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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW OF PAKISTAN

Dr. Saima Waheed
Assistant Professor, HOD, Department of Law, ALHAMD Islamic University Islamabad. Email: somi2win2026@gmail.com
Commander (R) Abdul Ghaffar
Senior Assistant Professor, Bahria University Law School (BULS), Bahria University Islamabad Campus. Email: ghaffar.buic@bahria.edu.pk
Dr. Sohaib Mukhtar
Associate Professor, HOD-Research, NUST Law School, National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST). Email: sohaibmukhtar@nls.nust.edu.pk

Abstract
This article provides a comprehensive analysis of environmental law worldwide and in Pakistan. It examines the historical foundations and cultural influences on environmental protection, reviews relevant literature, and outlines the methodology of analysis. Key institutional structures (e.g. international bodies, Environmental Protection Agencies (EPA)) are compared. The evolution of environmental law is traced globally and within Pakistan, highlighting milestones such as international conferences (Stockholm 1972, Rio 1992) and domestic enactments (Pakistan's 1983 Ordinance, 1997 Act, and constitutional developments). The impact of environmental law is assessed through outcomes and case studies. Global trends (e.g. climate obligations, rights-based approaches) are discussed, with implications for Pakistan's future policies. Detailed case analyses including Pakistan's Shehla Zia v. WAPDA, 1994 and the International Urgenda Foundation v. Netherlands, 2019. This article concludes with recommendations to strengthen Pakistan's legal regime, emphasizing enforcement, institutional capacity, and public participation. All claims are supported by scholarly and legal sources.

Keywords: *Environmental law of Pakistan; international environmental law; sustainable development; institutional framework; climate litigation; environmental justice.*

Introduction

The accelerating environmental crisis – from climate change and air pollution to biodiversity loss has made robust legal frameworks essential worldwide. Nations have responded by enacting environmental legislation and ratifying international treaties (e.g. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biodiversity) to integrate environmental protection into governance. In developed regions, laws like the U.S. Clean Air Act and the European Union's environmental directives exemplify established regulatory systems that embed sustainability and the precautionary principle into policy. At the global level, the concept of an environmental rule of law has gained prominence: the United Nations emphasizes that linking environmental needs with fundamental rights and obligations is central to sustainable development.

Pakistan, by contrast, faces acute environmental challenges such as chronic smog, water scarcity, and climate-induced floods, despite having a considerable body of environmental laws. Pakistan's framework includes federal and provincial enactments (e.g. the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997 and its provincial counterparts) and institutional agencies tasked with enforcement. However, experts note a stark implementation gap: "Pakistan possesses an elaborate framework of environmental regulations, yet its enforcement is as fragile as the very ecosystems it seeks to

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protect". Seasonal disasters in Pakistan – smog in Lahore, heatwaves in Karachi, floods in Sindh are widely seen not as acts of nature alone but as failure of law.

This study is doctrinal study conducts an analysis of global best practices and Pakistan's legal regime. It asks how have environmental laws evolved internationally, and how does Pakistan's framework align with or diverge from these norms? What impact have these laws had, and how might future trends (e.g. climate litigation, rights-based approaches) shape outcomes? By reviewing institutional arrangements, legislative evolution, jurisprudence, and policy outcomes, this article identifies gaps and opportunities in Pakistan's environmental law. It aims to inform both academic understanding and policymaking by juxtaposing Pakistani experience with global standards and lessons.

Pakistan's environmental framework has grown extensive, but enforcement remains weak. Each season brings familiar disasters (smog, heat waves, and floods) which analysts characterize as "not acts of fate alone; they are failures of law". For example, in Pakistan, harsh winter smog in cities like Lahore and devastating floods during monsoon are direct consequences of regulatory lapses and weak enforcement (even when strong laws exist). This study explores how legal and institutional factors contribute to such outcomes, and what reforms could bridge the gap between text and reality.

This study uses a qualitative approach by performing a doctrinal analysis of statutory texts (international agreements, national legislation, and regulations) and reviewed scholarly analyses to map structures and evolution. It examines institutional documents (e.g. agency mandates, government reports) to chart Pakistan's regulatory framework. This research also includes case studies: Shehla Zia v. WAPDA (1994) exemplifies judicial interpretation in Pakistan, and Urgenda Foundation v. Netherlands (2019) for international precedent on right based climate obligations. These cases were selected for their legal significance and availability of documentation. Sources include legal databases, government publications, academic journals, and reputable news outlets. Throughout, assertions are backed by citations to ensure verifiability.

An Overview of Environmental Law Globally and in Pakistan

Scholars of environmental law stress that effective governance requires both substantive norms (e.g. emission standards, protected areas) and institutional capacity (agencies, enforcement). Developed countries often have decades of experience and resources such as the EU has enshrined environmental integration in its treaties and countries like Sweden and Germany have piloted strict climate laws. In contrast, developing countries face implementation challenges.[1]

Environmental law emerged only in the mid-20th century as global awareness of human impacts on nature grew. Early 20th-century initiatives focused on conservation and resource management, but broad ecological protection was rare until after World War II. The landmark 1972 Stockholm Conference marked a turning point, as nations first agreed on shared responsibilities for environmental protection. At Stockholm, Pakistan (as a developing country) was influenced by global emphasis on balancing development and conservation. Islamic values and local cultural traditions also emphasize stewardship, Pakistani society is imbued with the principle of Khidmat-

[1] Yang, Tseming, and Robert V. Percival. "The Emergence of Global Environmental Law." *Ecology LQ* 36 (2009): 615.

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e-Khalq (service to creation), and Islam teaches balance and moderation in resource use (though Pakistan's legal culture only slowly codified these values).[2]

In Pakistan's history, environmental concerns have deep roots in its geography and society. The Indus civilization and later agrarian cultures recognized the importance of rivers and land. Under British colonial rule, Pakistan inherited many resource laws (forestry acts, canals acts) dating to the late 19th century. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan initially lacked explicit environmental provisions, but guaranteed the right to life (Art. 9) and dignity (Art. 14). Early governments prioritized development over environment, but the 1970s global awakening had domestic reverberations, Pakistan established a Ministry of Environment in 1975 (influenced by Stockholm). The country's first comprehensive environmental law was the Pakistan Environmental Protection Ordinance (PEPO) of 1983. This was followed by Pakistan's participation in international agreements (Rio Earth Summit 1992), development of the National Conservation Strategy, and eventually the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act (PEPA) 1997, which consolidated federal and provincial mandates for environmental protection.[3]

Overall, Pakistan's environmental legal regime has been shaped by this blend of global influence and national circumstances. Culturally, communal values (for example, local water-sharing customs and Islamic ethics) emphasize respect for nature, but rapid population growth and industrialization have strained these norms. Historically, progressive steps like constitutional amendments recognizing a clean environment (e.g. Article 9A in 2024) are built atop this foundation of early laws and cultural imperatives.[4]

Pakistan's laws fail enforcement, smog and floods as predictable outcomes of regulatory failure. Multiple agencies with overlapping mandates, underfunding, and unclear provincial-federal roles hamper enforcement. Other studies of Pakistan's climate policy (e.g. analyses of the 2012 Climate Change Policy and its litigation) highlight the role of courts in filling policy gaps (see Leghari v. Pakistan) while lamenting bureaucratic inertia. Global literature on environmental law underscores principles like polluter pays, precaution, sustainable development, and intergenerational equity as foundational norms. Comparative legal scholars emphasize that merely adopting laws (de jure) is insufficient without transparency, accountability, and public participation (the rule of law dimension). Thus Pakistan's legal statutes align superficially with international norms (it is party to major treaties and has adopted key principles into law), but gaps persist in governance and enforcement.

Institutionalization of Environmental Law Globally and in Pakistan

Internationally, environmental law is institutionalized through treaties, UN bodies, and agencies. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) leads global environmental governance, and multilateral agreements (e.g. Paris Agreement, Montreal Protocol) impose obligations on states. Many countries have national bodies for instance, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforces federal environmental laws, and the EU's Directorate-General for Environment

[2] Jabeen, Asma. "Green Milestones: A Chronology of Environmental Legislations in Pakistan." *Annals of Social Sciences and Perspective* 7, no. 1 (2026): 11-18.

[3] Mukhtar, Zeeshan. "Environmental Pollution and Regulatory and Non-Regulatory Environmental Responsibility (Reviewing Pakistan Environmental Protection Act)." In *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, vol. 13, pp. 443-456. 2023.

[4] Haider, Aftab. "Review of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan and the Fundamental Right of a Clean and Healthy Environment: A Case Study of New Article 9A." *International Journal of Law and Legal Advancement* 1, no. 1 (2025).

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oversees EU regulations. Non-governmental organizations (IUCN, WWF, etc.) also play oversight and advisory roles. Crucial principles have been codified: e.g. the Rio Declaration (1992) declared that states shall develop national law regarding liability and compensation for the victims of pollution" and formalized the polluter pays principle. The principle of environmental integration is enshrined in EU treaties, which mandate that environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of other Community policies. International courts and quasi-judicial bodies (e.g. the International Court of Justice, regional human rights bodies) are increasingly interpreting human rights to include environmental dimensions.[5]

Pakistan has built several layers of environmental institutions, though their effectiveness varies. At the federal level, the Ministry of Climate Change (formerly the Ministry of Environment) and the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) are charged with policy and enforcement. Under PEPA 1997, a Pakistan Environmental Protection Council (chaired by the Prime Minister) was to coordinate national policy and approve standards. Pak-EPA (under that ministry) implements the law nationwide. After the 18th Amendment (2010), environmental powers largely devolved to provinces. Each province has its own EPA (e.g. Punjab EPA, Sindh EPA, KPK EPA, Baluchistan EPA) to enforce federal standards and provincial laws. The law also established Environmental Tribunals for adjudicating offenses at federal and provincial levels.[6]

In practice, institutional capacity is often weak. Scholars note that confusion in the structure of institutions, lack of relevant resources, and poor regulatory capacity in Pakistan. Agencies are frequently understaffed and underfunded. Overlap between federal and provincial roles, especially after devolution, has created gaps. For example, the Sindh and Punjab provinces have updated environmental statutes (Sindh EPA Act 2014, Punjab EPA Act 1997 with amendments), but enforcement mainly happens through provincial boards with varying rigor. The judiciary and civil society have stepped in as Pakistan was the first country where courts created a human-rights-based Climate Change Commission in Leghari v. Federation (2015) to oversee government climate policy. Still, international observers warn that many Pakistani tribunals and regulatory bodies do not yet meet global standards of independence or scientific expertise.

Evolution and Impact of Environmental Law Globally and in Pakistan

Environmental law has progressed through identifiable phases in Pakistan. Initially (pre-1970), conservation was fragmented and largely technical (e.g. wildlife laws, watershed compacts). The modern era began with the 1972 Stockholm Conference, which launched new international commitments. This led to domestic laws like the U.S. Clean Air Act (1970) and Clean Water Act (1972). The principle of sustainable development emerged around1980s, culminating in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which produced key documents like the Rio Declaration (including "precautionary principle") and Agenda 21. Since Rio, hundreds of multilateral environmental agreements and national laws have been enacted. In the last two decades, climate change has become central: the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Paris Agreement (2015) set binding or pledged targets. Courts worldwide have started to interpret constitutional rights in light of environmental protection, as seen in Massachusetts v. EPA (US 2007) recognizing EPA's authority on GHGs, or

[5] Koondhar, Mohsin Ali, Lutfi Albasha, Safwat A. Mahmoud, Lamiaa Galal Amin, and Ibrahim Mahariq. "Comparative Analysis of Onshore, Offshore, and Floating Wind Turbines for Renewable Energy Systems: A Review." *Ocean Engineering* 343 (2026): 123243.

[6] Zardari, Zulfiqar Ali. "Environmental Governance in Pakistan: Strengthening Institutions and Policies." *ASSAJ* 5, no. 01 (2026): 1798-1810.

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Mangwana v. Govt in Africa on the right to water. Global law evolved from isolated resource rules to comprehensive regimes addressing pollution, species, climate, and human well-being under an overarching sustainability paradigm.[7]

Pakistan's legal trajectory mirrors this timeline with local adaptations. Its first dedicated policy was the 1983 Environmental Protection Ordinance (PEPO), prompted by rising pollution. In 1993, the National Conservation Strategy was launched. The 1997 Pakistan Environmental Protection Act (PEPA) replaced the 1983 Ordinance, establishing a unified framework authorized environmental quality standards, mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for projects, and pollution control measures nationwide. Under PEPA, Pakistan also developed NEQS (National Environmental Quality Standards) for air, water, and noise, aligning in part with WHO guidelines.[8]

Judicial activism in the 1990s strengthened this evolution. In Shehla Zia v. WAPDA (1994), the Supreme Court linked Article 9 (right to life) and Article 14 (human dignity) to environmental health. This set a precedent that environmental protection is a fundamental right (later codified as Article 9A in 2024). During the 2000s, Pakistan ratified major conventions (e.g. Montreal Protocol, Rio agreements) and updated laws for example, provincial EPAs were empowered under PEPA rules, and the 2012 National Climate Change Policy created a framework (subsequently enforced by courts in Leghari v. Federation (2015)). The 18th Amendment (2010) devolved many functions, so provinces passed their own acts (e.g. Sindh EPA Act 2014). More recently, Pakistan has begun codifying environmental rights explicitly. Overall, Pakistan's legal evolution reflects international trends (from command-and-control pollution laws to rights- and sustainability-oriented laws), but lags in implementation quality.[9]

In many countries, environmental laws have tangibly improved conditions for instance, U.S. air and water quality dramatically improved from the 1970s to 2000s due to the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. The EU's Water Framework Directive has raised water quality and established river basin management. On the other hand, climate change remains a growing crisis despite laws; the need for stronger enforcement has been highlighted by litigation. The international community now tracks legal action as a measure by 2023 there were over 2,000 climate litigation cases globally, reflecting law's role in driving policy. Developing countries have seen mixed results as some (e.g. India with its National Green Tribunal and forest rights act) have achieved notable victories, but others struggle. Overall, scholars note that law can only be as effective as governance allows. Countries that integrate environment into all policies and ensure compliance (Sweden's carbon tax, Germany's energy transition laws) tend to see greater impact.[10]

Despite robust laws on the books, Pakistan's environmental indicators often stagnate or worsen, suggesting implementation shortfalls. For example, Pakistan's air quality in major cities (e.g. Lahore, Karachi) frequently breaches World Health Organization (WHO) standards; river pollution remains high; forests have continued to decline. These outcomes indicate weak enforcement as

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[7] Berebon, Charles. "Evolving Trends and Challenges in International Environmental Law: A Case-Based Analysis." *International Journal of Environmental Pollution and Environmental Modelling* 7, no. 2 (2025): 96-106.

[8] Asghar, Ali, Muhammad Umer, and Afzaal Afzal. "Effective Implementation of Environmental Laws in Pakistan." *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2024): 9-14.

[9] Bashir, Urooj, and Mian Tariq Javed. "Legal Avenues to Protect Environment: Investigating the Pakistan Legislation." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2025): 430-438.

[10] Rydberg, Agnes Viktoria. "Climate Change Litigation: General Perspectives and Emerging Trends." *International Community Law Review* 26, no. 4 (2024): 347-366.

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factories, brick kilns, and vehicles often operate in violation of rules. A recent report noted that one-third of Pakistan's population has no access to safe drinking water, despite legal provisions for water quality. Court interventions have occasionally led to local improvements. The Karachi Coast Protection law (2010) helped manage mangrove reforestation, however, such successes are localized and largely reactive.[11]

Analysts attribute these mixed impacts to governance issues. The environmental law literature highlights "institutional inertia" as a major barrier in Pakistan. Environmental tribunals and agencies often lack resources and independence, making enforcement erratic. The frequency of public interest litigation (e.g. Pakistan Environmental Law Cases 1-10 series in 2000s) underscores how ordinary recourse to courts has sometimes been the only check on pollution. International frameworks (like CPEC's environmental annexes) have so far had limited effect on on-ground practices. In summary, while Pakistan's environmental laws have created formal instruments (standards, permits, tribunals) their impact on air quality, water safety, and climate resilience remains limited without stronger implementation.[12]

Future of Environmental Law Global Trends and Implications for Pakistan

Environmental law continues evolving rapidly. Key trends include Climate litigation and rights-based enforcement. Cases like Urgenda v. the State of the Netherlands (2019), courts worldwide are increasingly treating climate inaction as violation of rights. The UN Human Rights Council and national courts are recognizing a right to a healthy environment. This suggests future laws are increasingly frame environmental protection as a fundamental right with enforcement via judiciaries. Policymakers are binding environmental rules into economic law. Instruments like carbon pricing, green finance regulations, and corporate ESG (environmental, social, governance) obligations exemplify this integration. With global issues (biodiversity loss, plastics, pandemics) transcending borders, new treaties (e.g. on plastic pollution, global biodiversity framework) are emerging. Mechanisms for cross-border accountability (trans boundary impact rules, shared watercourse agreements) are growing. Advances in monitoring (satellites, AI analysis of emissions, real-time pollution sensors) are creating new possibilities for enforcement and transparency. Thus laws are beginning to incorporate these tools in compliance frameworks.[13]

These global shifts imply both challenges and opportunities. The country's vulnerability to climate change continue to mount pressure for stronger action. Trends indicate Pakistan may face increased litigation or human rights challenges if policies lag. Adopting international best practices such as legally defined emissions targets with accountability mechanisms (as in the EU's Green Deal or New Zealand's Climate Act) could improve outcomes. Pakistan's new Article 9A (right to clean environment) aligns with global rights trends, potentially empowering citizens. However, the digital and finance trends demand capacity as Pakistan needs to build expertise in climate modeling, emissions trading, and ensure environmental data transparency to meet emerging standards. The future likely holds a more litigious and rights-oriented environment law landscape, which Pakistan must prepare for by updating statutes (e.g. pending Climate Change Act) and

[11] Noreen, Fouzia, and Khawaja Alqama. "Marine Pollution at Karachi Harbour: Challenges and Way Forward for Progress Towards SDG-14." *Journal of Nautical Eye and Strategic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2026): 1-15.

[12] Kaleem, Muhammad, Javed Iqbal, and Irfan Ullah. "Critical Evaluation of Environmental Protection Policies, Laws and Practices in Pakistan." *Social Science Review Archives* 3, no. 3 (2025): 1791-1797.

[13] Shamshad, Jaweria, and Rashid Ur Rehman. "Innovative Approaches to Sustainable Wastewater Treatment: A Comprehensive Exploration of Conventional and Emerging Technologies." *Environmental Science: Advances* 4, no. 2 (2025): 189-222.

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bolstering institutions. Proactive alignment with principles like precaution and intergenerational equity could position Pakistan to leverage international support (e.g. climate finance) more effectively.[14]

In Shehla Zia et al. v/s WAPDA, 1994, the Supreme Court of Pakistan heard citizens' challenge to the construction of high-voltage transmission lines near a residential area. The petitioners feared health hazards from electromagnetic fields. The Court took this opportunity to interpret the Constitution's right to life and dignity expansively. It held that Article 9's guarantee of life covers all facets of human existence beyond mere biological survival. Crucially, the Court declared that a dignified life includes basic necessities such as proper food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, clean atmosphere and unpolluted environment. It reasoned that the state must protect citizens from environmental hazards as a person is entitled to protection of law from being exposed to hazards which may be due to installation of any grid station, any factory, power station or such like installations. In effect, Shehla Zia enshrined the idea that environmental preservation is part of the constitutional right to life.[15]

This landmark judgment had a transformative impact on Pakistani jurisprudence. It established the foundation for treating environmental degradation as a violation of fundamental rights. Subsequent environmental cases (like Leghari on climate policy) have built on this principle, even before the right to a clean environment was formally added to the Constitution in 2024. The case shows how Pakistani courts have used general rights provisions to enforce environmental protection. Compared to global practice, this mirrors approaches in other countries where courts interpret human rights expansively (e.g. India's Subhash Kumar v. State). However, unlike Urgenda or the U.S. MA v. EPA, Shehla Zia did not compel the government to enact specific laws; it remains primarily declaratory, requiring legislative follow-through for concrete remedies.

In International Urgenda Foundation v/s the State of the Netherlands, as an international comparator, Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands (District Court 2015, Hague Court of Appeal 2018, Dutch Supreme Court 2019) provides a powerful example of climate accountability. Urgenda (an NGO) and citizens sued the Dutch government for failing to act on greenhouse gas emissions, arguing climate negligence violated human rights. In 2015, the Hague District Court ordered the state to reduce emissions by 25% (from 1990 levels) by 2020, instead of the 17% the government planned. It reasoned that under the duty of care (emanating from Articles 2 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, right to life and private life), the state owed citizen's protection from climate harm. The Dutch courts emphasized that the severity of the consequences of climate change created a duty to take immediate mitigation measures. They invoked international principles (no-harm, precaution) and found no legal excuse in the collective nature of climate change to shirk responsibility. The Supreme Court ultimately affirmed these orders in 2019.[16]

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[14] Muhammad, Saqib, Ahsan Muhammad, and Saba Muhammad Hussain. "Environmental Laws and Policies in Pakistan." *Competitive Research Journal Archive* 3, no. 02 (2025): 101-110.

[15] Shehla Zia et al. v. WAPDA, PLD 1994 SC 693 (Pak. 1994) – Supreme Court of Pakistan (environmental petition on high-tension lines).

[16] Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands, Supreme Court of the Netherlands (2019) – Detailed decision. The Climate Litigation Database. Available at https://www.climatecasechart.com/case/urgenda-foundation-v-state-of-the-netherlands/.

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Urgenda is notable as the first decision by any court in the world ordering states to limit greenhouse gas emissions for reasons other than statutory mandates. Its global significance lies in linking climate policy to enforceable human rights duties. For Pakistan, Urgenda illustrates what strong judicial activism on climate might look like under international or regional law. Pakistan is not an European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) member, but the logic of Urgenda can inspire Pakistani courts and legislators as it shows that constitutional rights (to life and health) can justify aggressive climate targets. International jurisprudence like Urgenda adds moral and persuasive weight to domestic environmental litigation. It also highlights the gap whereas Dutch courts compelled actual emissions targets, Pakistani courts have historically been more cautious about creating legislation. Learning from Urgenda, Pakistani stakeholders may push for more concrete obligations (e.g. binding reduction goals), possibly through future legislation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pakistan's environmental laws from early conservation measures to the modern PEPA 1997 and climate policies largely mirror global developments. However, a comparative perspective reveals critical weaknesses in execution. Other countries' experiences underscore that institutional strength and societal engagement are as important as the laws themselves. The jurisprudence of cases like Shehla Zia and Urgenda shows the power of courts in reinforcing environmental rights, but also indicates that without robust administrative follow-up, legal victories remain symbolic.

This study concludes that while Pakistan has made positive strides (e.g. constitutional recognition of a clean environment), much work remains. Gaps in enforcement, coordination, and public awareness have prevented laws from yielding their intended benefits. To address escalating climate and pollution threats, Pakistan must learn from global best practices by fortifying its regulatory agencies, enhancing transparency, and embracing rights-based, preventative approaches. Strengthening these foundations not only improve compliance, but also empower citizens and communities. As one analyst aptly noted, sustainability in Pakistan remain mere rhetoric unless laws are enforced and institutions are held accountable. The path forward is clear as a serious commitment to environmental rule of law that ensures the right to a safe, healthy environment is realized in practice, not just on paper.

To translate law into practice, Pakistan needs structural reforms informed by global best practices. Reinforce Enforcement Agencies by echoing international calls, Pakistan should make regulatory bodies more independent and resource-strong. Environmental tribunals must be staffed by both expert scientists and dedicated judicial officers to ensure decisions are enforceable. Funding and technical support (e.g. laboratories, monitoring equipment) for federal and provincial EPAs should be significantly increased. Institutions must be legally protected from political interference and under-staffing, similar to the autonomy seen in successful jurisdictions (e.g. the U.S. EPA's technical branches).

Improve Inter-Agency Coordination and Clarity: Post-18th Amendment overlaps between federal and provincial authority need resolution. A clear framework for cooperative federalism on the environment perhaps via a new Council of Environment Ministers can mirror models like Canada's Council of Ministers of the Environment. Capacity-building (training, shared databases) should be promoted across agencies to avoid duplication and ensure all regulators speak a common language of standards.

Law alone is not enough; citizens must be able to engage with enforcement. Pakistan should institute a national digital grievance system for environmental complaints, enabling direct reporting to agencies and reducing bureaucratic delays. Public access to information (pollution

data, EIA reports) should be mandated. Schools and media must be encouraged to raise environmental literacy. When communities are aware of their rights and given tools, they become watchdogs (a concept supported by the global environmental justice movement).

Drawing on international practice, environmental review processes (EIAs) should be expanded to include climate resilience measures and longer-term monitoring. All major infrastructure projects (e.g. in CPEC) must meet strict environmental performance standards, with transparent audits. Pakistan can adopt environmental clauses in development policies, making sustainable safeguards mandatory rather than optional. A stronger polluter-pays mechanism (e.g. higher fines, liability bonds) align incentives toward prevention.

Learning from cases like Urgenda and global treaties, Pakistan should set clear, legally binding climate targets. This would give courts a specific benchmark to enforce and signal accountability. Any such act should include appeals or citizen-initiated enforcement provisions, encouraging strategic litigation if government policies falter.

Pakistan should explicitly incorporate core international principles (precaution, intergenerational equity, rights to information/participation) into domestic statutes and regulations. For example, the precautionary principle (emphasized by UNEP and EU law) should be invoked in national policy language. Legislators can study frameworks from other countries' constitutions (over 100 now recognize environmental rights) and adapt suitable models for the Pakistani context.

Pakistan needs to shift from paper to practice. Scholars suggest a three-pronged approach: (1) beef up enforcement (independent agencies, technical capacity); (2) democratize governance (public access, civic involvement); and (3) integrate sustainability across all policies. If implemented, such measures could transform environmental law from a decorative text into "a living safeguard" for people and nature.

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