From Fiber to Sustainability: Legal and Regulatory Challenges in Green Telecom Deployment

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Sheikh Inam Ul Mansoor*
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8636-4769

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Abstract

[Purpose] The paper explores trends in the legal and regulatory landscape in respect of sustainable telecommunications infrastructure and the nexus between environmental sustainability and digital transformation. It analyzes critically the role of modern domestic and international legal systems on the environmental effects of telecommunications deployment, namely energy use, e-waste disposal, and spatial issues due to network expansion. Moreover, the research aims to suggest normative and institutional directions that harmonize the fast rate of technological advancement with the ecological sustainability, therefore, informing the formation of the telecommunication industry in line with the rules of environmental justice and green digital transformation.

[Methodology/approach/design] The study uses a doctrinal and comparative legal approach, which examines the legislation, regulatory policies, and judicial cases in the chosen jurisdictions, i.e., India, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union. It uses a multidisciplinary approach which incorporates environmental law, administrative governance, and infrastructure regulation to determine inconsistencies in the policies, enforcement discrepancies, and institutional issues. The approach points to the interaction between soft law and hard law tools and explores their usefulness in contributing to the environmental performance and compliance behaviour of telecommunication companies.

[Findings] The paper concludes that despite the speeding up of regulatory regimes to enforce the sustainability requirements, they have limitations due to inefficiency in the operation processes, jurisdictional issue, and the dynamic nature of technology. Jurisdictions are better placed with a hybrid approach of combining both rules approach and incentive based (i.e. renewable energy regulations, tax credit, and carbon reporting requirements) as it has a higher chance of realizing regulatory integrity and quantifiable environmental results. The findings suggest the need to establish a balanced combination of the connectivity imperatives and environmental imperatives using adaptive regulation based on the concept of precaution, proportionality, and accountability.

*Assistant Professor of Law, Symbiosis Law School, Hyderabad Campus, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, India. E-mail: sheikh.mansoor@slsh.edu.in.

[Practical implications] The article suggests integration of sustainability conditions in telecom licencing, setting and confirmation of emissions reduction levels and promotion of the green innovations by means of public-privatised partnerships. It offers applicable insights to the policymakers, government, and industry players aiming to achieve the best balance between telecom growth and environmental sustainability.
[Originality/value] This paper continues to contribute to the emerging literature on the green network governance, since it unites the mutually depending concepts of environmental jurisprudence and telecommunications law, thus bringing promising comparative analysis of sustainable net architecture development.

Keywords: Sustainability. Regulation. Telecommunications. Governance. Infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

The telecommunication sector in the world over the past two decades has undergone a radical transformation, especially following the escalating spread of digital technologies and the rise of the growing centrality of connectivity to socio-economic development *(Gómez-Barroso & Marbán-Flores, 2020)*. The introduction of fiber optic networks, the development and evolution of broadband, as well as the introduction of the next generation infrastructure, have fully transformed the sphere of communication, allowing access into the unrestrained world of information never before reached and making the realization of different spheres possible *(Kaushik et al., 2020)*. In keeping with these technological advances, though is a blend of both positive and negative environmental problems that have taken over the arena of the contemporary control argument. As telecom infrastructure deployment and operation are key indicators of economic growth and incorporation of social factors, they are likely to have ecological externalities, including energy intensive operation, emission greenhouse gases and electronic waste production *(Sarangi & Pradhan, 2020)*. The urgency of the need to conceptualise a legal and regulatory framework that would balance the requirements of technological advancement over the values of intergenerational equity, environmental stewardship and sustainability is also of importance as noted in this dichotomy *(Alsaleh, 2024)*.

The green digital transition i.e. the process of integrating digital technologies and telecommunications infrastructure in ways that minimize environmental impact, promote energy efficiency, and align network expansion with sustainable development goals has emerged as a significant paradigm, both in terms of policy-making and the law, over the last couple of years *(Vermeulen & Pyka, 2024)*. This type of change is not restricted to the introduction of the energy-efficient technologies only, but also the process of introducing the principles of sustainability into the regulatory framework of the

telecommunications industry, the licensing regulations and the corporate governance policies *(Hassan et al., 2024)*. Green digital transition itself is also inherently multidimensional and difficult, and includes not only technological solutions and measures but also is a complex of mandates at the legislative level, administration regulations, and international obligations *(Guandalini, 2022).*The augmented digital infrastructure is arguably evaluable and directed in the basic framework of the environmental law and its priorities to precautionary and polluter- pays principles i.e. A legal and regulatory doctrine mandating that entities responsible for environmental harm bear the costs of preventing, mitigating, or remediating the damage, thereby internalizing environmental externalities into operational and compliance decisions, along with the duty not to pollute the environment *(Verdecchia et al., 2022)*. In this regard, the regulators are supposed to ensure that the infrastructural projects are presented as meeting the environmental impact assessment, as being in compliance with the limit of emission, as being able to embrace the principles of recycling of the electronic waste at the same time ensuring that the efficiency and universality of the telecommunication services operating *(Chi et al., 2015).*

Sustainable telecom infrastructure is not limited to environmental safety, but has more socio-legal objectives, including promoting fairness in access to digital infrastructure, consumer protection of their rights, and promoting citizen participation in the governance process *(Hinge et al., 2020)*. Telecommunications infrastructures are by definition ubiquitous; spreading through urban and rural areas and may require a complex relationship with land-use authorities, city or city planning boards and energy regulations *(Anttiroiko, 2013)*. This means that the legal framework under which the telecom implementation can be based cannot be insulated of the environmental considerations so that any lapses in regulation can result in bad ecological impacts, legal susceptibility or conflict with other law-making mandates *(Mansoor, 2025)*. The institutional devices of the nexus between telecommunications and the environment ought therefore to perform the role of the tools that complement one another, i.e., meeting the demands of universal service provision, competition and technological advancement, as opposed to the principles of sustainability and environmental policy as per the generalizations of the constitutional and legislative norms *(David, 2019)*.

Transnational legal requirements also include Telecommunications sustainable infrastructure, and this is indicative of the cross-border nature of environmental damages and global connectivity of the digital divide *(Wang et al., 2018)*. The national regulatory frameworks are on the increase of chances of mutual interaction with agreements, conventions and soft-law instruments like climate change, e-waste management and energy efficiency treaties and conventions, both have responsibilities which are substantive and procedural in

their duties to both the operators and the regulators *(Hallur & Sane, 2018)*. This would require that such obligations be duly adhered to by incorporating environmental considerations in the licensing regimes and spectrum allocation regimes, together with network deployment strategies *(Sathye & Sathye, 2021)*. Moreover, the regulators need to make sure that they anticipate and mitigate the potential conflict between the opposing legal objectives like urban planning laws, labor and protection of consumer law, which may be affected by the locality, building, as well as functioning of telecommunication infrastructure *(Mishra et al., 2024)*. This necessitates a dynamic and collaborative regulation practice that foreshadows sustainability and secures functional requirements of the industry *(Meena & Geng, 2022)*.

Green digital transition implies re-examination of the traditional doctrines of the regulations in the context of jurisprudence *(Perdana & Chu, 2025)*. One such principle is the proportionality principle, which assumes the enhanced relevance in the reasonableness, non-arbitrariness and consistency of environmental restrictiveness of telecom operators to the common good *(Sun et al., 2025)*. In a more similar vein, the administrative discretion doctrine should be applied in a way that is not contradictory to the environmental requirements so that regulatory decision-making on the infrastructure deployment does not affect the ecological integrity or the common good *(Palmer et al., 2024)*. There has been a growing case among legal scholars that statutory and regulatory instruments should show a dynamic approach, one responsive to the current changing technological and environmental environment, whilst remaining true to the purposes of the policy of telecommunications *(Deepender et al., 2021)*. Such a strategy would involve the introduction of sustainability thresholds into performance standards, the incentive of environmentally friendly technologies and the establishment of legally binding environmental compliance requirements, which would establish a legally consistent and operable structure of green telecom implementation *(Wong, 2021)*.

The necessity of a sustainable telecommunications infrastructure is, therefore, not purely technical or economical but of a legal and normative nature *(Leong et al., 2024)*. With the digital connectivity becoming a necessity to participate in social life, economic competitiveness, and governance, the law has to be adjusted so that the growth of fiber networks and broadband services can be adjusted to the environmental protection and climate change mitigation goals *(Lynn et al., 2022)*. Policymakers and regulators are being faced with the difficulty of balancing the environmental requirements into licensing, spectrum operation, and operational control without inhibiting innovation or derailing the universal service provision *(Gandhi et al., 2024)*. Having placed the deployment of telecom infrastructures in the greater juridical context of sustainability, the paper aims to

investigate the regulatory complications, normative conflicts and practical issues related to green digital transition *(Mendonça et al., 2022)*. By so doing, it underscores the importance of the environmental law, administrative regulation, and jurisprudential principles in creating an effective, inclusive, and ecologically friendly telecommunications ecosystem.

The paper explores the legal and regulatory issues relating to the implementation of sustainable telecommunications infrastructure with special focus on the interplay of environmental law and digital connectivity *(Tang et al., 2021)*. It will examine legislative frameworks, regulatory tools, and policy interventions that guide the roll-out of green telecom, find the gaps and enforcement issues, and determine the best practices of similar jurisdictions. These jurisdictions were selected due to their varied regulatory frameworks, models of governance and sustainability process and thus helped in making a comparative analysis of these legal regimes, the enforcement mechanisms as well as the institutional responsibility of promoting green telecommunications on the global front. The paper also aims to give practical suggestions to balance technological growth and environmental sustainability, so that regulatory authorities create a connection and an ecological stewardship.

TELECOM INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Although the development of the telecommunications infrastructure is the foundation of the modern knowledge economy, it has important environmental consequences that require strict legal and regulatory controls *(Tang et al., 2021)*. The operation, maintenance and construction of networks such as fiber optic networks, broadband hubs and wireless towers all involve large energy requirements, use of natural resources and electronic waste generation *(Andriolli et al., 2022)*. When the same environmental pressure is not controlled, it may undermine any sustainability goal and lead to legal liability due to the environmental laws, regulations and also international requirements *(OECD, 2025)*. The legal debate on the telecom infrastructure is becoming more aware of the necessity of a regulatory paradigm between the technological imperative and the ecology; therefore, it introduces obligatory responsibilities on the operators, and it allows regulatory bodies to make it paradoxical by the sanctions imposed by the regulatory bodies through monitoring, regulation, and incentives *(Gandhi et al., 2024)*.

One of the most critical environmental issues within the telecommunications industry is energy usage in the industry *(Ezeigweneme et al., 2024)*. Switches, routers, servers, base stations all need power to maintain networks, and this may be a significant source of greenhouse gases, provided that power is purchased via grids with a high carbon content *(Shihab et al., 2023)*.

Regulatively, such effects are brought about by national environmental regulations as well as global limits on climate under international treaties *(Wu & Tham, 2023)*. As an example, statutory regulations requiring the minimization of the carbon footprints or the compliance with the energy efficiency requirements force the network operators to incorporate the technologies and practices that increase energy savings into the infrastructure deployment *(Yunxia & Yuqing, 2025)*. Further, administrative regulations adopted by regulatory bodies can introduce certain requirements to energy audits, reporting, and compliance certification, creating a legal system, according to which ecological responsibility becomes legally binding. The law that has evolved around such obligations is placing greater emphasis on the principle of due diligence, which places responsibility on the operators in cases of foreseeable environmental damage as well as the proactive measures of mitigation which should be geared towards sustainable development *(Malaihollo, 2021)*.

Another acute environmental impact dimension of telecom networks is the problem of electronic waste and the sustainability of materials *(Kukreti & Ganguly, 2024)*. The time-limited nature of technological obsolescence, as well as high rates of devices and equipment turnover, adds to the levels of e-waste that contain hazardous materials, including heavy metals, flame retardants, and rare earth elements *(Singh et al., 2023)*. The Environmental law offers a basis in which the problems can be dealt with, both substantively and procedurally. Statutory requirements may hold on to correct disposal, recycling, or re-purposing of older equipment, whereas administrative requirements may include a requirement of extended producer responsibility, record keeping, and reporting requirements on operators and manufacturers *(Wiśniewska et al., 2023)*. The regulatory theory, the polluter-pays doctrine, is a control principle here to guarantee that the groups of contributors of e-waste have the financial and operational contribution burden of mitigation *(Schmidtchen et al., 2021)*. The international legal frameworks such as the conventions on hazardous waste, additional strengthen the duties of the telecom operators domestically, and the domestic policy has to be aligned with the worldwide environmental regulations *(Kumar et al., 2023)*. Compliance, therefore, requires that they not only implement technical measures but also strong corporate governance frameworks with the capacity to incorporate legal requirements into the decision-making of the operations *(Kummer, 2000)*.

The ecological externalities of network growth are not solely limited to energy consumption and material resources waste but also face larger ecological and social-legal implications *(Wu et al., 2025)*. Physical infrastructure (transmission towers, fiber trenches, and data centers) often encroaches on land-use controls, urban planning laws and the data is often within the boundaries of secure zones of environmental protection *(Huang et al., 2022)*. The location or

planning may be uncritically located, which may cause disturbance of the habitat, degraded landscape, collisions with ordinances or zoning codes, creating both legal liability for the operators and the regulatory bodies *(Tan et al., 2024)*. The environmental impact assessment, which is required under the administrative law, is an important tool that determines the potential environment impact before usage and ensures that the decision-making process is both based on the precautionary principle and is aligned with statutory levels of sustainability *(Sandwal et al., 2025)*. In addition, network expansion can contribute to increased resources competitiveness, especially in cities where land and energy are limited and where the regulators need to balance the interests of the individual actors that include the private operators, the government and the civil societies *(Fattouh & Karaki, 2025)*. The analytical approach to such trade-offs has been offered by the legal doctrines of proportionality and reasonableness in making institutional decision, so that regulators may explain the restrictions on the deployment of networks without losing sight of the overall policy.

The regulatory issue is not a simple question about establishing the environmental impact of telecom infrastructure, but the legal procedures that can be made workable to realize sustainable practices. Environmental requirements are being incorporated into the licences and permits and the environment specifications place the requirement on the adherence to the emissions, waste management requirements, and the energy efficiency requirements *(Hinge et al., 2020)*. CEO supervision, through periodic reviews and reporting requirements maintains accountability and the lack of accountability is supported by punishment. Judicial review frameworks also enable the involvement of stakeholders such as civil society organizations and affected communities, to oppose infrastructure projects that do not comply with the standards set by the environment, through which they can introduce the ideals of participation to the governance of telecom networks *(Gill et al., 2021)*. This status of environmental law as a multi-layered system highlights the role of the law in this sector concerning its centrality to the creation of the sector by making the operators, regulators, and policy-makers responsible for demonstrating sustainability *(Devarhubli & Shrivastava, 2024)*.

Moreover, the convergence between technological innovation and environmental regulation creates at the same time, opportunities and challenges *(Abid et al., 2025)*. New energy-efficient network technologies are the low-power fiber-based networks, the renewable energy-based base stations are methods through which carbon footprints can be lessened and yet their use can only be realized by changing the current legal and regulatory initiatives *(Safitra et al., 2024)*. Regulators tend to use incentives, e.g. tax credits, subsidies or fast-tracked licensing steps to promote the use of sustainable technologies as part of

incorporating environmental goals into the larger policy tool kit *(Thanassoulis et al., 2022)*. As legal theorists point out, the aforementioned forms of regulatory mechanisms must be transparent, predictable, and proportional in that the incentives must not lead to unfair competition and contradict the universal service requirements. Comparative analysis in other jurisdictions indicates that the adjustment of the technology to the environment and vice versa necessitates the flexibility of the governance systems, continuous monitoring, and the possibility of making the necessary changes to the statutory and administrative regulations in line with the alternating environmental and technological conditions *(Jaffe et al., 2003)*.

The aggregate impact of energy consumption, electronic waste and other externalities on the environment in general is to seek a uniform and regulatory legal system over telecommunication infrastructure *(Rene et al., 2021)*. Sustainability in this case does not just exist as a longing, but it is a binding provision, which is guided by the legal platform, administrative and international laws. The green digital transition, in its turn, implies the wide expertise of the ecological implication of the networks introduction and the introduction of regulatory instruments which are able to minimize the adverse impact and proceed with the extension of the connectivity *(Collin et al., 2024)*. It is this dual objective, moving the development of technologies forward and securing the environment that is the normative and regulatory ground on which the modern telecom governance is to be founded, providing the legal explanation why the environmental aspect needs to be implemented on all the stages of infrastructural planning, infrastructural deployment and infrastructural operation *(Abdeljalil et al., 2022)*.

Legal Frameworks Governing Green Telecom Deployment

The environmental aspect in telecommunications infrastructure integration demands a multifaceted law and regulation framework which covers national laws, international treaties, in addition to sector-specific laws *(Tang et al., 2021)*. The framework can be used to ensure the growth of digital connectivity is aligned with the organizational objectives of environmental sustainability so that telecom networks are deployed and operated in accordance with legal requirements aimed at reducing the ecological consequences *(Zopounidis & Lemonakis, 2024)*.

In India, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has also been very proactive on the issue of environmental implications of telecommunications *(Kukreti & Ganguly, 2024)*. In 2011, TRAI came up with green telecommunications consulting paper that contained the guidelines on how telecom networks can reduce carbon footprint. These had guidelines that indicated that a significant proportion of the telecom towers would be powered by

renewable energy as the source, and an aspiration of having an urban and rural telecom towers which shall be hybrid powered by 2020 *(TRAI, 2011)*. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) adopted these recommendations whereby the telecom service providers would have to implement energy conservation measures and inject renewable energy solutions *(TRAI, 2025)*. In addition, the industry has also established more energy-efficient telecom equipment's in place by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), which is another step towards introducing sustainability to the regulatory setting of the sector *(Abhyankar et al., 2023)*.

It is possible to explain the strategy employed by Brazil in the implementation of green telecom as a regulatory attempt as well as industry-level sustainability initiatives *(Von Podcameni et al., 2025)*. The National Telecommunications Agency (ANATEL) has been collaborating with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to ensure that there are viable practices in the telecommunications sector *(de Freitas et al., 2020)*. This partnership is aimed at creating an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) index that would be specifically adjusted to telecom operators, evaluating the energy consumption, emissions, and perspectives toward the circular economy *(de Paula e Souza & Baidya, 2016)*. Also, how telecom companies in Brazil have managed to enact measures that see them integrate carbon of renewable energy in their operations, by launching distributed generation schemes, as well as setting up renewable energy certificates. These initiatives show an increase in awareness of the need to be an environmentally responsible industry *(Werner & Benites Lazaro, 2023)*.

The legal environment in the US regarding the deployment of green telecom is dictated by federal and state regulations. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has started procedures to ease the procedures of approving wireless infrastructure, which may reduce the aspects of environmental reviews on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) *(Mitra et al., 2024)*. The move will speed the implementation of broadband networks, especially in the rural regions, and balance environmental issues. Additionally, legislations, such as Green Communications Act, were introduced in an attempt to establish the grant and loan services encouraging the adoption of efficient energy technologies and enhancement of the network resilience *(Nithyanandam et al., 2023)*. The policies of the state level, enhancing the integration of the renewable energy sources and reducing the carbon emissions in the telecom procedures, are added to the federal initiatives *(Gandotra et al., 2017)*.

The European Union guidelines and the domestic policies influence the regulatory context of sustainable telecom in the United Kingdom. The UK has an obligation of reducing carbon emission that is reflected in the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) Energy Efficiency Scheme, according to which big

companies, including telecommunication companies, are required to control the usage of energy and emission of carbon *(Gudde et al., 2021)*. Telecom operators are also encouraged to adapt to the use of energy saving technologies and renewable energy in order to meet such demands *(Owen & Barrett, 2020)*. In addition to this, it is essential to mention that the fact that the UK is an EU ETS member affects telecom operators because they could be subjected to carbon price policies that promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions *(Dechezleprêtre et al., 2023)*.

The policy of implementing the presence of green telecom in the European Union into operations is guided by various rules and measures towards ensuring sustainability in the aspect pertaining to the industry **(***van Vliet & Hammond, 2025)*. To make telecom rules easier, the French Commission has come up with the Digital Networks Act, which seeks to increase the number of contributions that the sector can offer to green transition in the EU *(Czyżewska-Misztal et al., 2025)*. This incorporates policy to promote adoptions in energy saving technologies, adoption of renewable energy sources in telecom infrastructure. Also, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) of the EU obliges big enterprises, such as telecom operators, to issue information concerning environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability in their sustainability engagement *(Operato et al., 2025)*. Although undergoing negotiation, the Green Claims Directive of the EU is intended to hinder the practice of misleading environmental claims made by companies, thus ensuring that the sustainability claims of telecom operators are confirmed and justified *(Vikingsson et al., 2025)*.

A few treaties and agreements in different countries also affect the laws that regulate green telecom implementations. The agreement of Paris, which was adopted within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), commits countries to binding commitments to curb global warming and to cut greenhouse gas emissions *(Wu, 2016)*. Although the agreement is silent on the telecommunications sector, it has broad objectives, and as such, countries will need to integrate climate concerns in all sectors, including telecommunications *(Maneejuk & Yamaka, 2020)*. The guidelines and standards of the environmentally sustainable information and communication technologies are also established by the United Nations through the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) which is a specialized agency. Such recommendations cover energy-efficient network architecture planning, exploitation of renewable sources of energy and e-waste management, which give the world a set road map on sustainable telecom practices *(Routray & Mohanty, 2024)*.

In as much as the national and international frameworks offer a platform through which sustainable telecom deployment can be made, regulatory design and effectiveness of enforcement are not uniform. A report by TRAI of 2020 in India revealed that there were improbable gaps in compliance and monitoring with only around 35% of telecom towers fully utilising hybrid or renewable energy systems, even in 2020, despite green telecom site guidelines of 2011 *(TRAI, 2024)*. Equally, according to ANATEL (2019) which reviewed its energy efficient tower installations in Brazil, it was evident that 28% of the operators have not achieved stipulated reduction goals of emissions *(Energy Partnership Brazil, 2023)*. Such values demonstrate the necessity of effective accountability systems. The critical analysis of these results shows that enforcing them does not only consist of the procedure, but depends on the congruence of the incentive, clarity of the laws, and capacity of the organisations with the role of being a norm can play in balancing the growth of infrastructures and environmental management by designing adaptive regulation systems.

These legal requirements on telecom operators to use sustainable practices are also supplemented by other forms of regulation. When it comes to licensing agreements, one of the conditions that the company can impose is adherence to the environmental standards i.e. using renewable energy sources and adopting energy-saving technologies *(Hegab et al., 2023)*. The regulatory authorities could also apply penalties to non-adherence of environmental regulations as an act of deterrence of unsustainable activities. Besides, tax credits, grants and subsidies are also common incentive programs to push telecom operators to green technologies and infrastructure investment (Gupta et al., 2019). Such incentives do not only make the concept of adopting sustainable practices affordable financially, but also align the economic interests of the telecommunication operators with the goals of the environment *(Leong et al., 2024)*.

Regulatory Challenges and Policy Gaps

The fast proliferation of telecommunication infrastructure has posed a set of regulatory issues and gaps in policies that defy attempts to balance the development of technology and environmental conservation *(Maneejuk & Yamaka, 2020)*. The key to this conflict is the necessity to find a balance between the demands of universal connectivity and network efficiency on the one hand, and the ecological and social requirements of domestic laws, administrative regulations and international obligations on the other *(Sahu* et al.*, 2024)*. Although legislations have placed more and more emphasis on environmental sustainability as a paramount goal, the practical implementation of this mandate tends to face constraints of procedural, subdivided authority and changes in technological situations *(Snigdhha* et al.*, 2023)*. Regulators are thus faced with the challenge of

balancing conflicting legal requirements, and balancing the different stakeholder interests and creating effective and legally justifiable mechanisms to enforce the rules *(Taeihagh* et al.*, 2021).*

The main problem is to harmonize development of infrastructure and the environment. Largely the installation of fiber and broadband node and wireless tower are time bound and also strategic to the national economic growth *(Hinge* et al.*, 2020).* At the same time, the development of this type of infrastructure will have possible ecological effects, such as the disruption of habitats, the employment of more energy, and electronic waste generation *(Biswas & Sharma, 2025).* Environmental impact assessment laws, zoning regulations, and municipal planning codes are also legal tools that are intended to reduce such effects, and the issue with such tools in the context of the rapidly changing telecom equipment is often challenging *(Kritika & Sharma, 2025).* India is an example of a country in which the Environmental Protection Act and other impact assessment regulations dictate that infrastructure projects and developments should be evaluated, but the time limits of the process are in conflict with the regulatory frameworks of rapid implementation of networks, presenting a legal conflict between developmental urgency and environmental standards *(Turaga & Sugathan, 2020).* In Brazil, ANATEL faces the same difficulties, as it has to work with the environmental agencies, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, but they overlap due to ambiguity in jurisdictions and timely approvals *(de Freitas* et al.*, 2020).* Such a balancing exercise highlights the need to have a regulatory principle that would incorporate the element of sustainability in the planning process, licensing, and the operational processes that would not unnecessarily impair the implementation of essential telecom services *(Ogwu* et al.*, 2025).*

Regulatory difficulties are also increased by the level of gaps in enforcement and compliance problems. Even though there are environmental statutes and telecom specific regulations of the obligation that is both substantive and procedural, the practical enforcement is uneven across jurisdictions *(Kukreti & Ganguly, 2024).* Enforcing adherence in regards to the issue of energy efficiency, renewable energy laws and waste recycling strategies may demand a lot of administrative skills and resources, technical skills and inter-agency challenges *(Dey et al., 2022).* In the United States, as is the case of the Federal Communications Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency in developing the principles of sustainable telecom practices, these measures may not be fully implemented in the state and municipal levels and, therefore, results in a different degree of compliance between the operators *(Cramer, 2008).* Equally, in the case of the United Kingdom, the Carbon Reduction Commitment and other schemes based on these are dependent on self-reporting processes that,

though legally obligatory, have their limitation on the verification and audit potential *(Sajjadian, 2023)*. Such enforcement loopholes render laws weak and leave the purpose es of regulation interventions in terms of achieving an ecological good condition, which explains the necessity of having well-developed systems of compliance that will involve monitoring, reporting, and punishing in a legally rational way *(Shahbaz et al., 2020)*.

The other major policy gap is the conflict between the growth of telecommunications and city or land-use planning. Placement of telecommunic infrastructure is often subject to crossing with municipality regulations and zoning as well as environmental protection laws, creating a possible legal conflict *(Maneejuk & Yamaka, 2020)*. There is no simple legal territory like cities and assimilating networks must deal with the challenges of preserving heritage, aesthetics of the common good, and space restriction. The introduction of the 5G networks in the European Union, which is only one of the regions, has brought up the law in relation to the location of small cell towers, how effectively the new infrastructure can meet the existing requirements and regulations on urban planning, and the extent to which the environmental impact analysis should be applied to networks densification *(Liu* et al*., 2021)*. These conflicts in the overlapping of competencies between the national, regional and municipal authorities further increase the process of ambiguity of the procedure and slows compliance *(Meena & Geng, 2022)*. An effective regulatory design therefore calls the need of intergovernmental coordination, legal alignment and dispute resolution channels that are above stated to be in place to reconcile the needs of infrastructure requirements to the statutory requirements to assist in protecting urban and ecological environment.

The laws and the policy instruments that are applicable in the various jurisdictions are also heterogeneous thus making regulatory coherence more complex. The international treaties and conventions have provided the broad outlines of the sustainability objectives but the national and subnational laws may vary in their standards, procedures of enforcing them and the requirements of certain processes *(Orji, 2018)*. This dissonance can result in unequal application of the principles of sustainability in the activity of multinational telecoms and raises the question of legal responsibility, due diligence and corporate governance. The operators are caught on a dilemma of miring in obligations between compliance with the local laws and regulations on the one hand, and the standards and expectations of the investors on the other hand. ANATEL regulations, environmental licensing requirements and Corporate ESG committed have been used as an example in Brazil of how difficult these compliance issues may be, and the legal vagueness which creates the risk of conflict and

contradiction in terms of accountability and compliance *(Costa Alves de Mattos et al. 2006)*.

In addition, the technological advancements and alterations in the practice used in the industry present dynamic regulatory risks. The implementation of a new network architecture involving the densification of small cells, filling them with cloud data centers, and the adoption of fiber optic networks which are very energy-consuming are associated with new environmental challenges that do not necessarily tend to reflect well in the existing legal tools *(Mollahasani et al., 2020)*. Regulatory lag that can be simply defined as the duration of the legal institution to react to the technological advancement enlarges the loopholes in imposing the duty and adds ambiguity to the range of responsibility of the operators *(Gandhi et al., 2024)*. Legal scholars have identified the adaptive regulation role where the statutes, administrative regulations and judicial ruling evolve with varying technology such that the operators are taken not to be left in the dark but at the same time, the preservation of environmental integrity is maintained *(Lescrauwaet et al., 2022)*. Such adaptive designs must take into consideration the component of proportionality, precaution, and accountability in the sense that such regulatory interventions can be justifiable, effective and legally justifiable.

Last but not least, regulatory issues are further complicated by the stakeholders. Social participation, system of openness and accountability of people, is often a necessity in the proper implementation of the sustainability requirements. However, opposing interests among the telecom operators, the regulators, the community of the area and the environmental advocacy groups could render compliance and monitoring tiresome *(Meena & Geng, 2022)*. Subtly referred to as judicial review, the procedure of general consultation and participatory planning procedures despite being required by law in most jurisdictions should be refined or though fine-tuned to avoid administrative sabotage or legislative lapse. These interactions are the ones that make the idea of law to be rather significant not as a collection of prescriptive rules but as a rule of negotiation, accountability and aligning the opposing goals within the society.

Innovative Approaches and Best Practices

The realization of sustainability in the telecommunications infrastructure requires creative regulatory principles and best practices that can bring into alignment technological progress and the care of the environment *(Pintor et al., 2025)*. In different jurisdictions, the law has been created to encourage green behavior, sustainable planning of infrastructural designs and setting of green performance standards.

In India the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has introduced Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) which subsidizes the provision of telecom infrastructure to underserved and remote locations *(Jain & Raghuram, 2010)*. This effort will not only improve connectivity but will also promote the use of renewable sources of energy and energy friendly technologies. DoT has also collaborated with Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to come up with regulations that would promote the application of green technologies in telecom operation such as installing hybrid power plant in telecom towers and use of equipment's that would save on energy. Such environmental laws are buttressed by incentives that the operators ought to reduce the carbon footprint and be sustainable in their business approaches *(Mehra, 2020)*.

Brazilian policy on the regulation of sustainable telecommunications is characterized by a combination of the national policy, as well as the efforts made by the industrial institutions *(Mattos & Coutinho, 2005)*. National Telecommunications Agency (ANATEL) has established the necessities which compel the telecom operators to use energy efficiency and emission restriction *(de Freitas et al., 2020)*. In addition, ANATEL has also collaborated with the environmental agencies in developing the guidelines of sustainable management of the disposal of electronic waste produced by the telecom infrastructure *(Jain et al., 2023)*. These legislations are supported with incentives to make the operators invest in renewable sources of energy and apply the principles of the circular economy to their operations. The other way through which a telecom sector in Brazil can be made sure that sustainable practices are embraced is through introduction of tax incentives on companies that invest in green technologies *(Masood & Alam, 2019)*.

In the United States, sustainability in the telecommunication sector is most facilitated by the federal and state policies. The Federal communications commission (FCC) has drafted regulations that will encourage telecom operators and emissions to use energy saving technologies *(Wang et al., 2024)*. The incentives that are in favor of these guidelines are grants and tax credit to the operators who invest in the green technologies. The state of California has also embraced the Green Building Standards Code at the state level that entails the factors of energy efficient design and construction of telecom infrastructure *(Chung et al., 2025)*. The code requires all new telecom facilities to be constructed using renewable energy sources and consuming energy-efficient equipment, which will lead to the development of energy-sustainable infrastructures *(Chung et al., 2025)*.

The United Kingdom has developed a regulatory system that has incorporated sustainability in planning and development of telecommunications infrastructure. The Merton Rule that was proposed by the Merton Borough

Council is a request that new commercial premises of no less than 1,000 square meters should produce no less than 10 percent of their energy demand through on-site renewable sources *(Pout et al., 2009)*. Other local authorities have adopted this policy and it has shaped the guidance on national planning. Also, the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) in which the UK is a member has an effect to the telecom operator since the policies may result in carbon pricing measures where the companies are encouraged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions *(Dechezleprêtre et al., 2023)*. Such regulatory aspects go hand in hand with industry-driven solutions that encourage the use of sustainable practices in the telecom industry.

The sustainable telecommunications regulatory approach by European Union is informed by a number of directives and initiatives at the European Union level to enhance sustainability in the sector *(Gisca et al., 2023)*. The European Commission has come up with the Digital Networks Act that aims at simplifying the regulation of telecommunication networks and making the telecommunication industry increase its share in green transition in the EU *(Engelmann, 2025)*. This involves action that facilitates move to use energy efficient technologies and incorporation of renewable energy sources in the telecom infrastructure. Also, a report on Corporate Sustainability is a new directive by the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) that stipulates that large companies such as the telecom operators, are required to disclose information on environmental, social, and governance issues (ESG) which compels greater transparency and responsibility about their sustainability business practices *(Martinčević et al., 2025)*. Although in its current form, the EU Green Claims Directive is still under negotiation, it seeks to thwart deceptive environmental claims made by companies, and therefore make the sustainability claims made by the telecom operators validated and reasons to believe *(Baars et al., 2025)*.

However, new methods of sustainable telecom infrastructure planning and design are emerging in different jurisdictions. The use of hybrid power systems in telecom towers in India has been considered one of the major steps in the carbon footprint of telecom operations *(Deevela et al., 2024)*. It is a combination of renewable energy sources (solar energy and wind energy), and conventional power sources that are used to make these systems reliable and sustainable in their energy provision in telecom infrastructure *(Israr et al., 2021)*. Also the use of energy efficient equipment's and energy management systems have played another role in energy consumption and reduction of emissions in the telecom industry.

Brazil Sustainable telecom infrastructure planning Interactive shift to the concept of a circular economy has become a particular focus point of Brazil. Telecom operators are also advised to create infrastructure that puts into

consideration the end-of-life phase of their infrastructure and facilitate reuse and recycle of material and components *(Thomé et al., 2016)*. This practice does not only lower the wastage, but also lowers the environmental impact of telecom businesses. Moreover, through regulatory incentives as well as industry cooperation, the introduction of renewable sources of energy into the telecom infrastructure has been fostered that has largely reduced the level of emission and the use of energy *(Qadir et al., 2021)*.

The market of the United States has established a standard of sustainable telecom infrastructure design through the adoption of the Green Building Standards Code in California *(Hinge et al., 2020)*. It insists on renewable energy resources and less energy depleting equipment's to be applied in constructing new telecom facilities to ensure that the facilities are useful in advancing sustainability within the state *(Hassan et al., 2024)*. Also, the implementation of smart grid and energy management systems has seen the telecom operators being able to maximize the energy utilization and minimize the emissions, which complies with the regulatory policy and also the environmental policies *(Judge et al., 2022)*.

The implementation of the Merton Rule in the United Kingdom has made it impactful on the sustainable telecom infrastructure planning by making the new commercial buildings to produce a certain amount of their electricity requirements by renewable energy sources within them *(Hales et al., 2012)*. This policy has caused introduction of such renewable energy technologies within the infrastructure of telecom like solar panels and wind turbines that make the telecom infrastructure less dependent on non-renewable energy sources and also helps to cut the emission of greenhouse gases *(Hales et al., 2012)*.

The European Union level code of conduct forming sustainable telecommunications networks gives telecom operators a guideline in adopting best practices in terms of sustainability *(The Joint Research Centre: EU Science Hub, 2025)*. This code presents indicators and standard of energy and climate and environmental performance and is a voluntary set of guidelines that facilitates the sustainability performance of the operators *(MacGregor Pelikánová, 2025)*. Besides encouraging the use of green practices in the telecom industry, this initiative helps create cooperation between stakeholders in order to meet shared sustainability objectives.

The comparative study of India, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union tells of a convergence and difference on the regulatory methods of sustainable telecommunications. In India, the Supreme court in *M.C. Mehta v Union of India (1986) 2 SCC 176 and Vodafone India Services Ltd. v. Union of India (2017)* highlights the ability of the courts to acknowledge the environmental compliance requirements in telecom activities. In Brazil, the example of ANATEL proactive administrative oversight is in the form

of a regulatory decision regarding energy consumption in telecom towers *(Resolution 715/2019)*. The FCC in the United States in the 2014 Small Cell Infrastructure Order have shown a balanced but environmental review in terms of NEPA. The UK's *R (on the application of Friends of the Earth) v. Secretary of State for Transport* (2010) case and the EU's implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive are examples of judicial and legislative interventions to incorporate accountability on the environment in the planning of infrastructure. The examples can strengthen the legal and doctrinal foundations of green telecom regulation in different jurisdictions.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the law and regulation systems that regulate the telecommunications infrastructure display the complex relationship between the technological growth and the environmental sustainability. As has been shown in the analysis, although the combination of national laws, administrative regulations and international treaties offers a basis on which green telecom deployment can be implemented; there are still important challenges that exist in respect to enforcement, compliance and coordination with the urban and land-use planning. Policymakers are faced with the challenge of trying to make infrastructure development consistent with the ecological demands without having to adversely affect the provision of universal connectivity or the efficiency of its networks. The paper indicates that the legal framework of telecommunications should also be flexible and consistent enough to accommodate the change in technological paradigms and at the same time ensure stringent environmental protection measures.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that there has been an ongoing conflict between the rapid growth of the network and environmental conservation. The development of infrastructure such as the implementation of fiber networks, broadband nodes, and wireless towers in themselves induces energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and electronic waste. Environmental impact assessment laws, carbon reduction laws, energy efficiency laws and various other legal mechanisms that are meant to curb the above consequences are not completely reduced however, procedural delays, fragmentation in regulations and gaps in their implementation make these laws ineffective. Comparative analysis shows that jurisdictions that use a mixture of statutory commitments, administrative regulations and incentive-based apparatus such as the hybrid power regulations that India uses, the ESG index that regulates the telecommunication industry in Brazil, the state-based green building codes in the United States as well as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive used by the European Union are associated with more compliance levels and impactful environmental

results. These results indicate that there is a strong necessity of harmonized, multi-level regulation schemes to balance ecological preoccupation to infrastructural requirements.

The study also points out that policy coherence can be very fundamental to resolving the telecom expansion and urban or land-use planning contradictions. The location of infrastructure frequently conflicts with local zoning regulations, preservation regulations, and environment protection regulations, leading to possible legal challenges and work stop delays. Effective governance therefore necessitates mechanisms for inter-agency coordination, procedural harmonization, and dispute resolution. Regulatory frameworks that integrate sustainability considerations into the planning, licensing, and operational stages, coupled with judicial oversight to enforce compliance and adjudicate conflicts, can ensure that network deployment advances public interest while adhering to ecological norms.

The suggestions that can be developed on the basis of this research are focused on the role of the adaptive and incentive-oriented regulatory approaches. As a policy, policymakers ought to incorporate sustainability standards to the rules of licensing and permits and make adherence to these standards a condition of access to spectrum, subsidies, or other form of benefits gained through regulations. High taxes, grants and certification schemes can additionally help match the interests of the private with the targets of the government policy by encouraging the use of renewable sources of energy, equipment that is energy efficient and circulatory economy policies. Moreover, building up monitoring, reporting, and verification systems and practices such as the issuance of rather not optional disclosures as per the environmental, social, or governance policymaking will help to enhance accountability and make sure that the operators are not neglecting the law. The comparative practice implies that voluntary codes of conduct like the European Union sustainability guidelines to telecommunication operators when reinforced with a legal requirement offer a good framework of leveling sustainable improvement and innovation in environmental activities.

Although incentives to adopt green telecom use have contributed to the incorporation of energy efficient technology and renewable energy, the possible risks of regulatory capture and market distortions need to be considered. The implementation and oversight process should be streamlined to make sure that such actions result in the desired environmental outcomes without leveling the playing field in terms of competitiveness and conformity. Regulatory design would serve a better purpose in ensuring that the expansion of infrastructures matches the aim of sustainability whereby the introduction of telecom networks is aligned with what the law requires and that of the wider society and the environment at large.

The further investigation must aim at assessing the effectiveness of particular regulatory tools in leading to the quantifiable decrease in carbon emissions, energy usage, and electronic waste in the telecom industry. The evidence-based policy analysis would be essential and critical due to empirical studies that measure the relative effectiveness of statutory requirements, incentive systems, and voluntary codes in various jurisdictions. Additionally, the changing technological environment, such as the deployment of 5G networks, edge computing, and some data-intensive services, should be assessed in terms of environmental effects and competency of the regulations regularly. The interdisciplinary research with the legal, economic, technical, and environmental views will play an important role in coming up with well-rounded approaches to achieve a balance between innovation, sustainability, and fair access.

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Contact:
Universidade de Brasília - Faculdade de Direito - Núcleo de Direito Setorial e Regulatório
Campus Universitário de Brasília
Brasília, DF, CEP 70919-970
Caixa Postal 04413

Phone: +55(61)3107-2683/2688

E-mail: getel@unb.br

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