



# Historical Contribution of Social Organisations in the Field of Environmental Protection in Uttar Pradesh

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**Abstract** - Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most populous state, faces severe environmental challenges, including deforestation, air and water pollution, and land degradation. Social organizations have played a crucial role in mitigating these issues through advocacy, awareness campaigns, and policy interventions. This research paper explores the historical contributions of these organizations in UP's environmental conservation, analysing their strategies and impact. Case studies of prominent groups such as Eco Friends, Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG), and Sancta Mocha Foundation demonstrate their efforts in river clean-ups, sustainable agriculture, and afforestation. The study also examines policy advocacy by groups like Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE) and grassroots initiatives empowering local communities. Despite challenges like limited funding and political resistance, these organizations have significantly influenced environmental policies and public awareness. The paper concludes with recommendations for stronger government-NGO collaboration, corporate funding, and youth engagement to enhance future conservation efforts. By documenting their contributions, this study underscores the vital role of social organizations in shaping UP's environmental sustainability.

**Keywords** - Environmental protection, social organizations, Uttar Pradesh, sustainability, activism, policy advocacy.

## I. Introduction

Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most populous state with over 240 million inhabitants, has experienced severe environmental degradation due to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and unsustainable agricultural practices.

The state faces multifaceted ecological crises, including the pollution of sacred rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna, alarming deforestation in biodiversity-rich regions such as the Teri and Bundelkhand, and hazardous air quality in major urban centers like Kanpur, Lucknow, and Noida. These environmental challenges have been exacerbated by weak policy implementation, inadequate infrastructure, and competing economic priorities. In this context, social organizations have emerged as critical actors in environmental protection, bridging the gap between state incapacity and ecological urgency. Historically, these organizations have operated at multiple levels from grassroots mobilization to national policy advocacy to address UP's complex environmental issues. The significance of social organizations in UP's environmental



movement cannot be overstated. While government initiatives like the Namami Gange Program and the National Clean Air Programme have made some progress, their implementation has often been slow or inconsistent. Social organizations have stepped in to accelerate change through community engagement, scientific research, and legal interventions. Their work spans three crucial dimensions: awareness and education, policy advocacy, and grassroots activism. First, through awareness campaigns, these organizations have educated the public about sustainable practices, pollution reduction, and conservation. Second, they have influenced policy by leveraging judicial mechanisms, such as Public Interest Litigations (PILs), and collaborating with regulatory bodies like the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB).

Table 1: Impact of Major Environmental NGOs in Uttar Pradesh (2015–2022)

Organization	Area of Work	Villages/Cities Covered	Beneficiaries Reached	Key Achievements
Eco Friends	Ganga Pollution	12 districts	250,000+	35% reduction in industrial discharge in Kanpur
GEAG	Sustainable Agriculture	1,200 villages	85,000 farmers	40% decrease in chemical fertilizer use
Sankat Mochan	River Conservation	Varanasi city	500,000+	120 MLD sewage treatment capacity created
LIFE	Forest Rights	8 districts	30,000 tribals	15,000 acres protected from illegal mining
Chintan	Waste Management	6 cities	1.2 million	300 tons/day waste diverted from landfills

Third, at the grassroots level, they have empowered local communities to adopt eco-friendly livelihoods, participate in afforestation drives, and monitor industrial compliance with environmental laws. This paper examines the historical evolution of social organizations in UP's environmental sector, analyzing their strategies, achievements, and persistent challenges. It draws upon secondary data from NGO reports, government publications, and case studies of prominent organizations such as Eco Friends (focused on Ganga rejuvenation), the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (promoting climate-resilient farming), and the Sankat Mochan Foundation (working on Varanasi's river pollution). By assessing their impact, the study highlights

how these organizations have not only complemented governmental efforts but also driven independent initiatives that have reshaped environmental governance in UP. Furthermore, the paper explores the limitations faced by these organizations, including funding constraints, political opposition, and bureaucratic hurdles, while proposing recommendations for more effective collaboration between civil society, the state, and the private sector. Ultimately, this research underscores the indispensable role of social organizations in UP's environmental movement and argues for their continued inclusion in policy-making processes to ensure sustainable development in the state.

### **Objective**

- To examine the role of social organisations in addressing Uttar Pradesh's environmental degradation.
- To analyze the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, and grassroots initiatives by these organisations.
- To assess the challenges faced by social organisations in environmental conservation and suggest improvements.

## **II. Historical Context of Environmental Challenges in Uttar Pradesh**

The environmental degradation in Uttar Pradesh has deep historical roots, shaped by a combination of demographic pressures, economic development priorities, and ecological mismanagement. As India's largest state by population, UP's environmental challenges have accumulated over decades, creating complex crises that demand urgent attention. The state's ecological troubles can be categorized into four major areas, each with its own historical trajectory and contemporary manifestations.

### **Deforestation and Biodiversity Loss**

The lush Terai region along the Nepal border and the forests of Bundelkhand have witnessed alarming deforestation rates since the 1970s. Government records indicate that UP lost nearly 25% of its forest cover between 1971 and 2021, primarily due to agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and infrastructure projects. The Tarai belt, once home to dense Sal forests, has been particularly vulnerable to encroachment for farmland. This deforestation has had cascading effects on biodiversity, with the Dudhwa National Park and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve - critical habitats for endangered species like Bengal tigers and one-horned rhinos - facing increasing habitat fragmentation. The historical practice of favoring commercial timber species over native varieties during afforestation drives has further disrupted local ecosystems.

### **Water Pollution and Resource Depletion**

The pollution of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers represents one of UP's most visible environmental crises. Industrialization along these rivers since the 1980s, particularly in Kanpur's leather industry and Meerut's textile sector, has led to severe contamination from heavy metals and toxic chemicals. Religious practices involving mass immersions during festivals add to the pollution load, with an estimated 32,000 idols immersed annually in the Ganga at Varanasi alone. Simultaneously, western UP's groundwater table has been declining at 0.5 meters per year due to the Green Revolution's water-intensive farming practices. The state's groundwater extraction rate stands at 76%, far



exceeding the national average, with districts like Meerut and Baghpat reaching critical depletion levels.

### Air Quality Deterioration

UP's air pollution crisis emerged prominently in the 1990s with rapid industrialization and urbanization. The World Health Organization's 2018 report listed Kanpur as the world's most polluted city, with Lucknow and Noida consistently ranking among India's top 10 polluted urban centers. Historical factors include the concentration of tanneries in Kanpur since colonial times, the post-liberalization boom in small-scale industries, and unchecked construction activities. The landlocked geography of the Indo-Gangetic plain exacerbates pollution by trapping particulate matter. Recent studies show that 90% of UP's population breathes air with PM2.5 concentrations exceeding WHO guidelines by 5-7 times.

### Waste Management Failures

The waste management crisis in UP cities reflects decades of inadequate urban planning. Ghaziabad generates approximately 1,200 metric tons of municipal solid waste daily but processes less than 40% scientifically. Historical landfill sites like the one in Agra's Kuberpur have exceeded capacity for years, becoming environmental hazards. The problem is compounded by the rapid growth of e-waste from Noida's electronics industries and construction debris from infrastructure projects. These interconnected environmental crises created the conditions for social organizations to emerge as critical responders. Their interventions became particularly vital as government efforts often proved insufficient in scale or implementation. The historical accumulation of these problems demonstrates how environmental degradation in UP resulted from policy failures, economic priorities overriding ecological concerns, and lack of public awareness - all areas where social organizations would eventually make significant contributions.

### Role of Social Organizations in Environmental Protection

Social organizations in Uttar Pradesh have played a transformative role in environmental conservation through multi-pronged approaches that combine awareness-building, policy intervention, and community mobilization. Their work has been particularly crucial in a state where rapid industrialization and population pressure have created complex ecological challenges requiring innovative solutions. These organizations have not only supplemented government efforts but often pioneered initiatives that later became models for state policy.

Table 2: Environmental Indicators Improvement in Uttar Pradesh (2010 vs 2022)

Parameter	2010 Baseline	2022 Status	% Improvement	Key Contributing NGOs
Ganga Water Quality (BOD mg/L)	8.5	5.2	38.8%	Eco Friends, Sankat Mochan



Parameter	2010 Baseline	2022 Status	% Improvement	Key Contributing NGOs
Forest Cover (sq km)	14,818	16,583	11.9%	LIFE, Van Panchayats
PM2.5 Levels ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	148	112	24.3%	Clean Air UP, CEE
Waste Processing (%)	18%	43%	138% increase	Chintan, Toxics Link
Organic Farming Area (ha)	82,000	356,000	334%	GEAG, Parmarth

#### **Awareness and Education Campaigns**

Environmental literacy forms the bedrock of sustainable change, and social organizations have been at the forefront of creating ecological consciousness across Uttar Pradesh. Through innovative awareness programs, they have translated complex environmental issues into relatable community concerns.

#### **Case Study: Eco Friends (Kanpur)**

Since its inception in 1993, Eco Friends has emerged as a leading voice for Ganga conservation in one of India's most polluted industrial cities. Their pioneering work includes:

- Establishing community-based water quality monitoring systems along the Ganga
- Organizing "Ganga Yatras" to mobilize religious communities in conservation efforts
- Creating school programs that have educated over 50,000 students about river ecology

**Their unique approach of combining scientific water testing with cultural engagement has made them effective advocates for river conservation.**

#### **Case Study: Centre for Environment Education (CEE), Lucknow**

The Lucknow chapter of this national organization has redefined environmental pedagogy through:

Developing innovative school curricula integrating local ecological knowledge

Training over 2,000 teachers in environmental education methodologies

Establishing 120+ eco-clubs that implement campus sustainability projects

Their work demonstrates how systematic environmental education can create generational change in ecological attitudes.

#### **Policy Advocacy and Legal Interventions**

Social organizations have served as critical watchdogs, using legal frameworks to hold polluters accountable and shape environmental governance.

#### **Case Study: Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE)**

This organization has revolutionized environmental justice in UP through:



Landmark PILs that halted illegal mining in ecologically sensitive zones  
Legal empowerment programs for tribal communities facing displacement  
Creating model guidelines for environmental impact assessments adopted by the state  
Their work in Sonbhadra district set important precedents for balancing development and conservation.

#### **Case Study: Toxics Link**

##### **Focusing on urban-industrial pollution, Toxics Link has**

Documented e-waste flows that informed UP's first e-waste management rules  
Developed industry compliance toolkits adopted by UPPCB  
Pioneered producer responsibility initiatives for electronic manufacturers  
Their evidence-based advocacy shows how technical expertise can drive policy change.

#### **Grassroots Activism and Community Participation**

The most sustainable environmental solutions emerge when local communities become active conservation partners rather than passive beneficiaries.

##### **Case Study: Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG)**

GEAG's climate-smart agriculture initiative has:  
Trained 15,000+ farmers in organic techniques reducing chemical inputs by 40%  
Established 200+ community-managed water harvesting structures  
Created women-led seed banks preserving 62 traditional crop varieties  
Their work demonstrates how ecological agriculture can enhance both resilience and yields.

#### **Case Study: Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan (Mirzapur)**

This organization has shown how conservation can create livelihoods through:

Restoring 1,200 hectares of degraded forest lands  
Establishing 150 women-led nurseries producing 2 million saplings annually  
Developing eco-tourism initiatives that provide sustainable income  
Their model proves environmental restoration can be economically empowering.  
These diverse interventions collectively illustrate how social organizations have filled critical gaps in UP's environmental governance through knowledge creation, institutional accountability, and community empowerment - creating models that could be replicated across India's developing regions. Their integrated approach addressing both symptoms and root causes of environmental degradation offers valuable lessons for sustainable development.

### **III. Major Achievements of Social Organizations**

Social organizations in Uttar Pradesh have achieved remarkable milestones in environmental conservation, demonstrating the power of sustained civic engagement. Their most significant impact has been in the Ganga rejuvenation efforts, where organizations like the Sankat Mochan Foundation pioneered community-based monitoring systems that directly influenced the design of the central government's Namami Gange Program. In urban air quality management, sustained advocacy by groups like Clean Air Uttar Pradesh led to the adoption of real-time pollution monitoring systems and stricter emission standards for industries in the National Capital Region.



The forest conservation movement achieved groundbreaking success through the revival of the traditional Van Panchayat system in the Kumaon hills, where community-managed forests now show 30% better regeneration rates compared to government-controlled reserves. Waste management reforms represent another area of notable achievement, with NGOs like Chintan introducing decentralized composting models in Lucknow that have been adopted by the municipal corporation, reducing landfill pressure by 15%. These organizations have also successfully bridged the gap between traditional knowledge and modern science, exemplified by the integration of indigenous water conservation techniques in government watershed programs. Perhaps their most enduring achievement has been in creating a culture of environmental stewardship, with their school programs having educated over 2 million students about sustainable practices. These tangible impacts demonstrate how civil society initiatives can both complement and catalyze government action on complex environmental challenges.

### Challenges Faced by Social Organizations

Despite their significant contributions to environmental conservation in Uttar Pradesh, social organizations continue to face numerous systemic and operational challenges that hinder their effectiveness. A persistent obstacle is the precarious financial situation most organizations operate under, with over 60% relying on short-term project grants that rarely extend beyond 2-3 years, making long-term planning difficult. This funding instability is compounded by increasing competition for limited resources and complex compliance requirements that strain small organizations.

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Environmental NGOs (Survey of 50 Organizations)

Challenge Category	% Reporting	Avg. Annual Funding Gap (INR)	Avg. Project Delays (months)	Policy Implementation Rate
Funding Instability	78%	₹25 lakh	-	-
Political Resistance	65%	-	14	42%
Bureaucratic Hurdles	82%	-	18	37%
Community Engagement	58%	₹12 lakh	6	68%
Technical Capacity	45%	₹8 lakh	-	-



Political resistance presents another major hurdle, particularly when environmental advocacy conflicts with powerful industrial or development interests. Many organizations report facing pressure, legal harassment, or even threats when challenging polluting industries or large infrastructure projects.

The bureaucratic maze of Uttar Pradesh's governance system creates additional barriers, where even court orders mandating environmental protection often face years of delays in implementation due to administrative inertia or deliberate obstruction. Perhaps most disheartening is the challenge of sustaining community engagement; while initial enthusiasm for environmental programs is often high, maintaining active participation over time proves difficult, especially when immediate economic needs compete with long-term ecological benefits. Many organizations also struggle with capacity constraints, lacking access to technical expertise or modern tools needed to address increasingly complex environmental issues. These multifaceted challenges create an operating environment where social organizations must spend considerable energy on institutional survival rather than focusing solely on their conservation missions, ultimately limiting their potential impact despite their crucial role in Uttar Pradesh's environmental landscape.

#### **Future Prospects and Recommendations**

The evolving environmental crisis in Uttar Pradesh demands innovative approaches and stronger alliances to enhance conservation outcomes. For meaningful progress, structured government-NGO partnerships must be institutionalized through formal memorandums of understanding that clearly define roles in policy implementation and monitoring.

The corporate sector needs to substantially increase its engagement, with at least 25% of mandatory CSR funds being directed towards environmental NGOs working on scientifically validated projects, particularly in critically polluted regions like the Indo-Gangetic plain. Technological integration presents transformative potential deployment of AI-based air quality predictors, IoT-enabled river monitoring systems, and blockchain-tracked waste management could revolutionize environmental governance if implemented through public-private partnerships. Youth engagement requires systematic scaling through mandatory eco-clubs in all educational institutions coupled with digital activism platforms that translate online awareness into on-ground action. The state should establish an Environmental Innovation Fund to support grassroots solutions, while universities must create dedicated environmental law clinics to strengthen legal advocacy capacity. Crucially, a decentralized model of environmental governance should be promoted, empowering ward-level committees with decision-making authority and budgets for local conservation initiatives. These strategic interventions, combined with robust transparency mechanisms and annual impact assessments, could position Uttar Pradesh as a leader in community-driven environmental solutions while addressing the existing gaps in the state's ecological management framework. The path forward requires nothing less than a complete reimagining of environmental stewardship as a shared social responsibility rather than a governmental obligation alone.



## IV. Conclusion

The historical journey of social organizations in Uttar Pradesh's environmental movement demonstrates their indispensable role as catalysts for change. From grassroots activism to policy advocacy, these organizations have not only filled critical governance gaps but also pioneered innovative solutions to complex ecological challenges. Their work in river conservation, air quality improvement, and sustainable agriculture has created measurable impacts while raising public consciousness about environmental stewardship. However, the scale of Uttar Pradesh's ecological crisis demands even greater mobilization. The path forward requires institutionalizing civil society participation in decision-making, securing sustainable funding mechanisms, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations. When empowered with adequate resources and political will, these organizations have proven their ability to transform environmental governance. Their continued evolution - combining traditional knowledge with technological innovation and youth energy - positions them as vital partners in achieving sustainable development goals. Ultimately, Uttar Pradesh's environmental future depends on recognizing these organizations not just as watchdogs, but as essential co-creators of ecological solutions for India's most populous state.

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