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Research Paper

Assessing the Role of Local Communities in the Success of River Restoration Projects: Evidence from Central Gujarat

Mr. Dineshbhai Kalabhai Gandhi[1], Dr. Dipak Makwana[2], Dr. Rajendrakumar Muljibhai Parmar[3]*

ABSTRACT

Rivers have always been at the heart of human life, shaping cultures, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Yet in recent decades, unchecked urbanization, industrial growth, and unsustainable land use have pushed many Indian rivers into decline. Central Gujarat reflects this trend, where once-thriving rivers now struggle with pollution, encroachment, biodiversity loss, and disrupted natural flows. In response, river restoration efforts are being undertaken, combining technical measures such as desilting, wastewater treatment, and ecological rehabilitation with community-driven initiatives. This study explores how local communities influence the success and sustainability of such restoration projects. It argues that communities are not just end-users of river systems but active custodians whose knowledge, practices, and stewardship directly shape ecological outcomes. In Central Gujarat, community engagement has taken diverse forms: citizen-led awareness campaigns, grassroots monitoring of pollution, revival of traditional water practices, and participation in policy dialogues. Through case studies of selected river rejuvenation projects, the research examines how the degree of community involvement corresponds with tangible improvements in water quality, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience. The methodology combines qualitative insights from interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observations with quantitative analysis of ecological indicators. Findings suggest that projects anchored in strong community participation achieve more lasting success than those dominated by top-down technical interventions. Beyond ecological gains, such initiatives also strengthen local governance, revive cultural traditions, and foster a shared sense of responsibility for natural resources. The study highlights three key insights: community participation is foundational rather than optional; sustainable outcomes emerge when scientific expertise works in tandem with local knowledge; and long-term success depends on embedding participation within formal governance structures. By situating the Central Gujarat experience in broader debates on sustainability and environmental justice, the research emphasizes that river restoration is

[1]PhD Scholar, Department of Social Work, Parul Institute of Social Work, Faculty of Social Work, Parul University, Vadodara
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Parul Institute of Social Work, Faculty of Social Work, Parul University, Vadodara
[3]Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Institute of Language Studies and Applied Social Sciences (ILSASS), The Charutar Vidya Mandal University (CVM) University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand
*Corresponding Author

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best understood not as a one-time project but as an ongoing socio-ecological process driven by collective stewardship.

Keywords: *River Restoration, Community Participation, Sustainability, Central Gujarat, Environmental Governance, Ecological Resilience, Water Management, Biodiversity*

Rivers are more than hydrological channels: they are living systems that embody ecological functions, cultural meanings, economic opportunities, and social relationships. In India, rivers have historically shaped patterns of settlement, agriculture, livelihoods and spiritual life. Over recent decades, however, rapid urbanization, industrialization, agricultural intensification, and poorly regulated waste disposal have severely degraded many riverine systems. The decline is visible in reduced water quality, altered flow regimes, loss of aquatic biodiversity, encroachment of floodplains, and diminished ecosystem services for local communities. In response, river restoration has emerged as an integrated policy and practice domain aimed at reversing degradation, reestablishing ecological structure and function, and revitalizing socio-economic benefits. Yet despite technical advances in restoration science, many projects fail to achieve sustained outcomes because they do not adequately engage the people who live with and depend upon the river. This study **"Assessing the Role of Local Communities in the Success of River Restoration Projects: Evidence from Central Gujarat"** examines how different forms of community involvement influence restoration outcomes and seeks to identify pathways for more inclusive, resilient, and effective river rejuvenation.

Rationale and significance

River restoration in India is both environmentally urgent and socio-politically complex. Central Gujarat, a region facing acute water demands, urban growth, industrial corridors, and agricultural pressures, presents a particularly illustrative case. Here, a variety of actors state agencies, municipal bodies, private developers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups interact around rivers that are simultaneously sources of livelihood and repositories of pollution. Restoration initiatives in this region have ranged from engineering-based riverfront development and channel desilting to community-driven clean-up campaigns and integrated watershed management. Yet success has been uneven: some projects deliver visible short-term improvements but falter in maintenance or fail to restore ecological functions; others demonstrate sustained gains through strong community participation and local stewardship.

Understanding why some projects succeed while others do not requires moving beyond technical prescriptions to examine social processes. Local communities play multiple roles in river systems as polluters, users, guardians, knowledge-holders, and political actors. Their daily practices waste disposal, water extraction, grazing, fishing, and land use directly affect river health. Simultaneously, community perceptions, values, and capacities determine the legitimacy, adoption, and maintenance of restoration interventions. Recognizing these interdependencies, this study probes the mechanisms through which community participation shapes restoration trajectories and explores how governance arrangements, economic incentives, cultural narratives, and social capital mediate these processes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the study titled **"Assessing the Role of Local Communities in the Success of River Restoration Projects: Evidence from Central Gujarat"** was

designed to address the core objectives of understanding how communities engage in river revival initiatives, the impact of their participation, and the challenges faced during these processes. The research was adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive view of people's participation in river revival projects.

Objectives

To answer these questions, the study pursues the following objectives:

- **Map and categorize** the types of community participation observed across selected river restoration projects in Central Gujarat.
- **Assess ecological outcomes** by examining water quality data, biodiversity indicators, and physical habitat conditions before and after interventions where data exist and through systematic field observations.
- **Evaluate social outcomes** via household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews to capture livelihood impacts, access to services, perceptions of river health, and incidence of conflict or cooperation.
- **Analyse governance structures** to identify facilitating policies, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and funding arrangements that influence project trajectories.
- **Develop policy recommendations** and an evidence-based framework for integrating community participation effectively into restoration planning and post-implementation maintenance.

Scope and delimitation

This study focuses on river restoration projects within Vishwamitri River Central Gujarat, with an emphasis on urban and peri-urban stretches that intersect municipal jurisdictions and dense human settlements. The research is delimited in several ways. **First,** it concentrates on community roles in restoration success rather than providing a comprehensive ecological assessment of all river stretches in Gujarat. **Second,** the study prioritizes projects implemented since approximately the last 10–15 years to capture recent governance arrangements and technical approaches. **Third,** while the study recognizes the importance of upstream-downstream hydrological linkages, it focuses on interventions and social dynamics within selected local case study sites rather than entire river basins. **Finally**, the research emphasizes participatory dimensions and governance are considered only insofar as they relate to community engagement and outcomes.

Research Design

This study was adopted a **descriptive** and **exploratory** research design. The descriptive design is intended to describe the current state of community involvement and participation in river revival initiatives in Central Gujarat. The exploratory aspect was help in understanding the underlying factors that influence participation and the barriers that people face in being actively involved in such projects.

Research Approach

The study was following a **mixed-methods** approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- **Qualitative Approach**: The qualitative approach helps in exploring the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals and communities regarding their

participation in river revival efforts. It was particularly useful in understanding the motivations, challenges, and benefits perceived by the community.

- **Quantitative Approach**: The quantitative approach was facilitating the collection of measurable data on the extent of participation, its impacts, and the factors influencing people's involvement. This was be used to supplement qualitative findings and offer a more generalizable view of community participation.

Population and Sampling

The study was focus on communities residing in areas Vadodara City and Villagers around rivers in **Vadodara Central Gujarat**, specifically the **Vishwamitri** Rivers.

- **Local Residents**: People who reside in the vicinity of these rivers and are directly impacted by the river revival initiatives.
- **Community Leaders and Activists**: Individuals who are involved in the planning, execution, or advocacy for river revival projects.
- **Government and NGO Representatives**: Officials from governmental bodies and NGOs working on environmental and river restoration projects.

The sampling technique was **stratified random sampling** for the quantitative data collection to ensure representation from different sections of the community, including gender, age groups, and socioeconomic statuses. The qualitative data was collected using **purposive sampling**, targeting individuals who are either directly involved or have significant knowledge about the river revival initiatives.

Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Data Collection

- **Surveys/Questionnaires**: A structured questionnaire was administered to a large number of local residents and community leaders. The survey was be designed to collect data on:
    - Awareness of river revival projects
    - Level of participation (e.g., attendance at meetings, involvement in clean-up drives, etc.)
    - Perceived benefits and challenges
    - Motivational factors influencing participation
    - Demographic details for correlation analysis (age, education, income level, etc.)
- **Interviews**: Semi-structured interviews were being conducted with key stakeholders, including government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders. These interviews were explored:
    - Their role in the river revival projects
    - Their views on public involvement
    - The challenges faced by communities in engaging with river revival projects
    - The strategies they have implemented to encourage public participation
    - Perceived outcomes and impacts of public involvement on the success of the revival initiatives

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis: The collected survey data was be analysed using **statistical software** of SPSS. Descriptive statistics was be used to understand the demographic characteristics of respondents and the extent of their participation in river revival initiatives.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Qualitative data collected from interviews was be analysed through thematic analysis. This approach was involved identifying patterns or themes within the qualitative data, grouping similar responses, and drawing conclusions based on the data. The analysis was help to understand the underlying motivations, barriers, and challenges faced by participants, as well as the success factors for increasing participation.

Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent**: All participants were being informed about the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of their participation. Consent was be obtained prior to conducting interviews, focus groups, or surveys.
- **Confidentiality**: Participants' identities were being kept confidential, and their responses were being anonymized during data analysis and reporting.

Limitations of the Study

- **Geographical Scope**: The study was focus on Central Gujarat and findings may not be generalizable to other regions.
- **Resource Constraints**: Due to time and financial constraints, the number of interviews and focus groups may be limited, which could affect the depth of qualitative data collected.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this study include:

- A comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of community involvement in river revival projects in Central Gujarat.
- Identification of key barriers and challenges that hinder effective participation.
- Recommendations for enhancing community engagement and participation in future river restoration projects.
- Contribution to policy frameworks on river conservation that incorporate greater community involvement.

The findings were be of particular value to policymakers, local government authorities, and NGOs working on river revival and community engagement strategies in Gujarat.

Aims of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore and assess the role of people's participation and involvement in the river revival projects in Central Gujarat, with a specific focus on the **Vishwamitri River** in Vadodara. The study was examined how community engagement in these initiatives influences the success of river restoration efforts, while also identifying the challenges and opportunities associated with local participation in the river revival process. The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations to improve public involvement, foster sustainable practices, and contribute to the long-term success of the Vishwamitri River's restoration.

Variables under Study

In this study, several variables were be explored to understand the dynamics of people's participation and involvement in river revival initiatives for the Vishwamitri River in Central Gujarat. These variables were be classified into independent variables, dependent variables, and moderating/mediating variables. Each variable plays a crucial role in assessing the

factors that influence participation, the barriers to involvement, and the overall impact of community engagement in river restoration efforts.

1. Independent Variables

- Socio-Demographic Factors:
  - Age:
  - Gender:
- Awareness and Knowledge of River Issues:
  - Environmental Awareness:
  - Information Access:
- Government and Institutional Support:
  - Government Policies and Programs:
  - Support from NGOs and Civil Society:

2. Dependent Variables

Dependent variables are the outcomes that the study aims to measure in relation to people's participation and involvement in the river revival efforts.

- Level of Participation: The extent to which people actively engage in the Vishwamitri River revival efforts, which can be measured by:
- Frequency of Participation: How often individuals participate in activities like river cleaning, awareness programs, and meetings.
- Type of Participation: The nature of involvement, including physical (e.g., volunteering in clean-up drives), intellectual (e.g., awareness campaigns), or financial (e.g., donation for river restoration projects).
- Impact of Participation on River Health: The effect of people's engagement in revival efforts on the environmental health of the Vishwamitri River. This can be assessed through:
- Biodiversity Restoration: Impact on the river's biodiversity, including aquatic species and flora, as a result of local conservation efforts.
- Water Quality Improvement: Changes in parameters such as pollution levels, chemical contaminants, and physical water quality indicators over time as a result of people-led initiatives.
- Ecosystem Resilience: Recovery of ecological balance and the restoration of the river's natural function (e.g., water purification, groundwater recharge).

Hypothesis for the Study

In this study, several hypotheses are formulated to test the relationships between people's participation in the Vishwamitri River revival initiatives and the resulting environmental, social, and economic outcomes. These hypotheses aim to address key factors influencing participation and its impact on the river restoration process.

1. There is a significant positive relationship between the level of community awareness about the environmental issues of the Vishwamitri River and their active participation in river revival efforts.
2. Socio-demographic factors such as age, income, education, and occupation significantly influence the level of people's participation in the Vishwamitri River revival projects.
3. Government and institutional support positively influence the extent of people's participation in the Vishwamitri River revival initiatives.

4. Cultural and social factors, including community norms and religious significance of the Vishwamitri River, significantly influence people's participation in river restoration activities.
5. People's participation in the Vishwamitri River revival efforts leads to significant improvements in river water quality and biodiversity.
6. There is a significant positive relationship between community participation in the Vishwamitri River revival and the socio-economic development of local communities, particularly through ecotourism and sustainable livelihoods.
7. Barriers to participation, such as lack of awareness, insufficient resources, or socio-political resistance, negatively impact the level of community involvement in the Vishwamitri River revival initiatives.
8. Increased community trust and social capital are positively correlated with greater involvement in river revival activities.
9. Economic incentives, such as the creation of jobs related to river restoration and ecotourism, positively affect people was willingness to participate in the Vishwamitri River revival efforts.
10. The effectiveness of awareness campaigns and community outreach programs positively influences the level of active participation in the Vishwamitri River revival.

Population & Sample for the Study

1. Population of the Study

Total 600 populations for this study refers to the individuals directly or indirectly involved in the river revival efforts for the **Vishwamitri River** in **Vadodara**, Central Gujarat.

The primary population components include:

- **Residents of Vadodara**:
- **Local Volunteers**
- **Civic and Community Leaders**:

Sample for the Study

The sample represents a subset of the population that was being selected to participate in the study. Given the large and diverse population involved in the Vishwamitri River revival, a **stratified random sampling technique** was be used to ensure that all key stakeholder groups are appropriately represented. The sample size and selection were also depending on time and resource constraints, aiming for an adequate representation of the population.

Sample Size

Given the diverse and large nature of the population, the sample size was be determined using **statistical sampling techniques** based on the total population size. A representative sample was be selected, ensuring diversity in terms of socio-economic background, occupation, and level of involvement in river conservation. The sample size was also ensured that the data is sufficiently robust to draw meaningful conclusions.

- **Sample Size for Community Participants:** A random sample of approximately 6**00 local residents** (from both urban and rural areas) along the Vishwamitri River was be selected to participate in surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Data Collection Methods

- **Surveys and Questionnaires**: Distributed to residents, local volunteers, and businesses to gather quantitative data on their level of participation, awareness, and perceptions of the river revival project.
- **Interviews**: Conducted with government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders to gain qualitative insights into the role of institutions, the effectiveness of policies, and challenges faced by stakeholders.

Research Tools for the Study

The research tools for this study were be designed to collect both **qualitative** and **quantitative** data from different stakeholders involved in the river revival project for **Vishwamitri River**. As the study follows a **survey research methodology**, the tools was focus on understanding the factors influencing people's participation, the barriers they face, and the impact of their involvement on the river's restoration efforts.

Here are the **researches tools** that we are used in the study:

1. Survey Questionnaire

2. In-depth Interviews (Qualitative Research Tool)

Quantitative Data Analysis

- **Statistical Tools**: The data from the survey questionnaires was be analysed using **SPSS**. Descriptive statistics was be used to measure frequencies, averages, and distributions of responses.
- **Inferential Statistics**: The relationships between different variables (e.g., awareness level and participation) were be tested using **correlation analysis** or **chi-square tests** to explore patterns of participation across different groups.

Importance of the Present Study

The revival and conservation of rivers are critical for the sustainability of ecosystems, socio-economic development, and the overall well-being of communities that depend on them. In India, river rejuvenation efforts have gained significant attention, with a growing recognition that addressing the challenges faced by rivers is vital for ecological balance, water security, and socio-economic prosperity. Central Gujarat, and more specifically the Vishwamitri River in Vadodara, represents a crucial case study for understanding how people's participation and involvement can directly impact the success of river revival initiatives. This study seeks to explore the role of communities in the rejuvenation of the Vishwamitri River and highlights the importance of public engagement in ecological conservation and sustainable water management.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Public Perceptions on the Vaho Vishwamitri Abhiyan

1. **Economic Impact Perceptions:**
    - Nearly half of respondents (48.2%) fear loss of livelihoods for fishermen and farmers, while 35.5% worry about decreased property values near the river.
    - Positive economic impacts like eco-tourism are recognized by only 10%, and a small 6.3% foresee tourism revenue decline.
    - **Conclusion:** There is considerable concern about negative economic effects, though eco-tourism offers a promising opportunity to reshape the project's narrative.

2. **Measures of Success:**
    - A majority (48.5%) believe success should be measured by improvements in water quality, biodiversity, and community engagement.
    - Nearly as many (45.2%) focus on native species conservation, while industrial waste discharge and urban expansion are overwhelmingly rejected as success criteria.
    - **Conclusion:** Strong public support exists for ecological and social indicators of success, emphasizing sustainability and community involvement over development or pollution.

3. **Environmental and Sustainability Views:**
    - 48.5% see the initiative as enhancing environmental health and sustainability.
    - Concerns remain regarding water resource access (38.8%), environmental degradation (6.3%), and pollution (6.3%).
    - **Conclusion:** While the campaign is viewed positively for ecological restoration, some scepticism about implementation and resource management persists.

4. **Public Awareness and Participation:**
    - 44.8% value public awareness as key to informed decision-making and participation.
    - However, 39.3% worry that awareness efforts spread misinformation and distrust; smaller portions see it causing disengagement (9.5%) or reduced transparency (6.3%).
    - **Conclusion:** Education and communication are critical, but the quality and trustworthiness of information must be carefully managed to avoid scepticism.

5. **Mixed Economic Views (Additional Data):**
    - Respondents show mixed views on property values and livelihoods, with concerns about decreased values (48.7%) and loss of livelihood (41.7%).
    - Tourism revenue decline is noted by 9.7%, but potential growth in eco-tourism and recreation is unreported, indicating a missed opportunity.
    - **Conclusion:** Public perception on economic impact is divided; highlighting eco-tourism benefits could improve community support.

6. **People's Participation in the Project:**
    - 42.3% believe participation raises project costs; 32.3% see it as fostering ownership and support.
    - Bureaucratic challenges (22.2%) and conflicts/delays (3.2%) are concerns but less prominent.
    - **Conclusion:** While community involvement is valued for sustainability, concerns about costs and administration remain and should be addressed through effective management.

Measures of Project Success:

- About 77.5% of respondents link success to environmental and community factors like protecting native species, improving water quality, biodiversity, and fostering community engagement.

- A smaller group (22.5%) focuses on industrial waste increase or urban development, likely due to misunderstandings of project goals.
- **Conclusion:** Majority prioritize ecological restoration and social involvement as key success indicators.

Views on Public Involvement:

- 42.2% see public involvement positively, fostering community stewardship and ownership.
- However, 38.8% worry it may reduce accountability, and 15.8% feel it could slow project progress due to bureaucracy.
- **Conclusion:** Public participation is generally valued but seen as potentially challenging to manage effectively.

Role of Public Awareness:

- Nearly half (48.3%) believe awareness promotes informed decision-making and participation.
- A significant portion (35.5%) associate it with misinformation and distrust, and smaller groups see it reducing interest or transparency.
- **Conclusion:** Awareness is critical but must be managed carefully to avoid confusion and mistrust.

Nature of Public Participation:

- 44.8% perceive public participation mainly as criticism, while 42.2% view it as active decision-making involvement.
- Some disengagement is noted (13% ignoring or avoiding discussions).
- **Conclusion:** Participation is a mix of constructive engagement and critical scrutiny, with a need to better involve disengaged groups.

Benefits and Challenges of Public Participation:

- 45.2% value participation for fostering ownership and support.
- Concerns exist about increased costs (29.3%), bureaucratic hurdles (19.2%), and conflicts/delays (6.3%).
- **Conclusion:** While crucial for success, participation requires balancing inclusivity with efficiency.

Effective Public Engagement:

- 42.2% favour dialogue, feedback, and transparency as key to effective engagement.
- 41.8% stress decisions should not be made without consultation.
- **Conclusion:** Inclusive, transparent communication is essential to address community concerns and preferences.

Public Consultation:

- 55.3% see consultation as encouraging involvement and accountability.
- Yet, 22.3% feel it reduces responsibility, and 15.8% think it may obstruct progress if poorly managed.
- **Conclusion:** Well-managed consultation is critical to avoid delays and maintain accountability.

Perceived Responsibility for Public Participation:

- Majority (51.3%) believe the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible.
- Others see ONGC (32.2%) and VMC (16.5%) as responsible to lesser extents.
- **Conclusion:** EPA is recognized as the primary agency for ensuring public participation.

Effectiveness of Public Engagement:

- 48.2% worry decisions are made without consultation.
- 38.7% emphasize the need for communication, feedback, and transparency.
- Smaller shares report exclusion (6.7%) or dismissal of community concerns (6.5%).
- **Conclusion:** There is concern about insufficient consultation, but also recognition that transparent, two-way communication is vital.

Challenges to Public Involvement:

- The main challenges perceived are strong environmental regulations (39.0%) and abundant funding/resources (38.7%), which might limit engagement by creating either restrictive or complacent environments.
- Lack of stakeholder interest (19.2%) also poses a significant hurdle in fostering active community participation.

Public Awareness and Participation:

- A majority (51.3%) view public awareness positively as it encourages informed decision-making and participation, but 22.7% worry about misinformation causing distrust.
- Community participation is seen mainly as fostering cooperation, trust, and reciprocity (51.5%), though a substantial portion (35.7%) expresses concerns about potential conflict and division.
- Public participation is valued for encouraging ownership and support (45.2%), but concerns exist over increased costs, bureaucracy, and delays.

Government Role and Perception:

- Most respondents (55.0%) see the government's primary role as providing funding and regulatory support, essential for project success.
- However, some respondents worry that government involvement imposes restrictions on participation (22.5%) or prioritizes economic growth over environmental concerns (9.7%).
- Government involvement is credited with fostering collaboration and resource allocation (32.2%) but also criticized for increasing costs (31.8%), bureaucratic hurdles (22.7%), and project delays (13.3%).

Public Participation Impact on Environment and Justice:

- Opinions are divided: 35.3% believe participation might lead to environmental degradation, while others see it as a tool for promoting environmental justice and inclusivity.
- Addressing this divide requires better education and structured, inclusive participation mechanisms.

Inclusive Public Participation:

- Surprisingly, 54.5% believe limiting access to project information could ensure inclusivity, reflecting a possible misunderstanding.
- Only 26.2% recognize transparency, accessibility, and feedback as key to genuine inclusive participation.
- Exclusion of marginalized groups or ignoring community concerns were viewed negatively but still noted among some respondents.

Government Responsibilities:

- The largest group (41.8%) sees government responsibility as facilitating transparency and accountability.
- Nonetheless, a notable minority supports exclusion of stakeholders (25.8%) or ignoring community feedback (19.2%), which conflicts with good governance practices.
- Overall, openness, transparency, and accountability are critical for fostering trust and successful project outcomes.

Government Role and Public Consultation:

- 35.5% of respondents favour minimizing public consultations for efficiency, reflecting a preference for a centralized, top-down approach, which may risk alienating community stakeholders.
- 28.8% emphasize the government's traditional role in providing funding and regulatory support, essential for project management.
- Smaller groups support imposing control over public participation (16.3%) or prioritizing economic growth over environmental concerns (19.3%), both of which pose risks to sustainable and inclusive outcomes.
- Balancing efficient governance with meaningful public consultation is crucial for long-term success.

Government Engagement and Environmental Outcomes:

- 42.0% believe government involvement is key to enforcing regulations and promoting environmental sustainability.
- However, 29.5% worry the government may prioritize economic growth at the expense of environmental protection, while others express concerns about governance failures leading to environmental degradation or industrial pollution.
- This highlights the need for balanced policies that integrate environmental and economic goals.

Government Consultation and Project Implementation:

- 42.5% see government consultation as fostering cooperation and resource allocation, important for project success.
- Yet, roughly 22% each identify consultation as a source of increased costs and bureaucratic obstacles, and 12.8% note it may delay project timelines.
- Efficient, streamlined consultation processes are necessary to minimize these challenges.

Key Government Agencies Identified:

- 42.3% identify Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) as the primary overseeing agency, likely due to industrial ties.

- Other recognized agencies include the Environmental Protection Agency (25.7%), Department of Transportation (22.5%), and Ministry of Finance (9.5%), reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the project.

Transparency, Inclusion, and Accountability:

- A notable 32.3% perceive that excluding stakeholders from decisions is a government responsibility, suggesting a tendency toward centralized control.
- 25.7% believe limiting access to project information is common, while 22.7% think governments ignore community feedback.
- Only 19.3% see the government's role as facilitating transparency and accountability.
- These perceptions underline the need for improved openness, stakeholder inclusion, and trust-building in the project governance.

Key Challenges:

- **Funding and Resources:** The biggest challenge, identified by 55.0% and similarly by 42.2% in another data set, is insufficient funding and resources, underscoring the critical need for adequate financial and material support.
- **Weak Environmental Regulations:** About 16-42% of respondents highlight weak environmental laws as a significant barrier, indicating the need for stronger regulatory frameworks to protect the river ecosystem.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** A smaller but notable portion (12.7%-15.8%) points to lack of interest or engagement from stakeholders as a potential challenge, which could hinder project momentum.
- **Industrial Presence:** Concerns about industrial activity along the riverbanks are less prominent, with some respondents citing it as an obstacle but others not viewing it as a major issue.

Government's Role in Environmental Management:

- **Positive Role:** 38.3%-42.0% see government involvement as essential for enforcing environmental regulations and promoting sustainability.
- **Concerns:** About 29.2% worry the government may prioritize economic growth over environmental protection, while others raise concerns about potential encouragement of industrial pollution (19.3%) and environmental degradation due to mismanagement (13.2%).
- **Balanced Approach Needed:** These mixed views emphasize the importance of government policies that balance economic development with environmental sustainability.

Building Public Trust:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** 35.3% believe promoting transparency is key to building trust.
- **Excluding Public Input:** Nearly 50% (25.8% + 22.8%) worry that excluding community feedback or imposing decisions without consultation undermines trust.
- **Information Access:** 16.0% feel that limiting project information harms public confidence.
- **Conclusion:** Open communication and active public participation are crucial to fostering community trust and project support.

Government Agencies' Perceived Roles:

- **ONGC as Primary Agency:** A majority (64.8%) identify the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation as the main agency overseeing the project, likely due to its regional presence and resource management role.
- **EPA and DOT Roles:** The Environmental Protection Agency (16%) and Department of Transportation (12.7%) are also recognized, reflecting their specialized environmental and infrastructure roles.
- **Ministry of Finance:** Seen as less directly involved (6.5%), mostly in funding allocation.

Government Support and Community Involvement:

- **Promotes Involvement:** Nearly half (48.7%) associate government support with fostering community stewardship.
- **Concerns on Impact:** Some respondents (28.8%) worry government actions may increase environmental degradation; 19.3% link it to higher costs.
- **Minor Concerns:** Only a small fraction (3.2%) believe government causes conflicts and delays.

Ensuring Effective Project Implementation:

- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** 45.3% strongly believe fostering collaboration is vital for success.
- **Transparency Issues:** 25.7% think limiting access to information can ensure effectiveness, which contradicts transparency principles.
- **Ignoring Concerns & Oversight:** 22.5% feel ignoring community concerns might help, while only 6.5% support avoiding regulatory oversight suggesting regulatory control is widely seen as necessary.
- **Conclusion:** Effective implementation requires open stakeholder collaboration, transparency, and strong regulatory frameworks.

Building Public Trust:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** 38.7% of respondents believe that promoting transparency and accountability is the most effective way for the government to build public trust, emphasizing the importance of openness and clear communication.
- **Excluding Community Feedback:** Surprisingly, 32.5% think excluding community feedback helps build trust, possibly reflecting a perception that strong government control can improve efficiency, though this approach risks alienating the public.
- **Limiting Access to Information:** 22.5% suggest that restricting information might build trust, but this likely reduces transparency and public engagement, which are essential for sustainable success.
- **Decision-Making without Consultation:** Only 6.3% support non-consultative decision-making as a way to build trust, showing most people favour participatory approaches.

Government Accountability:

- **Positive Impact:** A strong majority (61.7%) see government accountability as crucial for fostering public trust and confidence, linking responsible governance with public support.
- **Concerns about Bureaucracy:** 22.3% worry that increased accountability could create bureaucratic hurdles, potentially causing delays or inefficiencies.

- **Perceptions of Transparency:** 9.7% feel accountability might paradoxically reduce transparency, indicating some scepticism about how accountability processes are implemented.
- **Conflicts and Delays:** A small minority (6.3%) believe accountability leads to conflicts and delays, reflecting concerns over administrative complexities.

Suggestions for Further Study

1. **Longitudinal and Impact Assessment Studies**: A significant gap in current research is the absence of longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of river restoration projects on both the environment and local communities. Future research should focus on assessing the impact of these projects on water quality, biodiversity, agricultural productivity, and rural livelihoods over extended periods. This could be done through regular monitoring and the use of indicators that measure the resilience of river ecosystems and the socio-economic status of communities.
2. **Social Mobilization and Behaviour Change**: Further studies could investigate how social mobilization and community behaviour change over time as a result of river restoration projects. Research could look at whether communities' attitudes towards water conservation and environmental protection change post-project and how such behaviour shifts contribute to the ongoing success of river management efforts. It would also be useful to understand the role of social norms, traditions, and cultural values in shaping community involvement in river restoration projects.
3. **Policy and Institutional Gaps**: A closer examination of existing policies and institutional frameworks is required to identify the gaps that hinder the successful implementation of river restoration projects. For example, while policies may mandate community involvement, their implementation often lacks the necessary funding, political will, or coordination among agencies. Future research could evaluate how existing policies can be restructured or strengthened to better support community-based river management.
4. **Role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems**: Future research should place greater emphasis on the role of indigenous knowledge in river management and restoration projects. While there is growing interest in integrating traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with modern scientific methods, there is still limited research that thoroughly documents these knowledge systems. Research could identify how TEK can complement or even lead restoration efforts, particularly in rural and indigenous communities.
5. **Technological Integration**: The role of technology in monitoring and implementing river restoration projects warrants further exploration. Technologies like satellite imagery, GIS mapping, real-time water quality monitoring, and data analytics can help stakeholders better understand and manage river ecosystems. Further studies could examine the challenges and opportunities associated with adopting these technologies, particularly in rural or low-resource settings.
6. **Cross-National Comparative Studies**: As river systems transcend political boundaries, international collaboration and cross-border case studies could yield valuable insights into how different nations tackle similar river management issues. Comparative studies between India and other countries that have undertaken successful river restoration initiatives, such as Australia, South Africa, or Brazil, could provide lessons that can be adapted to India's specific context.

Implications of the Study

This study's implications extend far beyond academic discourse, touching on practical issues of environmental management, sustainable development, and governance. The emphasis on community participation and decentralized governance presents a clear direction for policy-makers and practitioners involved in river management. It underscores the need for building institutional capacity at the local level, promoting collaborative governance structures, and ensuring that communities are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes.

In conclusion, this research reaffirms that people-centred approaches are central to addressing the water and environmental crises India faces, particularly in its river systems. Future river revival projects must integrate ecological restoration, social equity, and economic development to ensure that rivers are restored not only as physical entities but also as vital social and cultural resources for future generations.

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Conflict of Interest
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