, administrative accountability and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.⁵ This broader understanding enables affected communities to assert their environmental rights more effectively and ensures greater transparency and accountability in governance. Consequently, strengthening access to justice is indispensable for achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable environmental outcomes.⁶

¹ Philippe Sands & Jacqueline Peel, *Principles of International Environmental Law* (4th edn., Cambridge University Press 2018).

² S. Ravi Rajan, "A History of Environmental Justice in India," *Environmental Justice* Vol. 7, No. 4 (2014).

³ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford University Press 1987).

⁴ Upendra Baxi, "The Environment and the Law in India," *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* Vol. 28 (1986).

⁵ Gitanjali Nain Gill, "Access to Environmental Justice in India," *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* Vol. 6, No. 5 (2013).

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme, "Access to Justice in Environmental Matters" (2015), available at: <https://www.unep.org> (last visited on 10th April 2026).

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is fundamentally rooted in the principles of fairness, equity and inclusiveness in environmental governance. It seeks to address systemic inequalities that arise when certain communities bear a disproportionate share of environmental burdens such as pollution, resource depletion and displacement, while having limited access to environmental benefits. These disparities are often closely linked to socio-economic status, caste, gender and geographical location. In developing countries like India, marginalised groups—including indigenous communities, women and economically weaker sections are particularly vulnerable to environmental harm due to their dependence on natural resources and limited political representation.⁷

The concept of environmental justice is multidimensional and is commonly understood through three inter-related components: distributive justice, procedural justice and recognitional justice. Distributive justice focuses on the equitable allocation of environmental benefits and burdens. It emphasises that environmental risks, such as exposure to hazardous waste or industrial pollution, should not be concentrated in disadvantaged communities. Procedural justice, on the other hand, highlights the importance of inclusive and transparent decision-making processes. It ensures that affected communities have meaningful opportunities to participate in environmental governance, including access to information and the ability to influence policy decisions.⁸ Recognitional justice extends beyond distribution and participation by emphasising the need to acknowledge and respect the identities, cultures and rights of marginalised groups. It recognises that environmental injustices are often rooted in social and cultural exclusion and therefore, effective environmental governance must incorporate diverse perspectives and traditional knowledge systems.⁹ Together, these dimensions form a comprehensive framework for understanding environmental justice as both a legal and ethical imperative.

2.2 Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development gained global prominence through the Brundtland Commission Report (1987), which defined it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹⁰ It represents a holistic approach to development that integrates environmental protection, economic growth and social equity. The three pillars of sustainable development—environmental protection, economic development and social equity are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Environmental protection ensures the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems, which are essential for long term human survival. Economic development focuses on improving living standards and reducing poverty, while social equity emphasises fair distribution of resources and opportunities among all sections of society.¹¹

Several foundational principles underpin the concept of sustainable development. The precautionary principle advocates preventive action in the face of environmental uncertainty, emphasising that lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to delay measures to prevent environmental degradation. The polluter pays principle ensures that those responsible for environmental harm bear the costs of remediation, thereby promoting accountability. Intergenerational equity, a core element of sustainable development, stresses the responsibility of the present generation to preserve environmental resources for future generations.¹²

These principles have been widely incorporated into international environmental agreements as well as domestic legal frameworks, including Indian environmental jurisprudence, where courts have actively applied them in environmental decision-making.

2.3 Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development

Environmental justice and sustainable development are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing concepts. While sustainable development provides the overarching framework for balancing economic, environmental and social objectives, environmental justice ensures that this balance is achieved in an equitable and inclusive manner. Without the incorporation of justice, sustainable development risks perpetuating existing inequalities by prioritising economic growth over social and environmental concerns.¹³ Environmental justice acts as a critical component of sustainable development by emphasising fairness in the distribution of resources and the inclusion of marginalised communities in decision making processes. It ensures that development policies do not disproportionately harm vulnerable populations and that the benefits of development are shared equitably.

⁷ S. Ravi Rajan, “A History of Environmental Justice in India,” *Environmental Justice* Vol. 7, No. 4 (2014).

⁸ Philippe Sands & Jacqueline Peel, *Principles of International Environmental Law* (4th edn., Cambridge University Press 2018).

⁹ David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements and Nature* (Oxford University Press 2007).

¹⁰ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford University Press 1987).

¹¹ Klaus Bosselmann, *The Principle of Sustainability: Transforming Law and Governance* (Routledge 2016).

¹² United Nations Environment Programme, “Sustainable Development Goals and Environmental Law” (2019), available at: <https://www.unep.org> (last visited on 11th April 2026).

¹³ Gitanjali Nain Gill, “Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development in India,” *Environmental Law Review* Vol. 14, No. 2 (2012).

Access to justice plays a crucial role in bridging these two concepts. It enables individuals and communities to enforce environmental rights, seek remedies for environmental harm and hold institutions accountable. By facilitating access to information, promoting public participation and ensuring effective legal remedies, access to justice strengthens both environmental governance and sustainable development.¹⁴

In essence, the integration of environmental justice into the framework of sustainable development is essential for achieving long term ecological sustainability and social equity. Such an approach not only addresses immediate environmental challenges but also ensures that development processes are inclusive, participatory and just.

3. Legal and Constitutional Framework in India

3.1 Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India provides a strong normative and legal foundation for environmental protection and the advancement of environmental justice. Although the original Constitution did not explicitly recognise environmental rights, judicial interpretation and constitutional amendments have significantly expanded its scope. Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, has been judicially interpreted to include the right to a clean, healthy and pollution-free environment.¹⁵ The Supreme Court has consistently held that the right to life is not merely a right to physical survival but encompasses the right to live with human dignity, which necessarily includes access to a safe and healthy environment.

In addition to fundamental rights, environmental protection is embedded within the Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties. Article 48A imposes an obligation on the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife. Similarly, Article 51A(g) places a duty on every citizen to protect and preserve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife.¹⁶ These provisions, though non-justiciable in nature, have been instrumental in guiding judicial interpretation and legislative action. Together, they create a constitutional framework that integrates environmental protection with governance and civic responsibility.

3.2 Judicial Activism and Environmental Jurisprudence

Judicial activism has played a pivotal role in the development of environmental jurisprudence in India. The higher judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, has adopted a proactive approach in interpreting constitutional provisions to address environmental concerns. Through a series of landmark judgments, courts have not only expanded the scope of Article 21 but have also incorporated key principles of international environmental law into domestic legal frameworks.¹⁷

One of the most significant contributions of judicial activism has been the evolution of Public Interest Litigation. PIL has democratised access to justice by allowing any public-spirited individual or organisation to approach the courts on behalf of affected communities, particularly those who are marginalised or lack the resources to seek legal remedies. This procedural innovation has enabled courts to address a wide range of environmental issues, including industrial pollution, deforestation and environmental degradation caused by large-scale development projects.¹⁸

The judiciary has also developed and applied important environmental principles such as the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle and the doctrine of sustainable development. In cases such as *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court explicitly recognised these principles as part of Indian environmental law.¹⁹ These judicial interventions have not only strengthened environmental governance but have also ensured greater accountability of both state and private actors.

¹⁴ Gitanjali Nain Gill, "Access to Environmental Justice in India," *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* Vol. 6, No. 5 (2013).

¹⁵ *Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar*, (1991) 1 SCC 598.

¹⁶ Constitution of India, Arts. 48A & 51A(g).

¹⁷ *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*, AIR 1987 SC 1086.

¹⁸ S.P. Sathé, *Judicial Activism in India: Transgressing Borders and Enforcing Limits* (2nd edn., Oxford University Press 2002).

¹⁹ *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India*, (1996) 5 SCC 647.

3.3 Role of the National Green Tribunal

The establishment of the National Green Tribunal under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 marked a significant advancement in India's environmental legal framework. The NGT was created as a specialised body to handle environmental disputes efficiently and expeditiously, thereby addressing the limitations of traditional courts in dealing with complex environmental issues.²⁰

The Tribunal is empowered to adjudicate cases related to environmental protection, conservation of forests and natural resources and enforcement of legal rights relating to the environment. It applies key environmental principles such as sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle while delivering its judgments. The NGT's specialised structure, which includes both judicial and technical experts, ensures informed and balanced decision making.

One of the major contributions of the NGT has been its ability to provide speedy and effective remedies. By reducing procedural delays and offering a more accessible forum, the Tribunal has significantly enhanced access to environmental justice. It has also played an important role in holding industries and government authorities accountable for environmental violations.²¹

However, despite its achievements, the NGT faces certain challenges, including limited resources, jurisdictional constraints and issues related to enforcement of its orders. Nevertheless, it remains a crucial institution in India's environmental governance framework and a key mechanism for advancing environmental justice.

4. International Legal Framework

The development of environmental justice and sustainable development has been significantly influenced by international environmental law and global policy frameworks. These instruments have not only shaped the normative understanding of environmental governance but have also guided domestic legal systems, including that of India, in adopting progressive environmental standards.

The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 marked the beginning of modern international environmental law by recognising, for the first time, the fundamental right of individuals to an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being.²² It emphasised the responsibility of states to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations, thereby laying the groundwork for the principle of intergenerational equity.

Building upon this foundation, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) further elaborated key principles of sustainable development. It introduced concepts such as the precautionary principle, polluter pays principle and the need for public participation in environmental decision-making. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration is particularly significant as it highlights three essential components of environmental governance: access to information, public participation and access to justice.²³ These procedural rights are crucial for ensuring transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in environmental decision-making processes.

The Paris Agreement (2015) represents a landmark global effort to address climate change through collective action. It emphasises climate justice, equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, recognising that developed and developing countries have different capacities and responsibilities in addressing environmental challenges.²⁴ The Agreement also underscores the importance of public participation, transparency and access to information in achieving climate goals.

These international instruments have had a profound influence on national legal systems. In India, courts have frequently relied on international environmental principles to interpret constitutional provisions and develop environmental jurisprudence. The incorporation of principles such as sustainable development and precautionary measures into domestic law reflects the growing convergence between international norms and national legal frameworks.²⁵

²⁰ National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

²¹ Gitanjali Nain Gill, "The National Green Tribunal of India: A Sustainable Future Through Environmental Justice," *Environmental Law Review* Vol. 14, No. 4 (2012).

²² United Nations, *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment* (1972).

²³ United Nations, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992), Principle 10.

²⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Paris Agreement* (2015).

²⁵ Philippe Sands & Jacqueline Peel, *Principles of International Environmental Law* (4th edn., Cambridge University Press 2018).

5. Expanding Dimensions of Access to Justice

Access to justice in environmental matters has evolved from a narrow, court-centric concept to a broader, multi-dimensional framework encompassing procedural, institutional and technological aspects. This expanded understanding recognises that effective environmental governance requires not only legal remedies but also participatory and preventive mechanisms.²⁶

5.1 Access to Information

Access to environmental information is a cornerstone of environmental justice. It enables individuals and communities to make informed decisions, participate effectively in governance and hold authorities accountable. In India, the Right to Information Act, 2005 has played a significant role in enhancing transparency by allowing citizens to access data related to environmental policies, industrial projects and regulatory actions.²⁷

Access to information also facilitates early detection of environmental risks and promotes public awareness. Without adequate information, affected communities are often unable to challenge environmentally harmful activities, thereby undermining the effectiveness of environmental laws.

5.2 Public Participation

Public participation is an essential element of democratic environmental governance. It ensures that decisions affecting the environment are not made in isolation but involve input from stakeholders, particularly those directly impacted. Mechanisms such as Environmental Impact Assessment processes and public hearings provide platforms for community engagement.²⁸

Participation enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of environmental decisions by incorporating local knowledge and addressing community concerns. It also helps in preventing conflicts by fostering dialogue between stakeholders. However, for participation to be meaningful, it must be inclusive, informed and free from coercion.

5.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution

Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, including mediation, arbitration and negotiation, have emerged as important tools for resolving environmental disputes. These mechanisms offer several advantages over traditional litigation, including reduced costs, faster resolution and greater flexibility.²⁹ ADR is particularly useful in environmental disputes, which often involve complex technical issues and multiple stakeholders. By promoting collaborative solutions, ADR helps in achieving outcomes that are not only legally sound but also socially acceptable and environmentally sustainable.

5.4 Institutional Mechanisms

The establishment of specialised institutions has significantly strengthened environmental governance. Bodies such as the National Green Tribunal in India provide a dedicated forum for environmental adjudication, equipped with both legal and technical expertise.³⁰ Such institutions enhance access to justice by reducing delays, simplifying procedures and ensuring effective enforcement of environmental laws. They also play a crucial role in developing environmental jurisprudence and promoting accountability among polluters and regulatory authorities.

5.5 Technological Advancements

Technological innovations have further expanded the scope of access to justice in environmental matters. Digital platforms, online grievance redressal systems and environmental monitoring tools have improved transparency and efficiency in governance. Remote sensing technologies and data analytics enable real-time monitoring of environmental conditions, thereby facilitating timely

²⁶ Gitanjali Nain Gill, "Access to Environmental Justice in India," *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* Vol. 6, No. 5 (2013).

²⁷ Right to Information Act, 2005.

²⁸ Shyam Divan & Armin Rosencranz, *Environmental Law and Policy in India* (2nd edn., Oxford University Press 2001).

²⁹ P. Leelakrishnan, *Environmental Law in India* (5th edn., LexisNexis 2019).

³⁰ National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

intervention.³¹ Technology also enhances public participation by providing online platforms for consultations and information dissemination. However, challenges such as the digital divide and lack of technical literacy must be addressed to ensure equitable access.

6. Challenges in Achieving Environmental Justice

Despite significant advancements in legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms, achieving environmental justice remains a complex and challenging task. Several structural and procedural barriers continue to limit effective access to justice.

6.1 Procedural Barriers

One of the major challenges is the complexity of legal procedures, which often involve lengthy processes, technical requirements and high costs. These barriers discourage individuals, particularly from marginalised communities, from seeking legal remedies. Delays in judicial proceedings further exacerbate the problem, undermining the effectiveness of environmental laws.³²

6.2 Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness about environmental rights and legal remedies is another significant obstacle. Many affected communities are unaware of the mechanisms available to address environmental grievances. This information gap limits their ability to participate in decision-making processes and seek justice.³³

6.3 Socio-economic Inequality

Socio-economic disparities play a critical role in determining access to justice. Marginalised groups often lack the financial resources, legal knowledge and institutional support required to pursue environmental claims. As a result, environmental burdens are disproportionately borne by those who are least equipped to address them.³⁴

6.4 Weak Enforcement Mechanisms

Even when courts deliver favorable judgments, enforcement remains a major challenge. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of political will and inadequate regulatory capacity often result in poor implementation of environmental laws. This undermines public confidence in legal institutions and weakens the overall framework of environmental governance.³⁵

6.5 Conflict between Development and Environment

The tension between economic development and environmental protection is a persistent challenge. Development projects, such as infrastructure and industrial expansion, often lead to environmental degradation and displacement of communities. Balancing these competing interests requires careful policy planning and adherence to principles of sustainable development.³⁶

In many cases, economic considerations take precedence over environmental concerns, leading to policy decisions that compromise long-term sustainability. Addressing this conflict requires integrating environmental considerations into development planning and ensuring that affected communities are adequately compensated and rehabilitated.

7. Role of Institutions and Governance

Effective environmental governance and the realisation of environmental justice depend significantly on the strength, coordination and accountability of institutions at national, regional and local levels. Institutions act as the backbone of environmental regulation by formulating policies, enforcing laws, resolving disputes and facilitating public participation. In India, environmental governance is

³¹ United Nations Environment Programme, “Environmental Rule of Law” (2019), available at: <https://www.unep.org> (last visited on 12th April 2026).

³² S.P. Sathé, *Judicial Activism in India* (Oxford University Press 2002).

³³ Upendra Baxi, “Access to Justice and Social Action Litigation in India,” *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* Vol. 18 (1976).

³⁴ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Harvard University Press 2009).

³⁵ Gitanjali Nain Gill, “The National Green Tribunal of India,” *Environmental Law Review* Vol. 14 (2012).

³⁶ Klaus Bosselmann, *The Principle of Sustainability* (Routledge 2016).

characterised by a multi-layered institutional framework that includes legislative bodies, executive agencies, the judiciary and civil society organizations.³⁷

At the governmental level, institutions such as the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Central Pollution Control Board and State Pollution Control Boards play a crucial role in regulating environmental activities. These bodies are responsible for granting environmental clearances, monitoring pollution levels and ensuring compliance with environmental standards. However, their effectiveness often depends on administrative capacity, transparency and political will.³⁸

The judiciary has emerged as a key institutional in advancing environmental justice in India. Through proactive judicial intervention and the use of Public Interest Litigation, courts have expanded the scope of environmental rights and ensured accountability of both state and non-state actors. Judicial bodies have also played a vital role in interpreting constitutional provisions and incorporating international environmental principles into domestic law.³⁹

In addition to formal state institutions, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and grassroots movements have been instrumental in advocating for environmental justice. These organisations act as intermediaries between communities and the state, raising awareness, facilitating participation and providing legal assistance to marginalised groups. Environmental movements in India, such as those opposing deforestation and displacement, have highlighted the importance of community engagement in environmental governance.⁴⁰ Decentralised governance mechanisms, including Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies, also play a critical role in environmental management. These institutions enable local participation in decision-making processes and promote sustainable resource management at the grassroots level. However, their effectiveness is often limited by inadequate resources and lack of technical expertise.

Overall, a coordinated and participatory institutional framework is essential for achieving environmental justice. Strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing transparency and promoting collaboration among stakeholders are key to improving environmental governance.⁴¹

8. Recommendations

To strengthen environmental justice and promote sustainable development, a multi-dimensional approach involving legal, institutional and societal reforms is necessary. The following recommendations aim to address existing challenges and enhance access to justice in environmental matters.

8.1 Strengthening Legal Frameworks

There is a need to simplify and streamline environmental litigation procedures to make them more accessible to the general public. Legal processes should be made less time-consuming and more cost-effective. Additionally, environmental laws must be updated to address emerging challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental displacement. Strengthening the powers and jurisdiction of specialised tribunals like the National Green Tribunal can further improve efficiency and enforcement.⁴²

8.2 Promoting Awareness and Environmental Education

Lack of awareness remains a significant barrier to environmental justice. Public awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate citizens about their environmental rights and responsibilities. Environmental education should be integrated into school and university curricula to foster a culture of sustainability and responsibility. Media and digital platforms can also play a crucial role in disseminating information and encouraging public engagement.⁴³

8.3 Enhancing Public Participation

Ensuring meaningful participation of stakeholders in environmental decision-making processes is essential. Public hearings and consultations must be conducted transparently and inclusively, with special attention to marginalised communities. Legal frameworks

³⁷ Shyam Divan & Armin Rosencranz, *Environmental Law and Policy in India* (2nd edn., Oxford University Press 2001).

³⁸ P. Leelakrishnan, *Environmental Law in India* (5th edn., LexisNexis 2019).

³⁹ S.P. Sathe, *Judicial Activism in India* (Oxford University Press 2002).

⁴⁰ Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (Longman 2000).

⁴¹ Gitanjali Nain Gill, "Environmental Governance and Access to Justice in India," *Environmental Law Review* Vol. 14 (2012).

⁴² National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

⁴³ United Nations Environment Programme, "Environmental Education and Awareness" (2018), available at: <https://www.unep.org> (last visited 14th April 2026).

should mandate the inclusion of affected communities in policy formulation and project approvals. This will not only enhance legitimacy but also lead to more sustainable outcomes.⁴⁴

8.4 Leveraging Technology for Environmental Governance

Technology can significantly enhance access to justice by improving transparency, efficiency and accountability. Digital platforms for filing complaints, tracking environmental cases and accessing information should be developed and widely promoted. Remote sensing, Geographic Information Systems and data analytics can be used for environmental monitoring and policy-making. However, efforts must be made to bridge the digital divide to ensure equitable access to these technologies.⁴⁵

8.5 Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms

Effective enforcement of environmental laws is critical for achieving environmental justice. Regulatory authorities must be equipped with adequate resources, technical expertise and autonomy to perform their functions effectively. Strict penalties should be imposed on violators to deter environmental harm. Mechanisms for monitoring compliance and ensuring accountability must also be strengthened.⁴⁶

9. Conclusion

Environmental justice and sustainable development are essential components of a fair and equitable society. While significant progress has been made in developing legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms, challenges such as inequality, lack of awareness and weak enforcement continue to hinder their effective implementation. Access to justice serves as a crucial link between environmental rights and their realisation. The expansion of access to justice—from traditional court-based remedies to participatory governance, institutional mechanisms and technological tools—has significantly improved the ability of individuals and communities to protect their environmental rights. However, ensuring that these mechanisms are accessible, inclusive and effective remains a key challenge. The integration of environmental justice within the broader framework of sustainable development is necessary to address both present and future environmental concerns. This requires a holistic approach that combines legal reforms, institutional strengthening, public participation and technological innovation.

In the face of growing environmental challenges, including climate change and resource depletion, it is imperative to adopt policies and practices that prioritise both ecological sustainability and social equity. Environmental justice is not merely a legal concept but a moral and ethical imperative that demands collective action from governments, institutions and society as a whole. By strengthening access to justice and promoting inclusive governance, it is possible to achieve a sustainable future that benefits all sections of society.

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



⁴⁴ United Nations, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992), Principle 10.

⁴⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, “Environmental Rule of Law” (2019), available at: <https://www.unep.org> (last visited 14th April 2026).

⁴⁶ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Harvard University Press 2009).