

# CLIMATE VOICES

Citizen Participation in Environment  
and Climate Policy Making



Rainmatter  
Foundation

Civis

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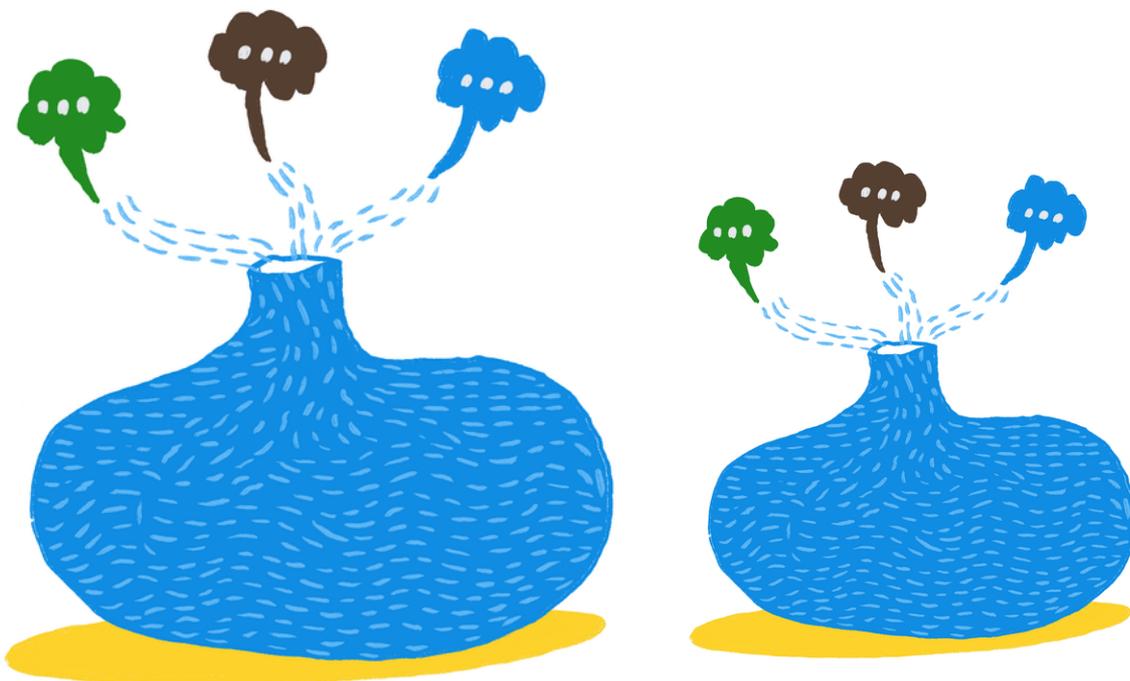
# INTRODUCTION

## What are Public Consultations?

Public consultation is a process of gathering feedback, opinions and suggestions from the general public on proposed laws, policies, projects and other vital issues. Consultations can initiate increased transparency and ensure that government is responsive to people's needs and aspirations.

They can be held through public hearings, surveys, focus group discussions and virtual platforms. They can be initiated by government bodies such as ministries, departments and regulatory authorities, as well as civil society organisations.

During public consultations, specific stakeholder groups and citizens are invited to share their inputs on the proposed law, policy or project. These inputs are considered during the decision-making process. Public consultations help policymakers identify potential issues, inform public how a policy is designed and ensure that the final decision reflects public interests and priorities.



## Public Consultations for Environment and Climate Action

Public consultations are essential for developing environmental policies as they provide people an opportunity to express their views on existing environmental policies. For instance, your city suffers from poor air quality due to traffic and industrial emissions. The government wants to introduce new standards and incentives to reduce pollution and improve public health. Since pollution is a problem that affects everyone, wouldn't you want to participate in how these measures are designed and implemented? Wouldn't you want to learn about the government's method of evaluating the costs and benefits of different options?

Laws and policies that combat climate change affect everyone; hence, public consultations should allow individuals, communities and civil society organisations to participate in decision-making.

This guide covers stories of individuals who took action in creative ways to help build India's environmental laws and policies. By participating in and advocating for climate consultations, you can directly impact policies that shape the future of our planet. So, take the first step and become an active citizen today!



PART 1

# CITIZEN ACTION



# CITIZEN ACTION



## HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN CLIMATE CONSULTATIONS

Public input can help shape policies that balance environmental, economic and social needs, creating a sustainable future for all. Here are some ideas that will help you contribute to policies that affect your life:

### 1. Research

You can start by researching the current climate policies and consultations occurring in your community. Public consultations in India are conducted at the Union, State and Local levels, and are of 3 types:

- Introduction of new laws: this could impact the climate, environment, agricultural practices, allied industries etc. You can participate in consultations either by submitting your feedback or attending in-person meetings. Several cities such as Chennai and Mumbai are releasing Draft Climate Action Plans to map out key initiatives to tackle climate change.
- Amending existing laws: These could be a draft amendment or notification to change an existing law or a policy dealing with climate and environment issues.
- Proposed projects: These are undertaken by the State Pollution Control Board, State Environmental Impact Assessment Authority or the respective state or local municipal bodies. Information about these hearings are available on the websites of these bodies.

Union government consultations on environment and climate policies are usually found in the e-gazette, or on ministry websites such as the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, state pollution

control boards. State and Local government consultations are found in state gazette notifications or in local newspapers.

## 2. Get informed

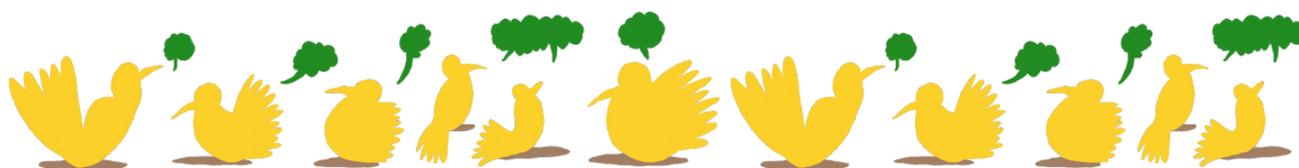
Read and learn about the impact of the proposed policy on you and your community. While publishing a draft consultation or notice of a public hearing, the relevant department may release an explanatory note describing the policy or issue. Additionally, you can learn by gathering information from reliable sources like news articles and reputed organisations publishing explainer blogs. Publishers like Indian Express and The Hindu carry an explained section that educates people on prominent issues including draft laws and policies. Furthermore, you can join WhatsApp groups of several advocacy groups that share relevant information.

## 3. Attend consultations

Sometimes, citizens are invited to provide their feedback and inputs by way of a public hearing or town hall meetings organised by a department, authority or organisation. This is your opportunity to voice your concerns and provide feedback on the proposed policy or project. For example, in Maharashtra, the Maharashtra State Pollution Control Board publishes notices for upcoming public hearings [on their website](#).

## 4. Share your experiences

Sharing your personal experiences and insights on the community impact of the proposed policy can help policymakers understand the real-world implications of their decisions. For instance, [fishers from the Thoothoor group](#) of villages in Kanyakumari are sharing their experiences on shark fishing to promote sustainable ways of fishing. The insights by the experienced fishers will be more valuable than academic inputs on best practices, when a consultation takes place.



## 5. Provide quality feedback

When providing feedback, these are few things to keep in mind:

- **Feedback on specific points:** Feedback provided should clearly reflect the part of the policy you're addressing. Avoid generalisations and focus on a particular section you believe needs improvement. This will make it easier for the policymakers to consider your feedback. Stay focused on the policy in question and avoid tangents or unrelated issues.
- **Providing evidence from lived experiences:** Feedback based on evidence is more likely to be considered. It's important to draw on personal experiences with the policy and explain its impact on you or others. Additionally, provide data or research supporting your feedback so that your suggestions are grounded in facts and real-world experience.
- **Providing perspectives and context:** Explaining why a certain clause or section does not work for you or others is crucial. This includes providing context about the impact of the policy or describing how the clause conflicts with other policies or values.
- **Prioritise collective good:** While it's important to share personal experiences, it's also important to consider policy implications on others, and provide recommendations that benefit everyone. This will be more likely to lead to positive change.
- **Solution-Oriented Feedback:** Commonly, officials conduct public consultations to explore different solutions. Providing recommendations to improve the policy helps demonstrate your reasoning for the feedback and your commitment to finding practical solutions. The solution should emphasise on reducing hurdles for both the citizens and government.
- **Empathetic Feedback:** Finally, it's important to approach feedback with empathy and recognising that policymakers are trying their

best. This would lead to productive discussions and positive outcomes.

## 6. Work with others

Consider forming or join an existing group with like-minded individuals in your community to work together on climate-related issues. Working together creates stronger impact. [The Youth for Climate India](#) has set up a Climate for Justice Library that provides literary resources on climate change and environmental issues. When public feedback was being sought on the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, the collective organised sessions and webinars to help people understand the implications of the draft notification, allowing them to give feedback with ease.

## WHY YOUR FEEDBACK MATTERS

As a citizen, your participation in public consultations is important for several reasons:

### 1. Representation

Participation in public consultations ensures that your perspectives and experiences are considered during decision-making. Research from a [PwC and UN Global Impact report](#) shows that since women account for 55% of employment in the agriculture sector their lack of representation in consultation processes results in ineffective policies.

### 2. Nuanced Feedback

Your feedback will help provide insight into the potential impact and identify unintended consequences of the proposed policy. Thus improving the quality and effectiveness of the policy and make laws more contextual. When the Draft Notification under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 was released in July 2022, a Delhi resident provided valuable feedback stating that a requirement to always carry their vehicle's PUC (pollution control certificate) is difficult to implement and unnecessary as this information is linked to the vehicle number and available online. Nuanced and personal comments like

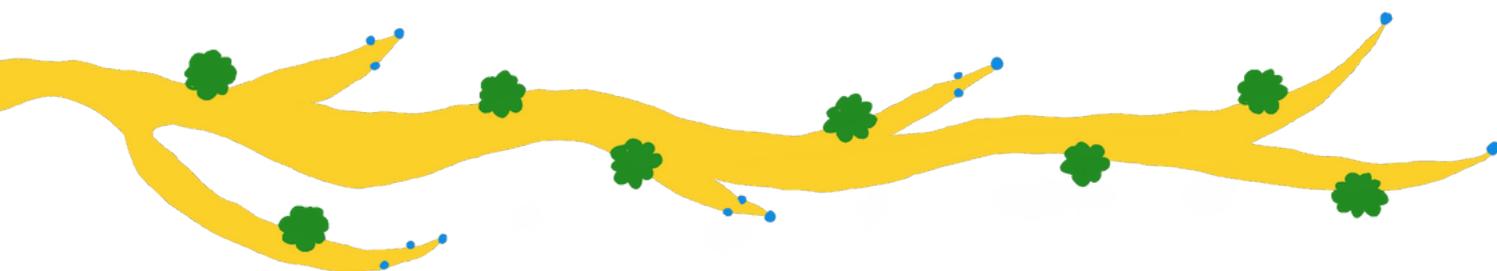
these help law-makers understand the impact of the proposed policy and make amendments accordingly.

### 3. Increased Accountability

Public consultations increase accountability and transparency in the decision-making process. Community action by farmers in Devbhumi Dwarka, Gujarat halted the operations of a polluting bauxite refinery as it affected the quality of their produce. They accomplished this by informing the Gujarat Pollution Control Board authorities and demanding them to intervene under the provisions of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. While no public consultations were held by the authorities, the farmers' demand for accountability from the government caused a positive outcome. You can demand for public consultations, to ensure sustained compliance with the provisions of the law.

### 4. Personal Experiences

Sharing personal experiences help policymakers understand the potential consequences of their decisions. For example, farmers' experience practising the Jhum method (traditional slash and burn technique) close to the Umngot River in Meghalaya drove a successful community action against the construction of a dam that would have threatened their food security by changing their traditional cultivation method. While the Jhum technique receives criticism for being unsustainable and polluting, these farmers practice it differently. Farmers using the Jhum method clear forests, burn the biomass, cultivate multiple crops for a year, then move to the next forest leaving the previous land to naturally regrow.



# EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL CLIMATE CONSULTATIONS RESULTING IN EFFECTIVE POLICY

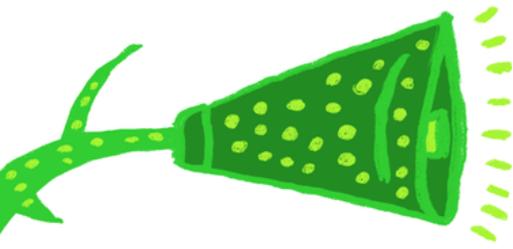
Here are few of the several instances of public consultations that have resulted in effective policy in India.

## 1. Draft Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2021

Plastic, especially single use plastic (SUP), often infiltrates into landfills and burdens the environment. There has been a longstanding demand for a SUP ban in India. During the public consultation for the Draft Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2021, citizens' feedback reflected this demand. Large corporations like PepsiCo, Coca-Cola Corporation, Parle Agro, Dabur and Amul had lobbied for plastic straws (a variant of SUP) to be exempt from the ban on SUPs. However, given the strong citizens' demand, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change included plastic straws in the list of plastic items to be banned.

## 2. BT Brinjal

Around 2005, the Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Ltd. had undertaken scientific tests on BT Brinjal, a Genetically Modified Organism food that had perceived benefits of fortifying food security in India. While the Supreme Court had lifted a ban on the cultivation of BT Brinjal, in 2010, the Ministry of Environment and Forests undertook a public consultation. The mass outrage against the BT Brinjal's cultivation by concerned farmers, environmentalists, and other stakeholders, resulted in an indefinite moratorium against the commercialization of BT Brinjal.



# HOW TO SPREAD AWARENESS ON CLIMATE CONSULTATIONS

## 1. Social Media

Use social media platforms to create educational resources like posts, brochures, flyers fact sheets, infographics and videos to raise awareness about climate consultations and the importance of participating.



## 2. Host events

Organise community events, such as town hall meetings, panel discussions and workshops to provide information on the impact of climate change and the role of climate consultations in addressing the issue.

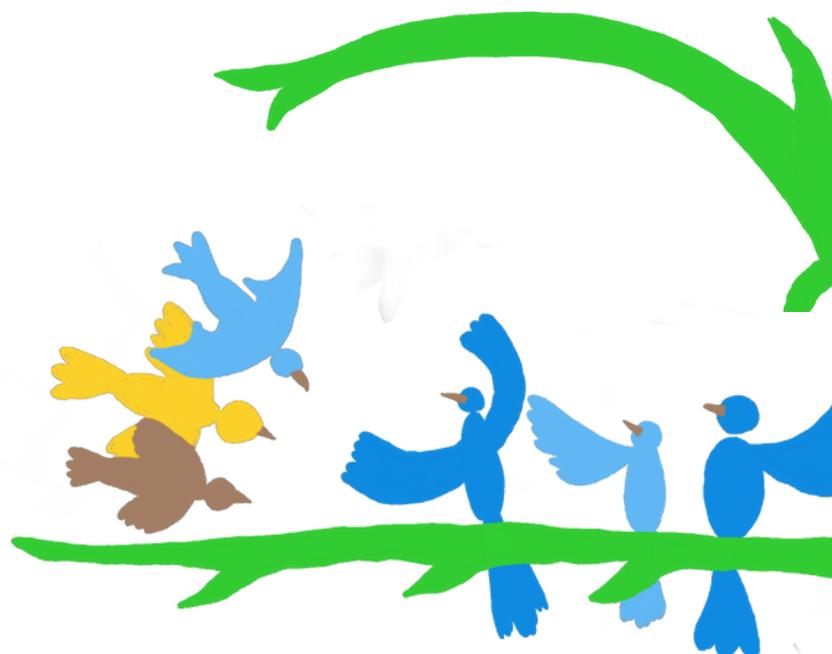
## 3. Collaborate with local organisations

Partner with local organisations, like environmental groups, schools and faith-based organisations, to create mass awareness.



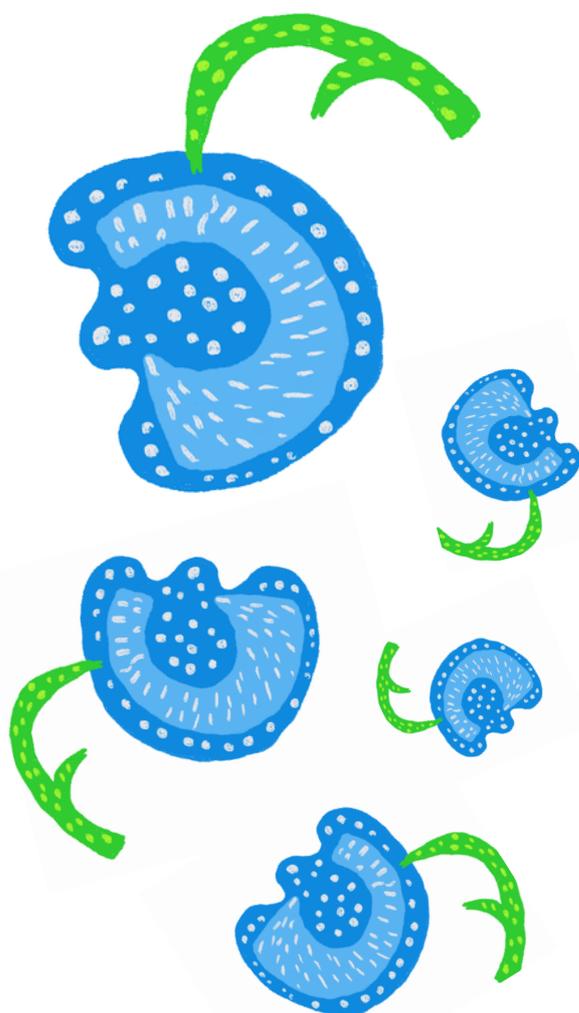
## 4. Encourage advocacy

Encourage your community members to participate in climate consultations and advocate for policies that address climate change. This contributes to creating an inclusive and participatory approach, where individuals and communities feel heard and valued in the decision-making process. This can help build trust and encourage more individuals to join in.



## 5. Utilising Civis.vote

You can visit [Civis.vote](https://www.civis.vote) to check for ongoing public consultations and actively participate in relevant climate consultations. Civis.vote displays active public consultations on draft laws and policies where your feedback is required. It allows you to write your inputs on the policy and read and engage with comments from fellow citizens. On the last day of the consultation period, the platform aggregates all comments and relays it to the Ministry or Department that seeks your feedback.



PART 2

# CLIMATE ACTION BY CIVIL SOCIETY AND NON-PROFITS



# CLIMATE ACTION BY CIVIL SOCIETY AND NON-PROFITS



As a member of a civil society organisation (CSO) or even a sole climate enthusiast, we try to engage communities to mitigate climate change. Through our experience we understand that this process is challenging. You may work with citizens who don't believe the direct impact of climate change on their lives or with a government or department who is arduous to engage with. However, collaborative action has always proved effective.

This section covers activities that a large organisation, small collective or even a sole crusader can undertake to help facilitate dialogue between citizens and governments resulting in effective climate policies. A CSO has a unique opportunity to mobilise communities and increase participation in climate consultations. So go ahead, take action and make a difference!

## COLLABORATING WITH CITIZENS

Lack of awareness about the process and difficulty in understanding policy documents are some challenges that limit citizen participation in climate consultations.

As a mobiliser, you can be a powerful advocate for the consultation process by helping citizens overcome the hurdles mentioned below.

### 1. Raising awareness about consultations

Raising awareness about public consultations ensures that citizens are engaged in the decision-making process. Generally, citizens don't participate in consultations as they aren't aware that their feedback is sought. And if they know of a consultation, they may be unaware about the process of sharing feedback.

You can help significantly by disseminating information on how to participate and about upcoming consultations through flyers, posters, social media and even WhatsApp. There is often a misconception that only professionals, academicians and those with technical knowledge can participate in policy making. Citizens should know that sharing their experiences can help lawmakers develop well rounded policies.

In 2019, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation advertised in the newspapers inviting public comments on the issue of felling of 2,238 trees from Aarey Colony, Mumbai. A local community organisation, Let India Breathe, disseminated information on the importance of participating in this consultation through WhatsApp and social media platforms. They provided detailed instructions on submission of feedback via email, resulting in increased participation.

## 2. Provide explanatory resources about the draft law

A draft law or policy's language can be technical and complex. Climate policies are accompanied by research and data sets that can be intimidating for citizens to comprehend.

Organisations can create content that simplifies the language of the proposed draft and clarify its socio-economic impact on citizens. These could be designed as short explainers, infographics, videos, podcasts, etc. The content should contain a brief overview of the draft law, its financial and social implications, and its impact on the environment, fundamental rights, lives and livelihoods of people. This content must be made available in regional languages to ensure accessibility to all citizens.

A sustainability magazine, Talk Dharti to Me, through its social media, examined provisions of the draft notification for the regulation of Extended Producer Responsibility under Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.

Civis publishes short videos explaining important provisions of draft environmental laws and policies open for public feedback on their website and social media handles.

Yuvan Aves, an environmentalist, using Instagram provided a summary of the Chennai Climate Action Plan in 2022 and encouraged citizens to participate in the public consultation to help shape Chennai's climate policy decisions.

### 3. Mobilising Citizens

As a CSO it's essential to encourage public participation in climate consultations. This helps people express concerns and contribute to the climate policies. Here are some practical ways of mobilising communities and increase participation:

Host town hall meetings and create a forum for people to share their thoughts and ideas about climate change. CSOs like The Climate Group India, World Wide Fund India (WWF), and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) have successfully organised town halls , which have helped build consensus around climate action.

Moreover, in India CSOs such as Greenpeace India, Centre for Environment Education India and Centre for Science and Environment have organised educational campaigns about the effects of climate change and importance of taking action, which has been effective in mobilizing citizens.

Leveraging social media platforms is another way to increase public participation. Greenpeace and WWF India have used social media to promote events, share information and encourage citizens to participate in consultations. In 2020, WWF India conducted an online consultation on climate change and biodiversity conservation, which was attended by around 600 people across India. Youth Ki Awaaz, ran a campaign #ZeroSeHero with Chennai's youth spreading awareness on the Chennai Climate Action Plan's public consultation. This encouraged several students to share their feedback on the city's local

authority. Some CSOs have collaborated with businesses to promote sustainable practices and encourage climate action. The Climate Group India partnered with businesses like Mahindra & Mahindra and Schneider Electric to promote renewable energy and sustainable practices. Lastly, CSOs can work with local governments to facilitate climate consultations. By partnering with government agencies, CSOs ensure that citizens are aware of consultations and have the necessary information to participate.

## WORKING WITH ORGANISATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS

Research organisations and think tanks can contribute as consultants to various government departments in environment and climate policymaking. In such cases, these organisations can ensure that public consultations are conducted in an effective manner.

### 1. Advocate for conducting public consultations

Persuade the department to hold public consultations with relevant stakeholders and citizen groups by highlighting the benefits.

- Resultant laws and policies are contextual and relevant to the public.
- Saves cost to implement the policy.
- Showing examples of policies that benefitted from this process.

Additionally, you can reiterate guidelines under the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy and other relevant laws that promote stakeholder engagement. For example, Rule 5(3) of the Environment (Protection) Rules provides a sixty-day period from the publication date in the gazette to send written objections to the Ministry or relevant department.

Furthermore, you can also rely on the order of courts and the National Green Tribunal (NGT), who have emphasised the necessity of effective public consultations. The Delhi High Court in Utkarsh Mandal v. Union of India held that public hearings must be taken seriously and multiple hearings cannot be conducted on the same day. Additionally, the NGT

noted that several factors contribute to an effective public hearing: location, time and date of the public hearing, executive summary and report provided in local language and due notice. The Tribunal noted that disregarding these factors would render any public hearing a redundant exercise that lacks transparency and public participation.

## 2. Encourage releasing the public consultation's results

By showcasing the successful public consultations you can ensure sustained and positive citizen engagement with the government in climate policy-making. A CSO can encourage government partners to publish the results of past consultations. Releasing the results will help promote transparency, increase accountability, provide legitimacy to decision making and improve citizen engagement methods by learning from experiences.



PART 3

# CLIMATE ACTION IN THE MEDIA



# CLIMATE ACTION IN THE MEDIA

Journalists, media persons and organisations are principal in promoting public climate consultations by ensuring the public is informed and engaged in decision-making. The media can adopt many methods to supplement the public consultation process on climate policies.



## 1. Highlighting importance of public consultations

Citizens turn to news and online media to learn about current and important issues. Journalists and media can discuss the significance of public consultations in mitigating climate change by reporting on upcoming consultations and the method of contributing to the decision-making process, and by sharing examples of successful consultations.

The onus to ensure everybody knows about public consultations is on several stakeholders including the government. However, media can leverage its significant position and goodwill to encourage greater civic participation in public consultations. For example, The Hindu published an [explainer on the Draft EIA 2020](#) discussing the provisions of the document and its possible impact on citizens.

## 2. Reporting on public consultation outcomes

Writing about the [number of participants](#), feedback received by the government, changes in climate policy due to citizen intervention and its resultant effect on the climate will provide evidence on the process' effectiveness. Realising the measurable impact of one feedback point on climate policy can provide the impetus required to boost civic action.

### 3. Platform for public discourse

Publishing content by climate activists, researchers, environmentalists, government officials offer readers various perspectives on an issue mentioned in the draft law or policy.

Legal language and data sets on climate policies can be difficult to understand given its complexity. Publishing explainer blogs and opinion pieces help citizens understand the impact of the proposed change on their lives in reality; allowing them to give nuanced feedback on the draft law.

An important point to note here is that due recognition must be given to those who communicate in regional languages. While many conversations may seem to centre around English and Hindi, efforts must be made to give a platform to those activists and researchers who communicate in other Indian languages as well. Mediums beyond text-based communications of blog and op-eds, such as videos, podcasts, etc. must also be considered to ensure their voice reaches a larger audience.

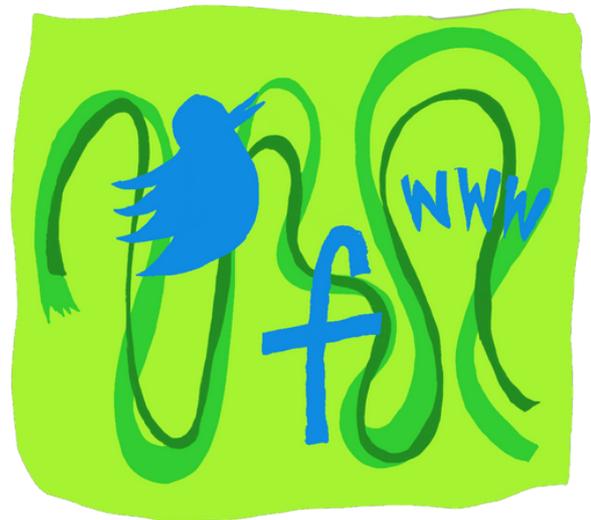
Platforms like [Citizen Matters](#) and [The Better India](#) have been instrumental in offering space to individuals and organisations by publishing content that simplifies draft environmental laws and policies.



## 4. Interview key stakeholders

Sometimes it is difficult for citizens to provide feedback as the draft policy is unrelatable. In such cases, to encourage citizen participation, they should learn about the policy through stakeholders who are directly impacted.

In the case of the development of Mumbai's Bandra-Versova Sea Link, the Hindustan Times highlighted profiles of some affected by the development activities. In case of a city-wide consultation, awareness of affected people's experience through such information would allow citizens to provide feedback concerning their position.



## 5. Use Social Media

The media can leverage the dynamic nature of social media platforms and host conversations between domain experts and stakeholders to raise awareness about the draft policy.

As social media develops to accommodate concepts like live reporting, it can grow into a platform that hosts online townhalls to discuss proposed draft policies. Media organisations, like EPW and Down To Earth, use social media to host discussions with experts on understanding aspects of climate policies.

# RESOURCES

Click on the icons on the left to view the links



**Civis.vote**: A platform to check for recent and open public consultations.



**Civis' Tracker** on environmental laws' compliance with Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy



**Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change**: Reports of the Expert Appraisal Committee Meetings that track clearances given to industrial projects.



**Climate Action Tracker**: A tool to check country-wise climate statistics.

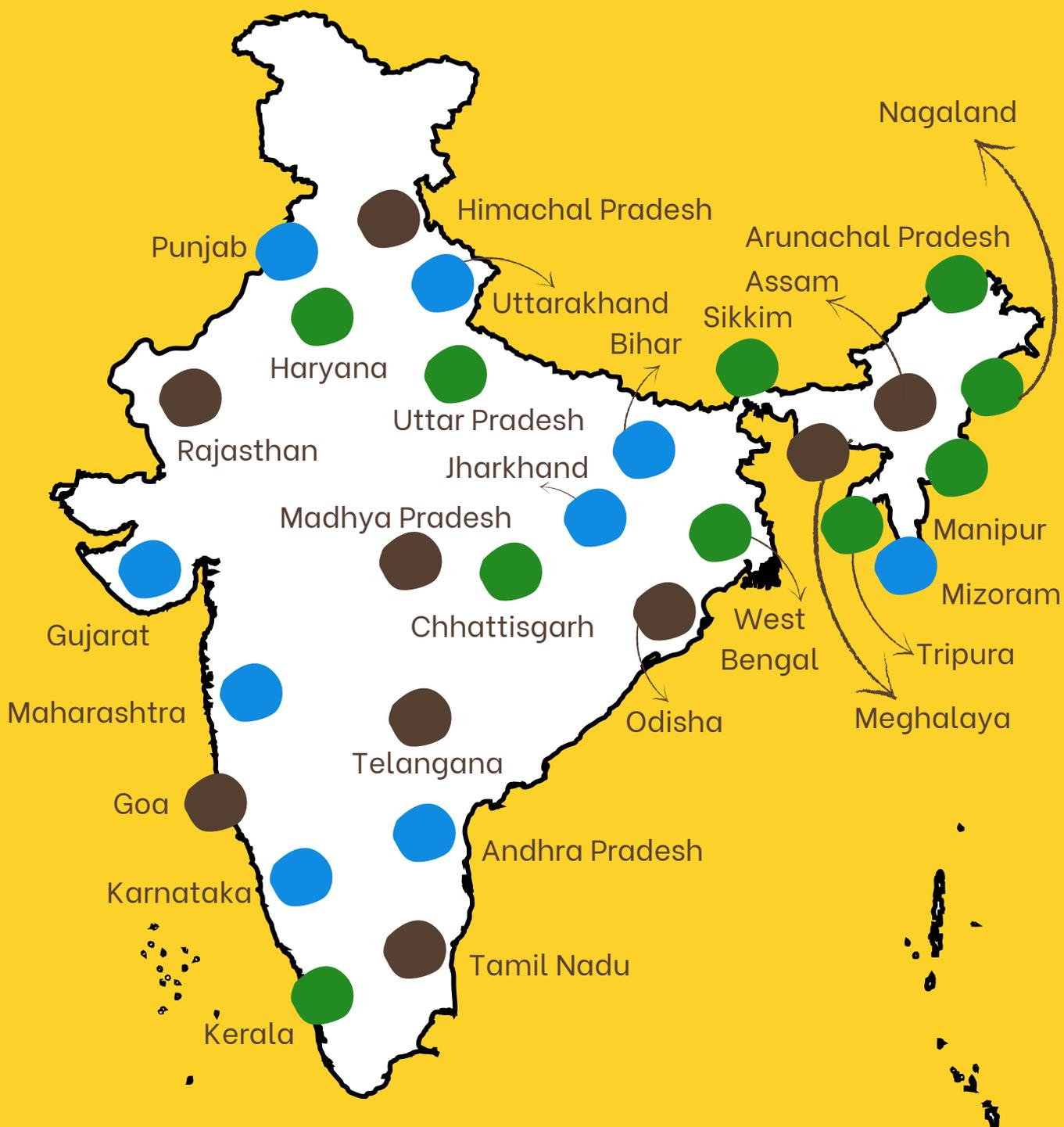


**ELaw**: A website that tracks environmental judicial developments.

# RESOURCES

Click on the icons on the map to view the links

## State-wise list of Public Hearings:



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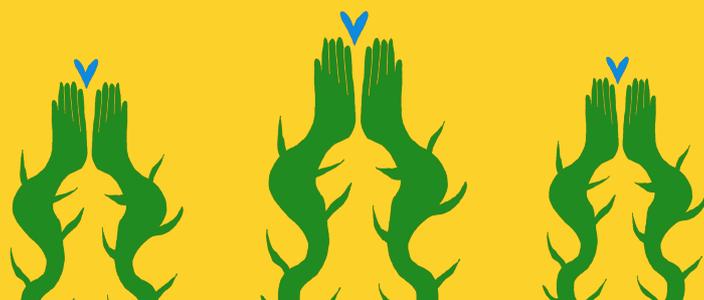
## Individuals and Climate Organisations

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- Rishabh Lalani, Rainmatter Foundation
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- Siddharth Agarwal, Veditum India Foundation
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