

## **THE ROLE AND COMPETENCE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

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**Abstract:** Local self-government bodies play a crucial role in implementing environmental policies at the grassroots level. Their proximity to communities and direct involvement in local land use, waste management, and public health positions them as essential actors in environmental governance. This paper explores the legal competence, challenges, and potential of local authorities in environmental protection, focusing on decentralization, legal mandates, and community engagement. Comparative insights from various countries highlight best practices and policy recommendations for strengthening local environmental governance.

**Keywords:** Local self-government, environmental policy, decentralization, environmental governance, municipal authority, sustainable development, local environmental management.

Environmental protection is no longer the sole responsibility of national governments. With increasing urbanization, climate risks, and biodiversity loss, **local self-government bodies (LSGBs)** have become critical agents in environmental decision-making. Whether managing green spaces, regulating industrial emissions, or enforcing sanitation laws, municipalities and other local authorities are often the first responders to environmental challenges.

This article examines the **legal competencies and functional roles** of LSGBs in shaping and enforcing environmental policy. While national governments set the broad legal framework, the implementation of environmental laws frequently depends on local institutions, which face both opportunities and limitations.

The following research methods were used:

- **Normative legal analysis:** Examination of legal acts regulating the powers of LSGBs in selected countries;
- **Comparative approach:** Analysis of decentralized environmental governance systems in Sweden, Germany, Uzbekistan, and India;
- **Case studies:** Review of local environmental projects and court cases involving municipal responsibility;
- **Qualitative data analysis:** UN reports, government reviews, and NGO documentation related to local environmental governance.

### **Legal Basis for Environmental Competence**

In most countries, the powers of LSGBs in environmental matters are derived from:

- **Constitutions or basic laws** (e.g., Article 12 of the European Charter of Local Self-

Government);

- **Environmental laws:** authorizing localities to regulate land use, waste, water supply, and air quality;
- **Municipal codes:** detailing local authorities' rights to issue permits, conduct inspections, and enforce fines.

In **Uzbekistan**, for example, the *Law on Local State Authority (1993)* and the *Environmental Protection Law (2023)* delegate limited but essential roles to regional and local bodies, particularly in waste management and natural resource monitoring.

### **Key Responsibilities of Local Self-Government in Environmental Policy**

Local authorities are typically tasked with:

- **Solid waste management** and sanitation;
- **Land use planning** and green space preservation;
- **Monitoring and controlling local emissions;**
- **Providing environmental education** to residents;
- **Implementing national environmental programs at the local level.**

In **Germany**, municipalities have authority over environmental permitting and zoning, while in **India**, panchayats are responsible for water conservation and afforestation at the village level.

### **Challenges Faced by LSGBs**

Despite their legal mandates, LSGBs often encounter:

- **Insufficient funding and technical capacity;**
- **Limited legislative autonomy**, especially in centralized states;
- **Poor coordination with national ministries and agencies;**
- **Lack of access to environmental data** and expertise;
- **Low public engagement** and trust in local institutions.

Local self-government bodies are positioned uniquely within environmental governance frameworks, as they operate closest to the communities affected by environmental degradation and policy outcomes. Their role is particularly crucial in implementing practical measures such as waste collection, local pollution monitoring, urban greening, and environmental education. Unlike national institutions, local bodies can directly engage with citizens, respond quickly to issues, and adapt policies to specific local needs.

Decentralization in environmental policy offers numerous advantages. It allows for tailored solutions that reflect regional ecological conditions and community priorities. Moreover, local engagement enhances democratic participation and fosters public accountability. However, decentralization is not without challenges. Many local authorities lack sufficient financial resources, technical expertise, and legal autonomy to act effectively. This often leads to a situation where responsibilities are delegated without the power or tools necessary to fulfill them—a phenomenon sometimes described as "decentralization without devolution."

Another persistent issue is the fragmentation of authority. Overlapping responsibilities between national, regional, and local institutions can cause confusion, delays, and inefficiencies. To address this, legal reforms must clearly define the roles and boundaries of each level of

government in environmental matters. Coordination mechanisms are also essential to ensure that policies are harmonized and implementation is coherent.

Capacity building is a critical component of strengthening local environmental governance. Municipal staff need access to training in environmental law, sustainable planning, waste management, and climate adaptation. Knowledge-sharing networks and inter-municipal cooperation can also help bridge capacity gaps, especially in rural or underfunded areas.

International examples demonstrate the effectiveness of empowering local governments. In Sweden, municipalities have the authority and resources to enforce environmental regulations and conduct local impact assessments. In Brazil, participatory budgeting processes allow citizens to set local environmental priorities. Such models prove that when properly supported, local governments can be powerful engines of environmental protection and innovation.

Ultimately, the successful integration of local authorities into environmental governance requires a combination of legal clarity, adequate resources, public participation, and institutional support. Without these elements, even the most progressive environmental policies may fail to achieve their intended impact on the ground.

Local self-government bodies are vital to implementing environmental policies that directly impact communities. While they possess significant potential to lead on climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and pollution control, this potential remains underutilized in many countries due to legal, financial, and institutional constraints.

## Recommendations

1. **Enhance the legal clarity** of local environmental mandates through targeted legislative reforms;
2. **Increase budgetary support** and access to national environmental funds for local governments;
3. **Develop training and resource centers** for local environmental management;
4. **Promote participatory mechanisms** such as local environmental councils and community monitoring;
5. **Encourage inter-municipal cooperation** for tackling regional ecological challenges.

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