

A Comprehensive Webinar Report of the

**National Consultation on Draft Environmental Impact
Assessment 2020**

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MAUSAM

By

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National Consultation on Draft Environmental Impact Assessment 2020

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Session 1

Environmental Laws and Environmental Protection in India Summary

India has several laws under the umbrella of the Environment Protection Act 1986. In this session, we had a brief tour of the history of how India began framing laws for environmental protection after independence and how it has evolved over the years. The speakers for this session shared their answers to the following questions:

What was the environmental protection model followed before the adoption of EIA in 1994?

Has EIA been an efficient tool in striking a balance between economy and ecology?

Why is the burden of balancing the two is solely on the environment ministry and not a shared responsibility of the finance ministry and the industries ministry as well?

Is it a notification or a law that is going to save India's environment?

During the process of answering the above questions, it was discussed how a country like India where the majority of people even today live within limits of what the natural environment can provide, and yet we are staring at widespread ecological destruction and disasters, and growing inequity in the distribution of wealth among Indians.

Critical analysis of environmental policymaking in India



Dr Sharad Lele started his talk with an important message - "All of us try to

practice World Environment Day every day of the year and not just the symbolic tree planting that happens typically on June 5". Dr Lele said he prefers to use the term governance rather than policy-making because the word environmental governance would encompass policy-making, the actual implementation of the policy through various tools, mechanisms and on-ground monitoring. He said that though the making of laws was for elected representatives, the rules under those laws and the implementation of rules happens through the executive, expert committees in various ministries and the pollution control boards. He also touched upon the role of the judiciary in advocating decisions and the role of media, civil society and all other stakeholders in making sure that rules are followed and processes are actually implemented. The trigger for the current meeting was not the change in law but in the proposed changes in a notification under the environment protection act. He said that through the notification route the executive has a lot of freedom and lacks democratic accountability for their actions. He pointed out that the challenge in the Indian context has been this power of the executive and the enormous misuse of the power that takes place in the name of supposedly rationalising the notification, but effectively diluting it. He said that the EIA procedure and the associated procedure of giving environmental clearances have been gutted much before the proposed draft changes. What the draft changes is to make this whole procedure even worse. Many of the proposed changes are unfortunately a poor reflection of what's already happening on the ground. He shared an example from the associated process of forest clearances that takes place when there is any industrial activity proposed in forest land. As a very rare but successful example of a democratic public participation process, he cited the landmark Niyamgiri Bauxite mining case. He said that as an EAC member, he has first-hand experience of the functioning of the committee, with clear instructions of not to stop any project and his experience of three and a half years as an EAC (thermal) member, only a single project was rejected and numerous dubious projects were cleared. He said that the Ministry of Environment was no longer a Ministry of Environment but a Ministry of implementing the wishes of the Ministry of- Coal, Power, Commerce, and other related ministries. He lamented that it was unfortunate the MoEFCC takes pride in showing the number of projects cleared. He said that those asking questions related to tightening of environmental regulations and preserving the forest cover have faced enormous pressure from within. He rued the belief in growth, an extreme form of capitalism coupled with the idea that technology will solve our problems is deep-rooted in our society. In conclusion, he said that democratic decision making was being stifled by publishing the official draft notification in only two languages, both of which the millions of our citizens do not understand.

Law or Notification- What can save India's environment?

Leo Saldanha, ESG



Leo started by questioning whether we deserve the type of weak regulations enshrined in EIA. He said that the idea behind creating the Ministry of Environment after the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1986 was to ensure that the environment constituted an important aspect of people's lives and that it does not lose out to the prevailing view of development held by the government. He said that since our independence we have lacked the idea of environmental assessment. He further stressed that in India one thinks of the environment as a trivial subject that we want to consider because of our international treaty obligations. The first acknowledgement of the problem of development without purpose or equality came from PM Nehru in 1959 itself when he described the hunger of huge infrastructure projects as a disease of gigantism. He highlighted the piecemeal and reactionary approach to the important questions of the environment, but we as a country failed to internalise Nehru's message and act accordingly. He mentioned the framing of the Wildlife Protection Act by ex-hunters who said that the forest belongs to the forest department and immediately alienated the tribes residing in the forests for thousands of years. He spoke of the years of systemic failures in regulatory practice, industrial safety and hazardous waste management despite our environmental jurisprudence being located within the framework of criminal law. This ultimately resulted in the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in 1986, and no one has gone to the prison for the accident even when the impacts of the accident are being felt by the third generation of people even today. He felt that India as a country is comforted by rhetoric and that we do not look for significant and substantive action. This rhetoric is best found in several of

the supreme court documents that failed to translate into real regulatory practice. He mentioned that the Indian administration viewed environment and forest regulation as a bottleneck for economic growth and development. He rued the fact that environmental rules were framed under the influence of the World Bank and European consultants. This process led to the birth of EIA notification. This need not go to the parliament for verification or approval by the elected representatives and lacks democratic accountability and transparency. He recommended reading Article 39 of the Constitution because what it says is - "when we use natural resources, you need to do so in a way that it does not create wealth in the hands of a few, to the detriment of many." He said that the EIA notification was the biggest agency for the creation of wealth disparities seen today. The notification was a tool to be amended at will to approve projects as the power of amendments lay with the executives in the Ministry of Environment, and the amendments to the 2006 version were a testimony to this. The EIA notification has seen numerous amendments towards its dilution starting from 1994 to the present draft notification, and the language used by the bureaucracy confounded even the judges of the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT). He said that we must take the blame for allowing to create the conditions that the executive has powers to cannibalise forest and other natural resources and the rules framed by them are those that augment that behaviour. He said we must oppose the draft EIA 2020 notification and demand a fully transparent, accountable, and democratic Act or the law. The situation we find ourselves presently in is a stark reminder of the flawed priorities and also presents us with a great chance to try to fix it. He suggested that we demand total scrapping of EIA and initiate a consultative process at the district level to come up with a new environmental law within the next six months.

Session 2

EIA 1994-2006-2020, the journey-challenges and victories:

Summary

All the existing and upcoming developmental projects in India such as thermal and nuclear power plants, industries, dams and highways cause huge destruction to the environment. The current policies and laws by the Ministry of Environment lack ecological concern and are more in favour of the profit-making in the name of development. The speakers in this session had presented their views on the effectiveness, journey, challenges and

victories of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in protecting the environment and local communities, and shared their own experiences in this concern.

EIA as a tool for environmental protection, from 1994 to 2020



Rohit Prajapati, Environmental Activist, emphasised that before drafting the EIA 2020 notification the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) would have to consider the Supreme Court orders, 'PSS Vs Union of India' that came out on 22nd February 2017 and 'Alembic Pharmaceutical Ltd Vs Rohit Prajapati' that came out on 1st April, 2020 as a result of petitions filed by him. In these orders, the Supreme Court had clearly mentioned that the situation of the common effluent treatment plant, sewage treatment plant and in general the environmental situation is worst in India. Even after the implementation of these orders by National Green Tribunal (NGT), the situation was not improved as per the recent report available on CPCB website, he said.

The EIA notification, 1994 was published to regulate the procedure of Environmental Clearance (EC). Later, many amendments were suggested such as, reporting consent of operation, requirement of a public hearing, and development of an environmental appraisal committee, by NGOs and various environmental activists across the country in favor of the conservation of the environment. On 31st March 1999, the MoEFCC came out with the office memorandum, where they have mentioned EIA notification as an Act. Generally, an Act is framed after it passes through both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Turning a notification, which is addressed as an office

memorandum, into an Act is the easiest and hassle-free way to modify the green laws. Later, the Union Ministry of Environment published EIA notification, 2006, with modified provisions that supports more industrial development. One such modification was allowing post-facto clearance for industries, which means an industry operating without Environmental Clearance (EC) and has no EIA report can get this done any time through some paper works, without shutting down the activity.

In 2009, a comprehensive Environmental Pollution Index (EPI) was coined in the SEPI report, jointly prepared by CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) and Indian Institute Technology of Delhi (IITD) which is available on CPCB website, he said. In this report, the 88 clusters from 19 states of India were considered on the basis of four aspects -air pollution, surface and groundwater pollution, soil quality and health impact like worker health issues, chemical contamination of the food, and chemicals into the food chain of localities. According to the report 43 clusters out of the 88 clusters were found to be critically polluted and 32 clusters were found to be severely polluted. A net of 75 clusters are in really very bad condition, however, various EIAs were conducted and various ECs were granted for projects proposed in those clusters. A number of expert committees looked at those reports without any iota of doubt, even if those EIAs and ECs had been deeply flawed. Therefore, many environmental activists suggested that the EIA should practically analyse the carrying capacity of the area where any project is proposed or operating, he said.

He suggested that these loopholes in the EIA notifications after 1994 cannot be fixed until the Ministry starts to prioritise environmental conservation while granting EC, as the assumption and presumption of ToR (Term of Reference) and minutes of many public hearings itself proves that the Ministry is more concerned about industrial development. He highlighted the discrepancies such as, the ToR for the water aerodrome projects in Palitana, project near the Statue of Unity in Gujarat and a project in Assam were very identical, even though the three geographies and ecosystems are very different, which reflects the false concern of authorities while making decision for the EC of any project. He said that, "Ministries' own facts and figures about the state of the Indian environment go against their claims of good environment, less pollution, etc." Therefore, we should not just demand the scrapping of draft EIA 2020, which further dilutes the already diluted EIA provisions, but, we should also demand that a completely new,

much stronger legislation be drafted in comparison to the EIA notification, 2006, to actually carry out the role of environmental protection.

Using EIA as a tool for community rights protection- public hearings and other experiences from the field



Alok explained about the benefits of EIA and public hearing in the EC process. He remarked that under the “go” or “no go” category that was set up in 2009 for coal mining areas, only 9% of the total coal-bearing area of our country was announced to be no mining zone due to biodiversity richness and density of the forest and wildlife there. Later, the government implemented ‘violate’ and ‘inviolate’ policy, and it was found that 200 out of 700 coal blocks were ‘inviolate’. According to current data, 35 out of 800 coal blocks are ‘inviolate’ among which 7 coal blocks are in the biodiversity-rich Hasdeo-Arand area. Citing examples of allocation of coal blocks and notifying protected areas in Chhattisgarh, he said the government is only interested in corporatisation of resources or handing over the vast natural resources to a handful of corporates. That is why the government is making changes in various laws absurdly during the COVID-19 pandemic for the ‘ease of doing business’.

He stressed on the importance of public hearing citing that it is a big powerful intervention that is available with people. For instance, when the Jindal steel plant conducted a public hearing in 2004, it was protested by thousands of people in Raigarh. Even if the project could not be stopped, all issues raised by people were noted by the authorities which led to more people to show interest. Thus, public hearing empowers the local communities, makes them aware of their rights, and assures their participation in decision making.

He mentioned that for the Parson Varsan East Coal Mining Project of 10-15 million tons coal providing capacity, the public hearing was initially bypassed. Before this project was proposed, he has been analysing the compliance for water discharge, safe coal dumping etc., for existing coal projects of 10 million ton capacity in the same area. For that, he went to some institutions to understand and collect evidence on the performance of the coal mining project. Finally, the public hearing took place based on the evidence he submitted to the Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC). Even the village people documented the shortcomings in the EIA report of Parson Varsan East Coal Mining Project and collected data such as, the elephant population seen in the last 10 years in the areas surrounding the project, all by themselves, to submit it during the public hearing. As a result, the EAC has taken the following positive decisions:

1. Decided to form a strict committee to ensure compliance by existing coal projects.
2. Assigned the Water Resource Department of Chattisgarh to find out the impact of this coal project on Rabo dam.
3. Asked the proponents to submit a report on cumulative impact assessment of coal blocks on the barrage in the Hasdeo-Arand area.
4. Told the proponent to submit a certificate of approval by the wildlife board showing no impact on the elephant habitat.
5. Also, asked the tribal department to submit the consent of Gram Sabha members for the expansion of coalfields.

All the above decisions have made the efforts of "Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan" team successful in working towards generating awareness among these local communities about ill-effects of submission of wrong documents, not doing Cumulative Impact Assessment, submission of fake consent from Gram Sabha members and National Wildlife Board (NWB), etc., and have further boosted the confidence of local communities to actively participate in the public hearings.

The Parson Varsan East Coal Mining Project was finally stopped after continuous public protest on the grounds of submission of wrong reports and EAC told the project proponent to bring the right documents. Thus, the EAC is helpful in strengthening the public hearing only if the people are strong enough to defend their points with the right documents in their hands, otherwise, without any environmental concern, many projects have been blindly given EC many times. For example, in Bastar, the forest clearance for the 13th deposit of Baladilha was kept on hold for four years to conserve the biodiversity and endemic plants, but, after being pressurised by the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) and corporates, the project got the required Forest Clearance (FC).

Even though not many successes have been achieved, the communities feel

their voices have been heard through public hearing, however, if the draft EIA notification, 2020 is not scrapped, the people who are facing the brunt may permanently lose the public hearing component in whatever replaces the EIA notification, 2006.

EIA and protection of wildlife corridors and forests



Debadityo started with the fact that there is a lack of discussion on real impacts or scientific quality of the Environmental Impact Assessment. The increased frequency of granting clearance by the Ministry to proposed projects is giving a green flag to damage the environment. The EAC, consultants and even the courts are more concerned about the Environment Clearance or Forest Clearance process, and they are least bothered about the protection of wildlife.

According to him the lack of ecological concerns in EIA notifications is dangerous for protection of wildlife corridors and forests in many ways, such as:

1. During EIA for a project, all the flora and fauna within the 10-15 km and beyond are included. However, according to the draft EIA 2020 Notification, the area up to only 5 km from the protected area will be assessed. The proponent hides the actual impacts of its project on the nearby species from the standing committee of the National Board of Wildlife (NBW) and gets consent on the basis of very illogical statements to negotiate by saying something like 'it happens' and 'we will do something if it arises'. Also, all these plans for conservation are made and submitted without any impact assessment studies. It is mostly made by discussions with forest officers. So, a top-to-bottom approach is taken by project proponents to frame the impacts of the

proposed projects.

2. In the EIA 2006 Notification, the projects were categorised as A & B which are assessed at central and state level, respectively. The boundary of any protected area (under the Wildlife Protection Act) and the Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ) were defined later. Thus, the categorisation of projects under the Environment Protection Act is not coordinated with the Wildlife Protection Act. According to draft EIA 2020, projects which have protected areas within 5 km will be examined under Category A and the rest are in Category B. Actually, the declaration of protected areas is very diplomatic. According to the orders of the supreme court, any project within 10 km of the protected area will be examined by the standing committee of the National Board of Wildlife, and the supreme court does not allow mining within 1 km of the protected area.
3. The issues related to projects which have ESZ and protected areas within its boundary go to the standing committee of National Board of Wildlife otherwise the EAC will appraise it although most of the EAC members are not experts of wildlife protection. Very few experts and practitioners are there to talk about actual impacts and very few scientists are there who act as activists otherwise they do not object to the false solutions of project proponents.

He reflected that the Forest Protection Act was framed during the British period and thus is not very wildlife centric, and the Biological Diversity Act is also not directly linked with the EIA. So, only wildlife protection acts play a major role in decision making. He mentioned that out of 20% of forest land in India we have declared only 5% as wildlife protection areas and many are still to be declared. He stated that the declaration of protected areas is not a very scientific process, these are very political decisions. During the declaration of any protected area, it should be kept in mind that animals do not see any boundaries as they keep on moving from one place to another in the forest. As of now the protected areas are like islands between the human settlements, he suggested. He asserted that most of the projects (even in Category A) are exempted from the general conditions which is the most dangerous loophole in draft EIA 2020. Further, he told about a refinery which has built its wall in the wildlife corridor that has restricted the elephant herd to move to other areas in the forest. He recommended that wildlife areas should not be sacrificed for profit-making from so-called development, and EIA of projects must consider all the protected areas whether it is reserved forest or a wetland, even if it is not notified by the Ministry.

EIA through a legal lens



Meenakshi stated that draft EIA 2020 is like a cover under which everything gives us the impression that everything is fine, although these changes are mentioned to facilitate the fast clearance of all developmental projects in India. To explain her statement she presented some points to highlight the loopholes in draft EIA 2020, EIA 2006 Notifications and office memorandums, as follows:

1. Screening is a necessary step to categorise project B as B1 and B2, however, in draft EIA 2020 Notification screening is completely omitted for projects.
2. More projects are added in Category B2, which will exempt them from public hearing and EIA study for getting EC. She strengthened her point with the example of the Helipad construction project in Noida which does not come under any of the categories mentioned in EIA Notification 2006 and later was kept in Category A by EAC. However, the draft EIA 2020 has categorised it as a B2 project.
3. Scoping is a necessary step to decide on projects for standardised ToR (Term of Reference). In the draft EIA 2020 Notification, scoping is completely removed, which indicates that MoEFCC is interested in fast clearance of projects rather than conservation of environment.
4. The CRZ Notifications have mentioned that the central government would decide the categorisation for maintenance dredging project but as per draft EIA 2020 Notification this project will be completely exempted and can freely operate without any consideration to take care or protect the sensitive areas surrounding the project. Many such projects will be totally exempted from the EC process as per draft EIA 2020 Notification.
5. A new category of MSME (Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium

Enterprises) projects has been introduced, which are getting a lot of leeways and all MSME projects to be considered B2 thereby giving complete exemption from EIA process. Along with that the projects that are proposed in industrial states, except 13 categories, are not required to seek any EC. Also, the categories of these industrial states are expanded like CRZ and ESZ.

6. Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ) are the areas that act as a buffer around sensitive areas. As per set standard, any project within 10 km of ESZ is suppose to get a nod from the committee of National Board for Wildlife (NBW), however, in the minutes of meeting for projects in the ESZ areas it can be found that the EAC decides limits by consulting with the project proponent companies, and as per the office memorandum of EIA Notification came in 2019, if there is any ESZ is notified already then a nod from NBW is not required.
7. In draft EIA 2020, modernisation of projects which also involves its expansion up to 50% (without increasing land and water consumption) is exempted from the EC process. This change was also suggested in the 2009 office memorandum, thus, the Ministry of Environment was looking for bringing this amendment from a long time.

She remarked that the draft CRZ (Coastal Regulation Zones) Notification received 90% negative comments in 2019, however, it was approved. Thus, there is a need to think of different strategies to scrap draft EIA Notification, 2020. It can be our individual actions like signing petitions, sending mails to the Ministry and participating in campaigns and/or discussing with friends, family and relatives to bring more sensitivity about the conservation of the environment in our country.

Session 3

Path ahead and action plan Summary

In this session, we looked at whether EIA is an effective vehicle for halting the corporate abuse of our environment and linked violations of human rights. Having heard from previous speakers on different aspects of environmental policymaking in India, the politics of it and the challenges with the EIA Notification, we then explored the realm of what could be the alternative pathways that can lead us to the path of environmental protection and environmental justice. Both the speakers in this session answered the following broad questions:

Is it possible to have a piece of legislation, notification or law, that can enable true exercise of every Indian citizen's Right to Life, Right to Freedom of Expression, and a way of life that values nature more than capital, for it is nature we are a part of and nature that resides in each of us?

Is there a way of life that values sustenance more than indulgence? For it is indulgence or the excess of it through our ever-increasing consumerism, that is eating away all our planetary resources.

Can India set an example for herself and for the world and become a society that ensures environmental protection and environmental justice to each form of life?

Halting the corporate abuse of environmental and human rights violations - Is EIA sufficient?



Nityanand started his talk by mentioning that it was one of the rare instances where there was consensus between the participants of this meeting that any single law is unlikely to be sufficient to halt the environmental and human rights abuse by the corporate world. He does not think that it's necessary to separate the environment and human rights to prevent their abuses because they are interlinked. He referred to the Visakhapatnam gas leak on May 7. The news he read was about the arrest of 150 people who wanted to hold hands and form a human chain to call for the arrest of those responsible for the LG Polymers Gas leak. The irony in this incident was that 150 people peacefully protesting the environmental disaster were promptly arrested by the police on June 5, the World Environment Day, but no arrests were made of those responsible for the 12 deaths and 3,000 injured people in this gas leak. He said that the problem was in our culture which views environmental offences as non-serious and environmental laws as flexible. Citing another example of the way environment and environmental concerns are viewed by those in positions of power, he spoke of the beach loop road in Chennai that the judiciary in Madras high court sees as a solution to city's traffic woes and does not want to see that the proposed road comes under CRZ notification, passes through

the area where Adyar empties into the Bay of Bengal, dissects several fishing villages, and crosses ecologically sensitive areas known as turtle nesting habitats. He thinks that the problem is that the laws themselves are not equal, with some environmental laws being enforced extremely actively depending on who stands to gain from that enforcement and who loses from it. He cited the example of conservation versus livelihood issue where the issue of conservation takes precedence over the livelihood of forest dwellers, but on the other hand in issues of conservation versus industry, conservation always takes a back seat. He said that it was not just the government but what values we hold as a society, the government values the same. He spoke of the civilisational conflict between those seen as tribal people and those from the industrialised society. The example given was of the Niyamgiri hills Bauxite mining case, where the people of Dongria tribe saw bauxite underground as a sign of prosperity whereas those of the industrialised society saw that bauxite had to come out for prosperity. Another example of the value systems he gave was of the kind of environmental offences booked as per the National Crime Records Bureau data of 2016; out of 4732 environmental offences just 11 were recorded under the Water Act and 25 under the Air Act in the entire country, despite the fact that not a single river runs clean in the country and has the maximum number of polluted cities with respect to air quality. 97% of the offences were registered under the Wildlife Protection Act and most of the offenders were scheduled tribes or other forest dwellers. He thinks that education has played a very important role in messing our heads because most of the decisions are made by experts, most of whom are civil engineers. This trend of engineers and economists being relied upon for all types of solutions over that of the experience and knowledge of indigenous tribes or forest dwellers, was problematic for it sidetracked conventional community wisdom and applied the same lens to different problems in different geographies. He said that location hardly mattered when it came to environmental violations as we had the case of LG Polymers plant in Visakhapatnam operating without an Environmental Clearance or ONGC operating hydrocarbon wells in the Cauvery delta without a valid operating license. He said that in India, complying with the environmental laws was far more expensive than violating the law. He further said that having an environmental license or not did not make a big difference on whether an environmental disaster will happen or not, because environmental clearances are given without proper due diligence. He said that there are three things that opt to happen as a way forward. One is that we need to be able to revalue and revitalise natural open spaces and confer the status of natural infrastructure to those spaces. The second he thought was to focus more on trying to build good civil liberty laws, creating and enabling environment for people to debate or protest about things. The last thing he said was about building legislation on the pillars of environmental justice. He ended with a message that environmental injustice thrived on some voices that are heard

over the underrepresented communities, and one underrepresented community often not mentioned is the unborn generation.

Proposed pathways for environmental justice in India



Soumya Dutta focused on some fundamental issues and pointed out that this was not just a question of a legislative framework and its implementation, but a much larger question of the kind of civilisation that we are. The first issue he mentioned was of the fundamental conflict of interest, where EIA is done by the project proponent and the consultants hired by them. He said that EIAs need to be done by the communities who are going to be impacted and the government should act in facilitating the same. The second point he made was the lack of any limits of what is an acceptable impact beyond which the cutting of trees or the destruction of grasslands would constitute environmental destruction. He said that this has to be quantified based on developmental, social and environmental impacts going beyond the anthropocentric view because the environment or the ecosystems are life support systems for all life on this planet. The third point he mentioned was about making the project sanction process a little more democratic by involving the local governments (Gram Sabhas and municipalities). The fourth point was about the Cumulative Impact Assessment of all projects over the entire area and wherever the impact reaches. The fifth point raised was about having zero exemptions. He said that the whole purpose of Environmental Impact Assessment is defeated when there are exemptions issued to various industries based on their nature and location. This is because it is known that each industrial activity will be having some impact on the environment, and the purpose of Environmental Impact Assessment

is to ascertain whether the impacts are within acceptable limits. The sixth point was to assess infrastructure projects with our commitments at the national and international level (The Paris agreement and the UN declaration of the rights of indigenous people). The seventh point was of identifying and mapping all the critical ecosystems, and boundaries are drawn. The eighth point was to have a comprehensive external cost accounting, including assessment of environmental and social impact. The ninth point was a proposal to grant constitutional authority to the environment which represents the entire life support system for all human beings as well as other lakhs of species that reside in the country. The immediate strategy might be to try to stop draft EIA 2020 from moving ahead, but the main problem is with the continuous dilution of environmental safeguards under multiple international and national corporate influence. He suggested not to be conservative in our approach but adopt a broader perspective that the environment and ecology is a whole life support system that needs to be brought into prominence and get more priority over money.

Vote of Thanks and Conclusion:

Niraj Bhatt of CAG thanked all the speakers for sharing their views, suggestions, and experiences relating to the EIA, draft EIA 2020, and the broader subject of environmental governance and environmental justice in India. He expressed gratitude to the team from CAG, ESG, MAUSAM for their support in putting together the consultation and its smooth execution.

The webinar brought together myriad perspectives on what ails the environmental governance framework, the role of different stakeholders in weakening or strengthening the EIA notification that is the prime tool governing the development versus environment space. It was felt that the EIA notification itself has failed to uphold the mandate of its parent Act, the EPA 1986, and that the draft EIA 2020 does more to improve India's ranking in the "Ease of Doing Business" than what it does to protect the environment. There was a collective demand that India desperately needs an independent and powerful regulator for environmental protection and environmental justice. It was agreed that active public participation at all levels within the environmental governance framework plays a crucial role in effective, accountable, and transparent implementation of rules and policies. There was a call for continued public interest and participation to strengthen and democratise the environmental protection and environmental justice in India, such that all unique ecosystems, humans, and all other life forms get complete protection and justice. There was consensus to wean away from the anthropogenic approach and the capitalist idea of continuous growth and development, and embrace the ecocentric approach to life.

Video URL of the webinar: <https://youtu.be/Th8mXYpivDc>

Documentaries on EIA:

[Part-1](#)

[Part-2](#)