

# CSR TODAY

RNI NO. MAHENG/2013/48866 ■ VOLUME 10 ■ ISSUE 09 ■ APRIL 2023 ■ PRICE ₹100 ■ TOTAL PAGES: 52



## AS INDIA PUSHES FOR 'SUPERFOOD' MILLETS AT G20, ITS FARMERS WANT A BETTER SUPPORT SYSTEM

Assured procurement and subsidised distribution of millets could help India deal with its farm crisis and widespread malnutrition.

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Extreme weather warnings fail to trigger climate action: study

### CSR INITIATIVE

The IUCN Red List: Identifying the birds that most need our help

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# CSR TODAY

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# IPCC reports warn of several challenges



**Rajesh Tiwari**  
Publisher  
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**There is a need to rethink how the climate finance world works and what are the other efforts that can be done to boost the finance opportunities to ensure climate resilience.**

**T**emperature rise, sea level increase, catastrophic impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people are some of the big challenges in India, according to the recently-released Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) synthesis report.

This report consolidates 6 reports and has more significant ramifications for policy.

"One of the most significant implications of the report for India is the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. These events could have dire consequences for agriculture, the economy, and public health. The report highlights the need for policymakers to prioritize investments in disaster risk reduction, including early warning systems, evacuation plans, and infrastructure development to protect vulnerable populations," said Dr Anjal Prakash, Research Director, Bharti Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business and IPCC lead author for two of the reports.

"This is the first time six reports were published in a cycle and provides very robust science which can influence the next few years of action in this decade. The report clearly shows that it is theoretically possible to limit warming to 1.5°C, but the current scale, scope and pace of global action pledged under 2030 is not enough. So we are not on track that is very clearly mentioned in this report with very high confidence," points out Prof Joyashree Roy, Energy Economics programme, Asian Institute of Technology, one of the 93 authors of the IPCC synthesis report.

The report says India is not compatible with even 2 degree Celsius warming, and we may even surpass that based on the current trends we have. This is alarming because each fraction of warming has an implication for India and regions within the country. The report warns that each fraction of warm-

ing will have catastrophic impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people. India has about 400 million people, especially those from marginalized societies, that are most vulnerable to climate change residing in coastal zones and those having agricultural incomes, and this trend is very alarming for the country.


"There is a need to address the current shortfall in climate finances as this (India and the Global South) is the part of the world which has contributed least to climate change but is the most vulnerable and affected by climate events (cyclones, floods, disasters etc.). There is a need to rethink how the climate finance world works and what are the other efforts that can be done to boost the finance opportunities to ensure climate resilience," the report states.

Looking to the global north for the solutions is not an option as it will be too late for action but the need is to look inward, find solutions within the country. India has the 5th largest economy in the world and there is a need to work towards developing the focus internally, and build national and state-specific climate resilient pathways, it said.

"We brought in the human side" of climate change, Hoesung Lee, chair of the IPCC, told a news conference, saying it was a major shift since the last IPCC policy document in 2014 which had few references to individuals and their behaviour.

Peter Thorne, one of the IPCC authors and a geography professor at Ireland's Maynooth University, said it was time for everyone to accept a share of responsibility.

"We at all levels - governments, communities, individuals - have made climate change somebody else's problem," he added.

The report was approved after a week-long meeting of scientists and governments in Interlaken, Switzerland, to negotiate the text. 

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APRIL 2023 | VOL. 10 | ISSUE 09

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Printed, Published and Edited by  
Rajesh Tiwari on behalf of Indian Centre  
For Corporate Social Responsibility, Printed  
at The Pack-Age, 196-I, Katrak Compound,  
J.S.S. Road, Gaiwadi, Girgaon, Mumbai -  
400 004 and Published from Indian Centre  
For Corporate Social Responsibility, 106/A,  
Nirman Kendra, Plot No.3, Dr. E. Moses  
Road, Mahalaxmi Estate, Mahalaxmi,  
Mumbai 400 011.

**Editor:** Rajesh Tiwari

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## Universal Sompō's initiative for intellectually disabled children



Mr. Sharad Mathur, MD & CEO, USGI with children

**U**niversal Sompō General Insurance Company Ltd, as part of its long-standing commitment for societal development, contributed towards the construction of a school building for intellectually disabled children. Navchetana, a school for specially abled children aims to help children with a holistic learning environment and enhances the learning outcomes by providing an enabling ecosystem.

Started under the 'SEVA VAHINI TRUST' initiative in 2006, the school today has over 560 students from LKG to Standard 10th. Ensuring all the children sit comfortably, Universal Sompō inaugurated a new building in the campus recently.

The ceremony for which was held in the first week of March in Koppa, Karnataka. The SEVA Vahini Trust is training and educating such children for free of cost and is accepting children in the age group of 6 – 16 years in this institution.

Expressing his views on the inauguration, Sharad Mathur, MD & CEO, Universal Sompō, said, "As a socially responsible insurer, Universal Sompō understands the importance of giving back to our community and supporting those in need." According to him, 'Navchetana' school is a well-managed school for specially abled children. He said that as per a survey conducted in the district, there are 35 children who need special

care. He further said, "we wish that institution continues to grow from strength to strength in the pursuit of its noble mission. We believe that it is our responsibility to make a positive difference in the society and are honoured to be able to support such a worthy cause."

The school aims to empower and educate children to become good citizens of the country while providing additional support in case of residential and transportation facilities. Furthermore, the school has a holistic approach towards the development of children enabling them with indoor activities like yoga & exercise which helps for physical and mental.



# Covestro India's Commitment to Sustainability Kicks Off in 2023 with Plastic Waste Collection Drive in Ankleshwar and Greater Noida

Covestro India, leading producer of innovative polymers, is as committed to sustainability and a circular economy as it is to top-notch solutions for its customers. To this end, the company organized a number of plastic waste collection drive at its sites in India.

Sustainability being a core mission and integral part of the company's strategies, the plastic waste collection initiative invited Covestro India employees at various site locations to participate and make the drive a success. These locations included Kosamdi Lake, Ankleshwar, Gujarat and Surajpur Wetland Area, Greater Noida

India generates close to 26,000 tons of plastic waste per day, of which more than 40% of the waste remains uncollected, landing on sidewalks, near freeways, in rivers and in the ocean. The environmental consequences of such plastic waste have become increasingly apparent. Covestro India, as an integral part of the industry, has designed its CSR intervention activities to prioritize pollution in the marine environment. This is in line with its larger circular economy business model.

The company also strongly believes that collaboration across organizations is needed to develop impactful solutions, hence they have partnered with United Way Mumbai a non-profit organization working in urban and rural communities across India to identify and implement the most impactful solutions to community problems.

United Way Mumbai collaborated with the company to implement



the plastic waste clean-up activity. Bavanji Vekariya, Site head, Ankleshwar stated "At Covestro India, we believe that sustainable practices are the key to building a better future for our planet. Our focus on circular economy is a vital component of how we approach every aspect of our work. We are committed to driving positive change through our actions. The plastic waste collection drive held on February 27th, 2023 in Ankleshwar was a testament to this very commitment. We invited our employees to join us in this initiative to collect plastic waste and clean up the Kosamdi Lake area. It was heartening to see them actively participate and take ownership of this cause. We are grateful to our NGO partner, United Way Mumbai and local NGO Eco Roots Foundation, for

collaborating with us on this initiative. We truly believe that together, we can build a more sustainable future and create a world where future generations can thrive."

Arvind Kumar, Head - Site Services said that "We are pleased to collaborate with Eco Roots Foundation, our trusted NGO partner, to carry out this plastic waste clean-up initiative. As a responsible corporate citizen, Covestro India recognizes its role in preserving the environment and is committed to finding sustainable solutions to address the issue of plastic waste. Together with Eco Roots Foundation, we hope to make a significant contribution towards a cleaner and greener India. We believe that by working in tandem with like-minded organizations, we can create a more sustainable future for our communities."

## 21 Women Trainees secure 100 % Placement in renowned companies through Hindustan Zinc's Zinc Kaushal program

**T**wenty-one women trainees of 1st ever Unarmed Security Guard Batch secured 100 % placement through Hindustan Zinc's program - Zinc Kaushal.

The objective of the training course was to help women achieve financial freedom and to empower women who have been marginalized due to lack of education, early marriage etc. As part of the three-month training program exposure visits, guest lectures and several engagement activities were conducted to provide a holistic learning opportunity to match the needs of the mainstream industries.

Hindustan Zinc's skilling initiative provides market-linked skill-based

training on various trades such as general duty assistant, unarmed security guard, micro finance executive etc thus developing the skills and providing them with employment opportunities. These women trainees of Dariba, Zinc Kaushal Kendra have been placed at several renowned organizations such as Radisson Blu, Secure Meters – Udaipur, Zydus Hospital – Ahmedabad, Cocoon Hospital, Narayana Hospital – Jaipur, and Shree Salasar Balaji Temple.

Zinc Kaushal Kendra program initiated in 2018 focuses on enabling the unemployed youth with opportunities to upskill and pursue a stable livelihood. Strengthening this commitment, the program in the last

3 years has indirectly helped industries by providing them with more than 4,500 skilled youth who are now either employed or are entrepreneurs. The programme was initially established with the goal to offer short-duration intensive courses in different trades and profiles.

Expanding the reach of the programme, last year, Hindustan Zinc started the 1st batch of 13 students comprising Hearing and Speech impaired youth to make them independent with employment opportunities in the mainstream industries. Since inception, 4591 youth have been trained out of which 3810 have been placed or have become self-entrepreneurs.

## Infosys Recognized as one of the 2023 World's Most Ethical Companies® for the Third Consecutive Year by Ethisphere

**I**nfosys, a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting, today announced that it has been recognized, by Ethisphere, a global leader in defining and advancing the standards of ethical business practices, as one of the 2023 World's Most Ethical Companies. Infosys received the honour, for the third consecutive year, for demonstrating the high standards of business integrity through best-in-class ethics, compliance, and governance practices.

Infosys has become the only Company in India, and one of the four companies globally, in the software and services industry to receive this recognition. This recognition is awarded to global companies that have exceptional business

ethics and are committed to advance business integrity.

Infosys has been recognized among 135 honorees spanning 19 countries and 46 industries. These companies were evaluated based on the Ethisphere Ethics Quotient® across multiple categories, including culture, environmental and social practices, ethics and compliance, governance, diversity, and initiatives to support a strong value chain.

"Ethics matter. Organizations that commit to business integrity through robust programs and practices not only elevate standards and expectations for all, but also have better long-term performance," said, Ethisphere CEO, Erica Salmon Byrne. "We continue to be inspired by the World's Most Ethical

Companies honorees and their dedication to making real impact for their stakeholders and displaying exemplary values-based leadership. Congratulations to Infosys for earning a place in the World's Most Ethical Companies community."

Salil Parekh, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Infosys, said, "We are honoured to be part of the 2023 World's Most Ethical Companies community. This recognition is a testament to the strong foundation of ethical business practices and accountability that we continue to build on. As a responsible corporate entity, we are fully committed to nurturing excellence and transparency of operations and outcomes for the businesses that we drive."

# DBS Foundation partners with Haqdarshak to enhance financial literacy for marginalised communities

*Training initiative impacts 2,00,000 citizens, mostly women, giving them the independence and agency to access govt. support and financial services in India*

**D**BS Foundation has partnered with Haqdarshak Empowerment Solutions (HESPL) to undertake a social protection and financial literacy programme aimed at marginalised citizens across India, including daily wage earners, domestic workers, farm workers, sanitation workers, micro-entrepreneurs. The programme will educate 2,00,000 beneficiaries (70% women) to build their digital and financial capacity to access relevant government entitlements and private financial services.

The programme is being implemented in 10 districts in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana, targeting some of the most vulnerable populations in these areas. The initiative's ultimate aim is to establish a basic social safety net for these citizens and empower them with digital and financial training to take charge of their lives and households.

Under this initiative, a brick-and-mortar centre called a Yojana Kendra will be established in select communities. Women agents will be identified and trained as Haqdarshaks to serve and support the community. This agent cadre will mobilise potential beneficiaries, from low-income families i.e. those with minimal access to social



protection and financial services. The support agents will conduct financial literacy training camps using audio-visual tools and easy-to-understand content in local languages. Beneficiaries will be screened with the Haqdarshak mobile app to determine their eligibility for welfare programs and the agent will provide end-to-end support to fill forms, collect documents, and register

beneficiaries under social protection programmes. A helpline will be available for any queries or grievance redressal. The programme will be executed by 400 support agents, and there will be one supervisor for every 40 agents.

The financial literacy rate among Indian adults is the lowest compared to other major emerging economies, with only 24% being financially literate, according to a report by the Global Financial Literacy Excellence Center. This disparity is attributed to a need for formal training and awareness, as well as inter-state differences. Access to social welfare and financial inclusion services at the last mile is a critical challenge. According to a 2017 World Bank study, only 40 per cent of Indians can apply for government services as they cannot afford the time and money to access them. The collaboration comes at a crucial time when marginalised communities continue to grapple with the economic impact in the wake of the pandemic.



Shoma Narayanan, Managing Director, Group Strategic Marketing & Communications, DBS Bank India, said, "As a socially responsible bank, we recognise the need to create impact beyond banking and to encourage solutions for a more inclusive world. Our partnership with Haqdarshak is a concerted effort to empower marginalised communities, particularly women, by providing them access to social welfare and financial tools, which will increase self-sufficiency and give them agency over their lives. We are also proud of Haqdarshak, which has scaled significantly as a Business for Good under the DBS Foundation's Grant Programme, and shares our

purpose to build a better future." Aniket Doegar, Founder & CEO, Haqdarshak, commented on the partnership, saying, "DBS Foundation has been an early partner of ours since 2018. They have always put impact at the forefront and supported us, whether it was when Haqdarshak was a young organisation, through the pandemic, or now, as we have achieved scale. For us at Haqdarshak, this is our largest project so far. We are excited about our impact footprint — we will be touching the lives of 2,00,000 citizens, majority of them women, across disadvantaged sections of the community via digital and financial literacy training and by linking them

to relevant welfare entitlements. We are grateful to the DBS Foundation for collaborating with us on this important program. We hope to grow our partnership manifold in the years to come."

Haqdarshak aims to improve the lives of citizens and MSMEs by leveraging technology solutions to provide access to government welfare and financial services. With an extensive database of 7000+ state and central welfare schemes, available in 11 Indian languages through web and mobile channels, Haqdarshak offers features such as beneficiary onboarding, a customisable eligibility engine, and an end-to-end application workflow.

## Nykaa PRO boosts entrepreneurial dreams of young women through a special make-up training program

**N**ykaa PRO, Nykaa's content & commerce platform for beauty professionals, in its continued efforts to grow the ecosystem of beauty professionals in India, has collaborated with celebrated make-up artist, Kajol R Paswvan to provide a 3-day training to 12 young women from low-income groups. The partnership is an extension of Nykaa PRO's #GroWithPRO philosophy, which aims to empower individuals into creating livelihoods through a career in beauty and grooming. Nykaa PRO partnered with Mumbai based youth-led organisations, Project Baala and Junoon to identify and reach out to these exceptionally bright and young women for the course. These non-profits work towards empowering the youth from low-income groups and aims to make them employment ready.

True to this year's International Women's Day theme, #EmbraceEquity—by leveling the playing field with equal education and opportunities for



Nykaa PRO partners with Kajol R Paswvan as a part of its Ongoing Initiative #GroWithPRO

everyone, this program by Nykaa PRO was designed in partnership with Kajol R Paswvan to share her knowledge and experience of the professional beauty industry with beginners. The three-day training, focused on scope, career opportunities and challenges of the industry while also equipping the young women with hands-on and personalised training in basics of make-up and hairstyling techniques and prepared

them for future opportunities.

To fuel their journey as a professional make-up artist/hairstylist, Nykaa PRO provided each student with a starter-kit of make-up and hair essentials worth INR 10,000, a PRO guide, and an exceptional opportunity to intern with Kajol

R Paswvan. Nykaa PRO was launched in 2018 as a membership-led content and commerce platform designed to cater to beauty professionals. The platform features a range of professional beauty products with a selection of exclusive offers and masterclasses for people working in the beauty industry. Through its omnichannel offering, Nykaa PRO offers its services across over 27,800 Indian pin codes.

# Smile Train Announces Milestone 700,000th Cleft Surgery in India

Smile Train, the world's largest cleft-focused NGO, announces a major milestone — supporting 700,000 life-changing, free cleft surgeries in India through their network of 150+ partner hospitals across the country.

The announcement was made by Susannah Schaefer, Smile Train's President and Chief Executive Officer, during her visit to Bengaluru. She emphasized that this milestone was just one part of the larger story of how Smile Train is expanding their cleft care footprint in India: In addition to safe, high-quality surgical care, Smile Train also enables a growing number of essential, non-surgical cleft treatments at their partner hospitals, including nutrition and feeding support, orthodontic services, speech therapy, and psychosocial counseling — all to ensure the long-term, successful rehabilitation of every patient according to their unique needs.

Speaking about the achievement, Schaefer said, "India is one of our largest programs globally and has shown tremendous growth over the last 23 years in terms of the number of partner hospitals and patients receiving treatment every year. The 700,000th surgery milestone is a significant achievement, and our focus for the future remains expanding our comprehensive programs to ensure access to safe, free, high-quality cleft care for every child in need."

One in 700 babies is born with a cleft in India; this translates to more than 35,000 annually. Children with untreated clefts often live in isolation, but more importantly, can have difficulty eating, breathing, hearing, and speaking. Many cleft-affected

families cannot afford the cleft surgery and comprehensive care their loved ones need. Unlike mission-trip-based organizations, Smile Train empowers local doctors and hospitals with the funding, training, and resources to provide this often lifesaving care 100% free for all in need, every day of the year.

Mamta Carroll, Vice President & Regional Director for Asia, Smile Train added, "While we celebrate this significant milestone, we remain cognizant that we have a long way to go to ensure comprehensive cleft care for every child in need, while remaining committed to our values. In the process, our strongest pillars of support have been our extensive network of partner hospitals, medical experts, goodwill ambassadors, and of course, our generous donors. Each has helped us grow every step of the way, and we remain forever grateful."

Reaching this milestone would not have been possible without partnerships with like-minded medical and government-led organizations such as National Health Mission's Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), and National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH). Each day, these relationships drive early diagnosis and intervention for children with clefts and enhance the safety and quality of surgical care at treatment centers across the country.

Through every surgery, Smile Train will continue to build awareness and further education to reduce stigma and ensure acceptance for people with clefts in India and around the world.

## Gameskraft Foundation joins hands with the Dola & Rahul Banerjee Sports Foundation to Bring Grassroot Talents to Archery

Gameskraft Foundation, the social arm of the skill-based online gaming company Gameskraft, has associated with the 'Dola & Rahul Banerjee Sports Foundation' (DRBSF) to support young talent in archery. Through this association, Gameskraft Foundation aims to encourage and inspire budding athletes to achieve their dreams and support India's sports development.

The 'Dola & Rahul Banerjee Sports Foundation' is the brainchild of Olympians Rahul Banerjee and Dola Banerjee and has been established with the sole purpose of promoting archery in India by fostering talent. The sibling duo started this academy in 2015 which has now trained more than 70 archers, among whom most come from weaker economic backgrounds. Renowned players from the Foundation include the likes of Aditi Jaiswal and Juyel Sarkar; young archers who have not only secured many national victories, but have also represented India at an international level. The academy comprises of professional coaches, sports medicine doctors, physiotherapists, sports analysts and state-of-the-art equipment that facilitate the best learning, training and well-being experience for future archers.

# Dabur Revamps Govt. Middle School in Jammu

**M**oving forward on its commitment to improve the quality of life of local communities, particularly children, India's largest Science-based Ayurveda Company Dabur India Ltd expanded its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) drive in Jammu with the adoption of two new government schools in the city. The first of these schools – Government Middle School, Bari Shah Da Talab, Distt Samba – was revamped in partnership with Ennoble Social Innovation Foundation. The revamped school was handed over to the school authorities at a ceremony held in Jammu. The revamp would benefit the over 35 students studying in this school.

The development work was carried out by Dabur India Ltd's CSR arm Jivanti Welfare & Charitable Trust and an independent Not-for-Profit organization Ennoble Social Innovation Foundation. Dabur India Limited Head-Manufacturing Hrishikesh Ramani along with students inaugurated the revamped school and handed it over to the school authorities in the presence of ZEPO, Vijaypur Mr. Anil Kumar of Education Department, Ennoble Founder & CEO Mr. Chirag Bhandari, School Management Committee members & Village Panchayat.

The transformation includes establishing separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls, creating safe drinking water facilities and upgrading the school infrastructure with BaLA (Building as Learning Aid) painting. The school was also equipped with experiential education materials including a Mini Science Lab and Teaching Learning Material for an engaging learning experience. The school premises are now friendly for specially-abled students with the creation of ramps for Child with Special Needs (CwSN) toilet.

The revamped school now has new playground and uninterrupted electricity supply. Recycled Paver block has been used and compost bin has been set up to sensitise students on sustainability and to inculcate a sense of responsibility towards the environment.

The school, with its innovative elements and vibrant building, is now comparable with any private school. The entire community, including the school authorities, are delighted with the transformation and there



is an increased interest amongst the community to enroll their kids in this school. "Dabur is committed to sustainable well-being of people in our operational areas, and we believe that ensuring proper education for children is a priority endeavour. At Dabur, we have always supported the cause of promoting quality education and empowering individuals. This school support programme is an intrinsic part of our efforts to improve the overall learning environment in schools in Jammu, which we feel will go a long way in reducing school dropouts," Ramani said.

"We have been constantly engaged in development activities that create a sustainable impact in the communities we operate in. At

Dabur, we believe that education is both the means to a better life and a key to ensure overall development of the society. In a bid to improve enrollment levels and reduce the dropout rates in rural and semi-urban schools, Dabur has taken up the onus of improving the infrastructure in schools and improving the learning experience for children in rural India," Mr. Ramani added.

Mr Chirag Bhandari Founder Ennoble Social Innovation shared that "Ennoble envisions to make

Govt Schools Lovable and No 1 choice of the community by re-vamping school infrastructure and creating conducive learning ecosystems. We are glad to have found a partner in Dabur who are focused on working at grassroot levels to improve the learning spaces under their CSR initiative," he further stated.

The school revamp was undertaken

after detailed discussions with the school authorities and keeping their specific needs in mind. "After a detailed survey of the region, these two schools were identified this year as the initial beneficiaries for our Education-led CSR interventions in Jammu. After discussions with the school administration and local authorities, we commenced a host of development activities in these schools. Our intention is to develop and support these schools as Model Schools for the region," Mr. Ramani said. Going forward, Dabur plans to roll out a host of development initiatives aimed at improving the livelihood of rural populace, particularly women and children, in the region.





## After Successful Ceremonies in Pune and Mumbai, Quick Heal's CSR Initiative Takes 'Cyber Shiksha For Cyber Suraksha Awards' To Nagpur

Quick Heal, a global cybersecurity solutions provider, as part of its corporate social responsibility through its foundation hosted the 'Cyber Shiksha for Cyber Suraksha Awards' in Nagpur. The ceremony recognized the outstanding efforts of participating universities, teachers, and students in raising awareness of cyber safety, particularly among marginalized communities in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Ms. Anupama Katkar, Chairperson of the Quick Heal Foundation, and academic representatives from the six participating institutions were present to distribute the awards.

The awards ceremony was organized at Priyadarshini College of Engineering, Nagpur. Volunteering institutions from the region include Government Institute of Forensic Science, Nagpur, Priyadarshini

College of Engineering, Nagpur, Seth Kesarimal Porwal College, Kamptee, Shankarlal Khandelwal College, Akola, Sudha Sureshbhai Maniyar College, Nagpur, and J. M. Patel College, Bhandara. The ceremony was attended by more than 140 volunteers from the participating institutions.

Separate award categories were established to recognize the accomplishments of colleges, teachers, and students. The winners under each category were determined based on information provided by the colleges on their active involvement in the 'Cyber Shiksha for Cyber Suraksha' program, including their actions, activities, and outreach efforts. A dedicated voting page was set up on the Quick Heal Foundation website, featuring video clips of the nominated performances.

Speaking on the occasion, Anupama Katkar, Chairperson, Quick Heal Foundation and Chief of Operational Excellence, Quick Heal Technologies Limited, said, "I would like to congratulate all the winners for taking a step towards securing many futures by spreading education on cyber safety. Their eagerness to learn, enhance and share knowledge is commendable. We, at Quick Heal through our foundation, believe that cyber education is critical in today's world, and we are delighted to see the enthusiasm shown by the educational institutions, teachers and students to make 'Cyber Shiksha for Cyber Suraksha' initiative a grand success. We appreciate their commitment to making our digital world safer and more secure, and wholeheartedly thank all our partners for being a part of this crucial endeavor."



## Savlon Swasth India announces Sachin Tendulkar as the World's First 'Hand Ambassador' to inspire billions to wash hands

In a unique move, Savlon Swasth India Mission unveiled the World's first 'Hand Ambassador' with one of the greatest cricketers of all time, Sachin Tendulkar.

Globally revered for his immense contribution to the cricketing world, the Master Blaster, has inspired generations with the many firsts in cricketing history. Now, in yet another first, he lends his priceless hands to a special cause – as a Hand Ambassador to inspire billions to practice proper handwashing.

ITC's Savlon Swasth India Mission has been at the forefront, seeding behavioural change towards hand hygiene through innovative experiences and initiatives. Preventable infections create a huge economic burden on our country and regular handwashing is one of the simplest, most effective ways to stop the spread of diseases. With Sachin Tendulkar as the First Ever Hand Ambassador, Savlon Swasth India Mission goes even further in its



journey to develop the culture of hand hygiene for a healthier nation.

Conceptualized by Ogilvy India, the campaign features a series of films that take an unexpected route by featuring Sachin Tendulkar's Hand as their chief protagonist - bringing the importance of hand hygiene to everyone's notice and reminding people in his inimitable

style, to remember to wash their hands. Sameer Satpathy, Divisional Chief Executive, Personal Care Products Business, ITC Limited, said, "Washing hands with soap or hand-wash is a critical part of everyday hygiene, which helps us maintain overall health. This needs continuous emphasis and engagement to build a healthy habit for children in particular and society at large. Savlon Swasth India Mission has been at the forefront of enabling this behavioral change in hand hygiene. We are very happy to have Sachin on board, who himself has been a strong advocate of this practice as the 'Hand Ambassador' for Savlon Swasth India Mission"

Commenting on the partnership, Tendulkar, said, "Hand hygiene has an important role to play in building a healthier nation. It has been a cause I have been involved with for several years. When the Savlon Swasth India Mission team presented a unique and fun way of spreading awareness about this serious topic, I was excited about the idea of lending my hand, quite literally, to this initiative. It has been a pleasure working on this campaign. Together as a team, all of us hope that these engaging films drive behavioural change and promote responsible hand hygiene."



# World Bank Signs a \$1 Billion Program to Support India's Health Sector for Pandemic Preparedness and Enhanced Health Service Delivery

The Government of India and the World Bank today signed two complementary loans of \$500 million each to support and enhance India's health sector development. Through this combined financing of \$1 billion, the Bank will support India's flagship Pradhan Mantri-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM), launched in October 2021, to improve the public healthcare infrastructure across the country. In addition to the national level interventions, one of the loans will prioritize health service delivery in seven states including Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.

The agreement was signed by Rajat Kumar Mishra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance on behalf of the Government of India and Auguste Tano Kouamé, Country Director, India, World Bank.

“The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore the urgent need for pandemic preparedness and health system strengthening around the world and was a stark reminder that pandemic preparedness is a global public good” said Auguste Tano Kouamé. “The two Projects are supporting India's decision to increase the resilience and preparedness of the country's health systems against future pandemics. This will be of great benefit for the populations of the states participating in the projects and will generate positive spillovers for other states”.

India's performance in health has improved over time. According



Rajat Kumar Mishra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance on behalf of the Government of India and Auguste Tano Kouamé, Country Director, India, World Bank

to World Bank estimates, India's life expectancy—at 69.8 in 2020, up from 58 in 1990—is higher than the average for the country's income level. The under-five mortality rate (36 per 1,000 live births), infant mortality rate (30 per 1,000 live births), and maternal mortality ratio (103 per 100,000 live births) are all close to the average for India's income level, reflecting significant achievements in access to skilled birth attendance, immunizations, and other priority services.

Despite these advances in the health of the Indian population, COVID-19 has underscored the need for revitalizing, reforming, and developing capacity for core public health functions, as well as for improving the quality and

comprehensiveness of health service delivery.

“The two Programs leverage the unique strengths of both the Center and the States to support the development of more accessible, high-quality, and affordable health services,” said Lynne Sherburne-Benz, the World Bank's South Asia Regional Director for Human Development. “This strengthening of health systems, combined with attention to strong disease response, will improve preparedness and response to future disease outbreaks.”

The \$500 million Public Health Systems for Pandemic Preparedness Program (PHSPP) will support the government's efforts to:

- Prepare India's surveillance system to be ready to detect and



report epidemics of potential international concern, ensure rapid response, and prevent emergence of pathogens.

- Enhance India's capacity to detect pathogens, including zoonotic diseases, to inform India's bio-security response and commercialization of new technologies to prevent, detect or treat infectious diseases.
- Strengthen coordination and build institutional capacity of core public health institutions to implement the program and deliver high-quality results.

The \$500 million Enhanced Health Service Delivery Program (EHSDP) will support Government's efforts to:

- Strengthen service delivery through a redesigned primary health care model, which includes improved household access to primary healthcare facilities, stronger links between each household and its primary care facility through regular household visits and risk assessment of noncommunicable diseases.
- Improve quality of care by supporting the National Quality Assurance Standards certification across Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs), implementing measurement tools for quality of care, including patient experience, and strengthening the health workforce by adopting state-specific human resource

strategies for public health care facilities.

- Transform health sector governance and accountability by strengthening implementation capacity, enhancing performance measurement and rewards at the district level, and fostering learning and knowledge exchanges among states.

Both the PHSP and the EHSDP utilize the Program-for-Results financing instrument that focuses on achievement of results rather than inputs. Both the PHSP and EHSDP loans from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) have a final maturity of 18.5 years including a grace period of 5 years.

## Siemens Scholarship Program completes 10 years

Siemens Scholarship Program, based on the German model of Dual Education, completed 10 years with the induction of 200 students. The program hones youth to become industry-ready engineers and launch a sustainable career in engineering, R&D or manufacturing. As of 2023, over 1,300 students from 125 government engineering colleges across 27 states in India have been part of the Siemens Scholarship Program.

Under this program, Siemens provides financial assistance to deserving meritorious students who are unable to afford the education expenses. The students receive full scholarships covering the college fees and allowances for books, stationery, etc. Based on the German model of Dual Education, the students are provided with internships, training on mechatronics, soft skills,



projects and mentorships throughout the four years of engineering to make them truly industry ready. Fifty percent of the students are young women.

Sunil Mathur, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Siemens Limited, said "It is inspiring to see

the high level of untapped potential that we have in this country. Through the Siemens Scholarship Program we hope we are able to provide these young engineering graduates with equal opportunities to realize the true potential that India has to offer."



# Tata Technologies collaborates with Uttar Pradesh to transform Industrial Training Institutes

**T**ata Technologies, a global engineering, and digital services company has signed a 10-year Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the Uttar Pradesh (UP) government to modernize 150 government-owned ITIs across 75 districts in the state as part of the initiative to conceive and implement projects of high social impact and complement the nation-building efforts of the government. Post upgradation, these ITIs will not only cater to advanced skill requirements of students as well as prospective employers but also act as technology hubs, including skill centers for the large industries as well as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME).

Uttar Pradesh, being one of the largest states in India, possesses a large pool of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workforce. The state government has been actively taking initiatives like Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS), Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission, State Skill

Development Fund and Sabko Hunar Sabko Kaam to provide training and upskilling opportunities to the state's workforce. With a total investment of INR. 4887 crores, this ITI upgrade project will see the modernization of these centres on existing ITI premises with approx. 10,000 square feet of ITI area being developed by the Government of UP. The upgraded ITIs will offer six new trades and 23 new short-term courses, catering to Industry 4.0 demands, and training over 1,20,000 students annually at full capacity once the ITIs is upgraded. The project begins in March 2023, and the centres are expected to be ready between January 2024 and March 2024. This project will improve industrial training and education, creating a better learning environment for youth to meet industry needs. Upgraded ITIs will offer guidance and experiential learning through physical and digital delivery as well as employability skills. They will also serve as skill centers and boost local artisan

and handicraft industries by offering custom courses on product design and increasing their artistic level.

The project has received enthusiastic support from the government of Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath saying, "The transformation of ITIs in UP to Industry 4.0 Technology hubs is a significant step towards positioning Uttar Pradesh as investment destination of choice for manufacturing industry. We already have the best of talent and Uttar Pradesh, and this project will upskill our talent and create employment opportunities for the youth."

Echoing similar sentiments, Kapil Dev Aggarwal, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Vocational Education and Skill Development, said, "This collaboration with Tata Technologies will help in developing the state's technology upskilling infrastructure and improve the employability of our youth. We are confident that this project will play a pivotal role in making UP a leading state in


technology. Furthermore, the program will create a platform for artisans and the handicraft industry to enhance their product design, thereby increasing the value of their artistic works. This will open up new avenues for these sectors to showcase their unique craftsmanship and unlock the potential for their growth and success".

Speaking on occasion, Subhash Chand Sharma, IAS Principal Secretary, VESD, said, "The technology upgradation of ITIs will not only offer better employment opportunities for the youth of Uttar Pradesh but also establish the state as a coveted investment destination for industries looking to embrace Industry 4.0 and smart technologies for their manufacturing processes. Additionally, this initiative will prove especially advantageous for MSMEs that lack the financial resources to invest in high-end technological equipment, which will be made available for their use at the ITIs".

Commenting on the collaboration, Warren Harris, CEO & Managing Director, Tata Technologies, said, "We are excited to collaborate with the government of Uttar Pradesh to transform 150 ITIs into Industry 4.0 technology hubs. Our vision of Engineering a better world embodies our commitment to skill-building and developing skilled talent that would be required by the manufacturing industry to develop and manufacture innovative products. Through this collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh government, we are committed to supporting the development of technical and digital skills across Uttar Pradesh and empower the youth." Elaborating on the collaboration, Pawan Bhageria - President, Global HR,

IT Admin and Education, Tata Technologies, said, "India is at the centre of technology innovations that are driving the future of manufacturing. Our experience of working with global manufacturing companies on new technologies and solutions and understanding of the manufacturing value chain allows us to develop an industry-relevant curriculum that will equip students with skills that are being sought by manufacturing companies. This collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh government is a great opportunity for us to help train our youth on Industry 4.0 technologies and solutions and make them job-ready and this, in turn, may help the industry which is looking for such talent."

The upgradation and modernization of the ITIs will facilitate upskilling in sectors related to Industry 4.0, Product Design & Development, Product Verification and Virtual analysis, Design for Artisans and Handicrafts, Additive manufacturing (3D printing), Modern Automotive Maintenance Repair and Overhaul, Battery Electric Vehicle Training, IoT and Digital Instrumentation, Process Control and Automation with HMI, PLC SCADA, Advanced Manufacturing and Prototyping, Industrial Robotics with arc welding, AI-based Virtual Welding & Painting, Advanced Plumbing, Digital Meters, Agriculture and Horticulture, and much more.

The collaboration between Tata Technologies and the government of Uttar Pradesh promises to promote digital skill development and support the creation of job opportunities for the youth in the state, helping the state progress towards a brighter future. 

## Infosys Foundation Collaborates with the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans to Foster Learning for Army Widows and Children

Infosys Foundation, the philanthropic and CSR arm of Infosys, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) to provide educational grants and scholarships worth Rs 30 crore to widows and children of army personnel, who have been impacted through physical casualty.

Through this collaboration, more than 14,000 widows and children of army personnel from across the country will be able to advance their educational journey. This benefit will be extended to individuals wanting to pursue education from classes 1 to 12, graduation, post-graduation, professional courses, and grants towards computer literacy.

Infosys Foundation has a long-standing and unwavering commitment towards the Indian armed forces. Since 2016, Infosys Foundation has supported the Rehabilitation and Welfare section of the Indian Army with financial support to thousands of widows, and the next of kin of physical casualties, with grants amounting to INR 40 crore.

"We appreciate the support of the Infosys Foundation in creating avenues through which widows and children of Indian Army personnel who suffered physical casualties can restart and accelerate their educational journey. This will provide the necessary financial assistance to families of many such army personnel to empower them with a powerful tool like education, that will undoubtedly impact their lives positively, and bring about change", said, Brigadier Vikas Bharadwaj – Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV).

Sunil Kumar Dhareshwar, Trustee, Infosys Foundation, said, "Our long-standing collaboration with the defence forces, along with education being a core pillar of Infosys Foundation's vision, will further help this initiative to equip Army widows and children with knowledge levers that can help them realize their full potential. This collaboration is also aimed at inspiring them to achieve their aspirations, while being financially secure."



## Rotary Club of Delhi South installs solar power plant, donates tricycles and relief aid to leprosy patients



L-R: Dr Ritu Choudhary, State Leprosy Officer, Dr KS Baghotia, Secretary HKNS, Rtn Ashok Kantoor-DG 3011, MP Manoj Tiwari, Dr Sudarsan Mandal, DDG (Leprosy), MoHFW, Deepak Kapur-Head of RC Alliance, Mohd Shariq Malik, Head, Corporate Social Responsibility, ACRE

**I**n a bid to support leprosy patients and their families across Delhi NCR, Rotary Club of Delhi South (RCDS), Lepara and Assets Care and Reconstruction Enterprise Ltd (ACRE) came together to launch an on grid solar power plant at the Mother Teresa Home for leprosy patient at Tahirpur, Delhi.

Manoj Tiwari, MP, inaugurated the plant and distributed tricycles to leprosy patients to improve their quality of life.

Leprosy is one of the oldest-known, chronic infectious diseases which can lead to deformity and disability, if not treated on time. There were 1,27,558 new cases of leprosy detected globally in 2020-21,

out of which India accounted for approximately 54 per cent. Despite being completely curable, Leprosy remains one of the most misunderstood and underreported diseases, mainly because of lack of awareness about the disease, its treatment and management.

Rotary, along with its partners, uses a multi-pronged approach to raise awareness, dispel social stigma surrounding the disease, and improve medical care and quality of life for patients. Started in 2019, the Leprosy Control Project aims to uplift the lives of those suffering from leprosy and make India a leprosy-free nation. Tiwari, said, "It is important that people are aware that leprosy

is curable. Only with this knowledge will the ostracization of patients end, allowing them to live a life of dignity and security. With the support of non-profits like Rotary and its partners, I am sure that the project will develop further and benefit leprosy patients, their families, and the greater society in the future. The work being done by the Rotary and its partners to raise awareness around leprosy will be instrumental to meet Government's mission of eliminating Leprosy from India by 2027."

Dr Sudarsan Mandal, Deputy Director General (Leprosy), Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare says "Leprosy is still a public health problem in India as it contributes to around 54 per cent of the annual global new cases. Stigma and discrimination are the major causes of sufferings among leprosy patients. Although, Leprosy is curable and treatment is freely available, Leprosy affected people are still ostracized and face a lot of suffering due to lack of awareness among the common citizens. India being an endemic country for leprosy, is committed towards eradication. Leprosy is a bacterial disease and is fully curable with a combination of drugs called Multi Drug Therapy (MDT). The National Leprosy Eradication Program has strengthened its strategies towards eradication of this disease with newer interventions to end transmission cycle of leprosy by 2027. We are hopeful that the recently released National Strategic Plan & Roadmap (2023-27) will provide the guidance and blueprint to the States/ UTs to move towards Leprosy free India".

Deepak Kapur, Head of Rotary Club Alliance for Leprosy Control, said, "Since its inception, the Leprosy Control Project has been consistently working for improving lives of more than 1500 leprosy patients and their families in Delhi NCR. So far, we have trained more than 650 healthcare workers and conducted



63 physiotherapy camps across 30 Leprosy Colonies out of 40 in the state. The project takes a five-step approach to tackle leprosy: create awareness, training to capacitate healthcare workers, active case finding, treatment and palliative care of patients, and rehabilitation and re-integration into society in alleviating

the burden of leprosy in India. We thank our partners, ACRE and LEPRA who have shown unconditional support the cause.

Rotary will also soon be launching a one-of-its-kind comprehensive care facility at the Indira Gandhi Hospital which will provide rehabilitation and treatment to leprosy patients.”

Mohd Shariq Malik, Head, Corporate Social Responsibility, Assets Care and Reconstruction Enterprise Ltd (ACRE) said, “For ACRE, it is a matter of great pride to be associated with a noble cause like this and witness the impact the Leprosy Project has made in last three years. We share a common vision, value system, commitment to society and a common willingness to do better. Our long-standing partnership with Rotary Club of Delhi South and the LEPRA focuses on strengthening the existing healthcare infrastructure to diagnose, treat and rehabilitate leprosy patients.”

## Rebuild India Fund Launches Second Cohort of community-based NGOs to support vulnerable communities across India

**R**ebuild India Fund, anchored by Dasra and the Tarsadia Foundation, has announced the launch of its next set of 33 locally-led and community rooted grassroots NGOs. With this addition, the total number of NGOs working with vulnerable communities across 21 states has reached 56 with an overall impact on approximately 4 million lives. Rebuild India Fund is a \$50 million fund committed to providing flexible funding and capacity building support to 100 new grassroots NGOs each year for five years.

In India, civil society organizations have played a crucial role in solving some of these complex challenges with vulnerable communities. But chronic underfunding limits their ability to deliver impact at scale. To address these challenges, every NGO chosen to be a part of the initiative's cohort will receive flexible funding of minimum INR 50 lakhs (~\$13,500) over a period of five years, enabling them to cover organizational expenses and adapt to their communities' needs effectively. In addition to this, each organization will receive capacity building support to support resilience building of the organization.

On receiving flexible funding, our NGO partners are able to respond to urgent and longstanding organizational needs while being able to impact their communities at scale, “We work with tribals living in the disaster-prone region of Gudalur in Tamil Nadu, there can be unexpected expenses and relief work necessary to address immediate needs. The flexibility of using our funds to meet our unexpected needs is something very useful from Rebuild India Fund” - K.T. Subramanian, ACCORD- Action for Community Organisation Rehabilitation and Development.

The selection process for non-profits to the Rebuild Fund is meticulously designed to identify the most grassroots organizations by evaluating them against a basic eligibility criterion, including organization's existing budget and regulatory compliance. The organizations are recommended by networks working at the national and regional level such as Dhvani, GOONJ, RCRC, Womanity, NCDHR, Jan Vikas and others.

The final selection of the NGOs is done by an independent Investment Committee comprising diverse leaders from NGOs and social sector

organizations. NGOs that meet compliance criteria, are then assessed using a comprehensive evaluation and ranking method that anchored in Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) principles that focus on the broad parameters of Leadership of the NGO, Community Centricity of programme design, and Vulnerability of communities served.

All the organizations selected are systematically neglected and face multiple challenges with fundraising, collaborations and exposure to the larger sector. 54% of the cohort NGOs are women-led, while 55% are led by 'proximate' leaders, with lived experiences, belonging to communities they serve. All other NGOs are led by 'inclusive' leaders from neglected and marginalized communities based on caste and gender.

All the NGOs selected for the Rebuild India Fund work with six target communities – Scheduled Tribes (68%) including Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG), Scheduled Castes (61%), Religious Minorities (27%), LGBTQIA++ (5%), Nomadic and De-notified Tribes (9%), Persons with Disabilities (13%), Other Backward Castes (11%) and Backward Castes (5%).



# Bal Raksha Bharat & CISCO aid UP government's efforts to strengthen health seeking behaviour in aspirational districts

India has been at the forefront of the global efforts against Covid-19 and has fully vaccinated over 67% of its adult population. However, a large portion of the population is yet to overcome vaccine hesitancy. Several factors, more so in rural areas, such as ignorance, misinformation, and false theories have kept people from getting vaccinated. To counter this and accelerate government efforts on Covid vaccine uptake, Bal Raksha Bharat (globally known as Save the Children) and Cisco have launched 'Project Pratiraksha'. The yearlong program has helped demystify misinformation and reached a key milestone, having successfully administered over 4.5 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses in 24 blocks of the Balrampur and Shravasti districts of Uttar Pradesh.

"We appreciate the support given to us by Save the Children and CISCO to step up the vaccine uptake in Shravasti. The volunteers of the "Project Pratiraksha" went door to door to ensure maximum people were vaccinated against COVID 19, while also raising awareness of routine immunisation other healthcare services the government is providing. By joining hands together with



Team Save the Children and CISCO address the gathering at Balrampur District in Uttar Pradesh

all stakeholders that we can improve and make equitable and efficient access to health services to realise our dream of a healthy, disease-free nation," said Dr. Sharda Prasad, Chief Medical Officer, Shravasti district, Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking about the partnership, Harish Krishnan, Managing Director & Chief Policy Officer, Cisco, said, "India embarked on a challenging mission to vaccinate every eligible citizen in the country. We are proud that the Government's National Vaccination Program has been the most successful and largest vaccination programs worldwide. The

country has achieved a remarkable and unprecedented feat of administering over 220 crore Covid vaccine doses. "Project Pratiraksha" aims to aid the Government's efforts towards enabling strong health seeking behaviour. 4.5 lakh Covid doses administered have been administered so far, and this is just the beginning. The project is a true example of public, private, and civil society collaboration, and showcases Cisco's efforts to forge an Inclusive Future for All."

A lack of knowledge regarding health services can be a hindrance to the delivery of these services



Team Save the Children and CISCO after successful COVID Vaccination drive at Balrampur District in Uttar Pradesh



Team Save the Children and CISCO honoured for their hard work on COVID Vaccination in Shravasti district in Uttar Pradesh



and have real consequences on the health behaviour for a country. Bal Raksha Bharat is integrated within the existing structure and applauds the UP government's efforts to deliver health services to the last mile. We are rooted in community mobilization and collective action, and thank CISCO for being synergistic and complementary to public service, said Sudarshan Suchi, Chief Executive Officer Bal Raksha Bharat.

Additionally, over 1,700 front-line workers were trained to help overcome vaccine hesitancy at the grassroot level. The team from Bal Raksha Bharat has also been supporting micro planning for social mobilization and community engagement. For the 12-14 yrs age

group, school awareness strategy was adopted with DSA (District Schools Authority) through child centric engagements which enabled "Project Pratiraksha" to reach a significant number of schools and students in the two districts.

Other awareness mediums like public announcement systems and regular meetings with mothers and community leaders were held to improve healthcare behaviour in the community, which has bolstered government initiatives to improve vaccine uptake in the state.

The project focuses on high-risk areas and high-risk populations, including marginalized communities who have a high level of vaccination hesitancy. Both the districts are

attached to the Nepal border and have a large "Tarai" belt, with indigenous tribe "Tharu" residing there. The terrain is difficult to access with low literacy rate.

In the State of Uttar Pradesh, the National Health Mission has made special efforts to reach out to the community at the grassroots level. NHM focuses on affordable, accessible, accountable, effective, and quality services to the masses, especially to the vulnerable groups of the community. Project Pratiraksha is focused on supporting and catalysing the government's reach to the most vulnerable communities, so that they have access to scientific, evidence-based information on Covid-19 as well as other healthcare schemes.

## DCM Shriram Foundation launched its Mobile Medical Unit in Pasgawan Block of Lakhimpur Kheri District

**A**s a part of the Khushali Sehat Program, DCM Shriram Foundation launched its second Mobile Medical Unit in Pasgawan Block of Lakhimpur Kheri District where it will cater to 109 Gram Panchayats, the first MMU is running in Hariawan Block, Hardoi District. The MMU provides a range of preventive, promotive, diagnostic, and referral-based services focused on improving maternal and child health by identifying and reducing the number of high risk pregnancies. The Mobile Medical Unit is equipped with modern facilities.

The objective of intervention of Mobile Medical Unit (MMU) is to reach pregnant women and lactating mothers to provide and create a way of delivering primary care in



remote, inaccessible areas, and establishing a continuum of care with community level and outreach care as well as secondary and tertiary level care.

The MMU launched in Pasgawan block will reach 60 selected villages in the first phase and expand to other villages in the second phase. Through this program, the provision of free check-ups for all pregnant women in the area will be achievable. Various other tests will also be conducted through the MMU.

The District Chief Development Officer Anil Singh, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Santosh Gupta, and Mr. Pankaj Singh, the Unit Head, DCM Shriram Ltd- Distillery & Sugar, Ajbapur jointly inaugurated the Mobile Medical Unit supported by DCM Shriram Foundation.

## The Coca-Cola Foundation, Imagine H2O launch water innovation fund to expand access to solutions

**The Sustainable Access Solution Fund will pilot innovative technologies for water-stressed and climate-impacted communities**

**T**he Coca-Cola Foundation and Imagine H2O, a global non-profit that accelerates and deploys new water innovations, have partnered to scale entrepreneurial solutions for the global water crisis.

The Sustainable Access Solution Fund unlocks targeted grants and technical support to help communities pilot and adopt innovation, doubling Imagine H2O's annual pilot funding budget this year.

As one-third of the world's inhabitants still lack access to safe drinking water, innovative technologies are emerging that can help boost water supply, mitigate pollution and strengthen climate resilience. However, widespread risk aversion and financial constraints prevent utilities, businesses and other end-users from testing and validating these solutions.

The Solution Fund creates opportunities for innovators and their customers to overcome these barriers, building on Imagine H2O's ongoing pilot initiatives supported by philanthropic and public sector partners including OceanKind, 11th Hour Racing, Enterprise Singapore, World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

Since 2018, Imagine H2O has awarded US\$1.9 million for 69 pilots. This support has triggered



up to seven times in matching or follow-on funding from other partners. Beyond financial support, the Solution Fund utilises Imagine H2O's global startup accelerator programs and in-country networks to mentor entrepreneurs as they design, execute, and monitor the impact of these projects. Awards will be recycled back to the Solution Fund when pilots succeed.

"This partnership marks another milestone in The Coca-Cola Foundation's commitment to accelerate progress towards the UN SDGs - all 17 of which will be affected by how our water resources are used, treated and managed in the future," said Saadia Madsbjerg, President of The Coca-Cola Foundation. "By partnering with Imagine H2O, we want to not only showcase what is possible for water innovation, we also want to tackle the underlying obstacles preventing the faster uptake and scaling of these promising solutions." The Solution Fund will source

solutions that not only directly enable access to safe drinking water, but also help communities restore or sustain water resources threatened by climate change or environmental degradation. From biosensors for rapid contamination detection to rural water supply monitoring systems, a diverse range of technologies will be vetted from across Imagine H2O's network of 175 startups.

"From Johannesburg to Jakarta, the appetite to leapfrog conventional water management approaches is growing," said Imagine H2O's President Scott Bryan. "With The Coca-Cola Foundation, we will help underserved communities around the world embrace new technologies by providing dedicated funding and insight to entrepreneurs, local water providers and government partners."

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/press-releases/the-coca-cola-foundation-imagine-h2o-launch-water-innovation-fund-to-expand-access-to-solutions/>)

# AI-driven Zamit, in alliance with The Future Foundation, announces landmark research grant worth INR 1 million for schools and school teachers

In a landmark initiative that aims to provide impetus to research-based teaching, learning, and training in schools in India, Zamit, a leading AI-enabled one-stop solution provider for school education, in association with The Future Foundation, a not-for-profit body, has announced a research grant worth Rs 1 million.

The grant will be extended to select schools and independent teachers for demonstrably implementing research-driven teaching and learning solutions to help their students become future-ready. The announcement of this grant has been in tune with the focus and recommendations of the government's New Economic Policy or NEP 2020, which seeks to drive a research-based approach to teach in schools endorsing the incorporation of future-ready skill training as an integral part of subject learning and curricula.

"As an AI-based learning solution provider, we value the special role that original research-based insights and modern thinking can play in how children learn and teachers teach today in our schools. With the announcement of this research grant, we wish to foster a culture of original thinking that draws upon modern teaching and learning principles and practices and suggests readily-practicable solutions for upgrading our school education system.," said Aarul Malaviya, Founder and Director of Zamit.

Furthermore, To receive this grant, both schools and independent

Zamit, in association with The Future Foundation, announces Rs 1 million research grant for schools and school teachers

The thought behind this grant is in line with the government's NEP 2020

20 schools and 20 independent teachers are to be selected based on specific criteria, including the submission of a research proposal and approval thereof


While Rs 30,000 is to be given to each school, Rs 15,000 is to be given to each teacher

The grantees will have to undertake research drawing on Zamit's Nine Dimensions of Students

teachers must submit a research proposal which will be vetted by a screening committee appointed by Zamit and its academic partner Qualifications and Assessments

International, or QAI, UK. At the same time, while schools must demonstrate the desire to support at least 500 students, teachers must be able to keep at least 50 school students in their journey of future readiness. The grant will be available to primary and secondary school teachers with at least three years of relevant teaching experience and demonstrable skills in implementing new and innovative teaching and mentoring methods.

Besides, the grant will comprise Rs 30,000 in cash support per school and Rs 15,000 in cash for each teacher. In all, twenty schools and twenty school teachers are to benefit from this program. Once selected for the program, the schools and independent teachers, also accounting for NEP 2020 recommendations, will need to undertake independent and original research linked to Zamit's Nine Dimensions of Students and provide recommendations that can be practically and easily implemented in schools.

Apart from a research proposal of not more than 500 words for interested school applicants, a brief background on teachers representing the school will need to be submitted. One school must only submit one research proposal, and if selected, the research must be completed within three months of receipt of the grant proposal. Similarly, for teacher applicants, if selected post-submission of a research proposal, they will have to complete their research within three months. 



# AS INDIA PUSHES FOR 'SUPERFOOD' MILLETS AT G20, ITS FARMERS WANT A BETTER SUPPORT SYSTEM

Assured procurement and subsidised distribution of millets could help India deal with its farm crisis and widespread malnutrition.

By Manu Moudgil

A millet eatery run by a women's self-help group in the eastern coastal state of Odisha.

Image: Odisha Millet Mission.



As India prepares to host a three-day “Millet Mela” (millets fair) on the sidelines of an upcoming G20 Agriculture Working Group meeting to be held later this month, Indian farmers say they need a better support system to enable a shift away from conventional, resource-intensive wheat and paddy crops towards the more nutritious and climate-resilient millets.

Millets are a group of small-seeded grasses whose produce is gluten-free and rich in nutrients, dietary fibre, protein, and antioxidants. They require relatively little water and are not affected by high temperatures, making them ideal for regions with hot and dry climates. In contrast, wheat and rice not only need intensive irrigation and fertiliser inputs, their grains shrivel at high temperatures – a rising concern due to global heating.

“If South America has quinoa, India has millets, which can be marketed to the world as a superfood,” says Dinesh Balam, state coordinator, Odisha Millet Mission.

Farmers growing millets say a range of policy and regulatory issues must be addressed for this dream to be realised.

### ‘NUTRI-CEREALS’

Millets were traditionally popular but lost favour after the Green

Revolution popularised high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat. As a global frontrunner in the production of millets, India campaigned for the United Nations to declare 2023 as the “International Year of Millets” and has also provided US\$ 500,000 to the Food & Agricultural Organisation (FAO) to support related activities to promote these “nutri cereals”.

India is a major producer and exporter of millets – it accounts for 80 per cent of Asia’s and 20 per cent

of the world’s millet production, and is among the top five exporters of millets globally, having exported US\$64.3 million worth of millets in the year 2021-22. Indian embassies are conducting activities to increase awareness about and demand for exports. In Indian cities, chefs in five-star hotels are creating millet-based recipes, food companies are promising to include millets in their product offerings, and plans are afoot to have mobile kiosks serving millet-based drinks. As India prepares to host its first-ever G20 summit, its Agriculture Working Group meeting, to be held from 28 to 29 March, will include a showcase of millets.

Despite the buzz, however, the domestic policy ecosystem doesn’t yet present a long-term strategy for a transition away from wheat and rice to millets, essential to deal with the adverse fallouts of the Green Revolution, which made India self-sufficient in food production in the 1970s but



Dozens of millet varieties are grown around the world. These small-seeded grasses yield cereals or grains for human and animal food. Image: Ministry of Food and Agriculture, India.



had devastating ecological fallouts that farmers are still grappling with.

The current approach focusses on increasing the demand from urban areas and exports, hoping this will inspire farmers to expand supply.

“If meaningful actions are not taken to encourage farmers to grow millets, the year will just end with promotional activities hoping that the market will pick the tab. Both the farmers and private players

tagged – just as is currently done for wheat and rice.

Together, government procurement, minimum support price and inclusion in the public distribution system can signal clear policy support and make it profitable for farmers to grow millets.

### WHY MILLETS DECLINED

Traditionally, millets were a staple almost all over India, with a range

grammes (kg), while that of wheat almost doubled from 27 to 52 kg. Despite high production and mass distribution of wheat and rice, however, malnutrition persists. India is home to 224.3 million undernourished people, according to a report released by the Food and Agriculture Organization in 2019-2021. Every second Indian woman is anaemic, every third child is malnourished, and every fifth child is wasted (low weight-to-height), shows data.

Compared to rice, millets pack in more nutrition (they contain 1 to 5 per cent protein and 5 to 49 per cent iron) and increase climate resilience (1 to 13 per cent fewer calories lost during an extreme dry year), found a 2019 study by the University of Delaware, Indian School of Business and Yale University. Millets also reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2 to 13 per cent, demand for irrigation water by 3 to 21 per cent and energy by 2 to 12 per cent.

### CONSTRAINTS AND BUDGET SHORTFALL

The production of millets has indeed been increasing in recent years – from 12.49 million metric tonnes in 2020 to 15.92 million metric tonnes in 2021-22. But a lot of millets are cultivated as animal fodder. For instance, sorghum, one of the major millets, is grown on 2.6 million hectares across the country as animal fodder, while pearl millet is a popular bird feed. In fact, more than half the sorghum and pearl millet produced in India is finding its way to alternative uses like feed and alcohol.

“Many of the hybrid varieties of millets are cultivated to supply raw material for breweries. But the data on millets is also very limited as it only tracks pearl millet, sorghum and finger millet and does not take into account the minor millets [such as foxtail, proso and finger millets]. So, the actual area and production would be much higher than the



A variety of food products made from millets displayed at an international food and hospitality fair.

Image: tweeted by Piyush Goyal, the federal Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, and Textiles, on April 30, 2022.

have limited capacity,” says Rahul Sharma, an IT engineer-turned-organic farmer who is promoting the cultivation and consumption of millets in northern India.

The Indian government is among the largest buyers of its farm produce, and offers assured prices for a list of products that includes wheat and rice. Sharma says government procurement should favour millets, an assured “minimum support price” (MSP) must be offered to the farmers for the produce thus procured, and millets must be provided to the public at subsidised prices through the public distribution system that provides affordable food grains to the economically disadvan-

of foods and beverages made from these small grains. However, the area under millets declined in the 1960s when high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat were introduced and pushed through the public distribution system (PDS), which meant assured procurement and higher market prices for these two crops. The Green Revolution increased the irrigation cover to bring more area under wheat and rice cultivation, leaving millets restricted to rain-fed areas. Urbanisation and higher spending power also favoured wheat and rice.

Between 1962 and 2010, India’s per capita consumption of millets fell drastically from 32.9 to 4.2 kilo-



recorded numbers,” says Ravindra, executive secretary of WASSAN, an organisation which works for ecological security of rainfed areas.

While several government agencies and educational institutes are promoting the cultivation and consumption of millets, the annual federal budget for 2023-24 did not promise any special funding except making the Indian Institute of Millet Research a centre of excellence, which would translate into more funds for research and development.

The federal government has asked states to take initiatives to procure and distribute millets. A “sub-mission” on “nutri-cereals” under the National Food Security Mission provides incentives and training to farmers on crop production and protection technologies in 212 districts across 14 states. The costs incurred under the scheme are shared by the federal and state governments in a 60:40 ratio.

### THE FIRST MOVERS

The states of Odisha in eastern coastal India and Karnataka in south-

**If meaningful actions are not taken to encourage farmers to grow millets, the year will just end with promotional activities hoping that the market will pick the tab.**

**RAHUL SHARMA,**  
Organic Farmer in  
Northern India

western India have implemented systems to procure and distribute millets through fair price shops and mid-day meal schemes in schools, but the remaining states haven't. Among the many varieties of millets grown in the country, pearl millet, sorghum and finger millet dominate the market and government policies.

In 2021-22, the total procurement of millets was 0.63 million tonnes, half the 1.20 million tonnes procured in the previous year. Procurement by the state of Karnataka

made up 80 per cent of this figure. The state also got the maximum allocation of 470,000 tonnes of finger millet and sorghum from the federal government for distribution through the public distribution system in 2022-23.

“With procurement, the area under finger millet has expanded in Karnataka but we need a long-term budget allocation. Also, attention has to be paid to minor millets otherwise there will be mono-cropping of just one or two millets which is not good for ecosystem and nutritional diversity,” says Krishna Prasad of Sahaja Smrudha, an organisation working to revive millets and make farming sustainable in Karnataka.

Karnataka became the first state to include millets in its public distribution system in 2015, while Odisha launched a millets mission in 2017-2018 focussing on better production, developing a millet value chain, campaigning for behaviour change, and increasing household consumption of millets. In a massive step up, the state has increased its spending on Odisha Millet Mission from Rs 580 crore (US\$70 million) during 2015-2022 to Rs 3,200 crore for next five years (US\$390 million).

“We have a decadal approach to millets. We know that wheat and rice took several decades to become main grains of the population, so we have to give as much time to millets,” says Balam, the Odisha state coordinator for its millet mission. “Our main objective is increasing household cultivation and consumption in order to tackle both malnutrition and a brewing farming crisis, by focusing on villages and small towns.”

Balam says that for five years, the mission has run awareness programmes to encourage behaviour change among consumers, while assuring procurement at



A millet farmer in Odisha state. Image: Odisha Millet Mission.

government mandated prices to encourage farmers.

The mission's success has resulted in a 215 per cent increase in the gross value of millets produced per farmer household, said a study by NITI Aayog, the apex policy think tank of the Indian government.

"The lesson all states need to learn from Odisha is that farmers won't step into an uncertain environment. They need a support system just like for wheat and rice," says Ravindra of WASSAN. "Simultaneously, millets have to be promoted as a staple rather than a packaged superfood affordable only to the affluent."

and nutrition in the state of Punjab. "Though we have a network of around 100 local farmers cultivating millets, they only grow enough for self-consumption because the market linkages are missing. Most of the millet produce sold in Punjab comes from states in southern India."

The trickle-down effect can also be seen in rural areas. "There is definitely a lot of buzz around millets now. One of the agricultural extension centres in our region took seeds from us last year for distribution among farmers. We are also getting calls from Delhi-based private players, but they offer a much lower rate than we demand," says

ers' collectives aiming to provide members with end-to-end support in terms of technical, marketing, processing, and others inputs. "Big companies and city-based start-ups are dominating the supermarket shelves right now. We have to see how much of the market benefits reach farmers and how FPOs can be mentored," says Prasad of Sahaja Smrudha in Karnataka.

Support is also required for processing millets, which is a tedious process and requires separate mills than for rice or wheat. Apart from pearl millet, finger millet, and sorghum, other millet types have tough seed coats and require de-husking. "These processing units also need to be set up at the community level because once de-husked, these millets become more prone to pests and diseases. So they can't be stored for long and have to be consumed quickly," says Ravindra.

Balam of Odisha Millet Mission adds that boosting millet exports will need R&D to meet importing countries' specifications, including large-scale adoption of purpose-made processing machines. Odisha has again been the first mover in this field and has standardised some designs of harvesters, threshers and de-huskers.

To ensure widespread availability of these machines, Odisha has allocated Rs 1 crore (US\$1,22,000) to each block (an administrative unit composed of a group of villages) for making provisions for processing millets, with the help of FPOs and women's self-help groups.

"Investment in rural areas for local production, consumption and value addition is the key to make millets popular. We should aim for millets to replace 25 per cent of rice in popular diets," says Ravindra. ■

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/as-india-pushes-for-superfood-millets-at-g20-its-farmers-want-a-better-support-system/?sw-login=true>)

**Investment in rural areas for local production, consumption and value addition is the key to make millets popular. We should aim for millets to replace 25 per cent of rice in popular diets**

Other states are taking baby steps too: this year, the central-eastern Jharkhand state announced an allocation of Rs 50 crore (US\$6 million) for promotion of millets while Uttar Pradesh has promised to procure and distribute finger millet.

### THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

In urban areas, the focus on lifestyle diseases has brought attention to millets. "We conducted several cookery workshops talking about millet-based recipes, which has led to uptick in consumption especially among those living with lifestyle diseases like diabetes and heart disorders," says Rospinder Grewal of Kheti Virasat Mission, a group working towards sustainable farming

Sudha Nagavarapu, who works with Sangtin Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan, a grassroots organisation of small and marginal farmers and farm labourers that has been promoting millets for the last eight years in the Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh in north-central India.

For sellers in smaller cities, it's a mixed bag. "Our retail pick-up is still very low. The main outflow is through business-to-business deals and I don't really see a major shift there," says Rohit Jain of Banyan Roots, an organic products company that works with farmers in the north-western state of Rajasthan.

Another way forward could be support for farmer producer organisations (FPOs), which are farm-

# One to watch: Lesser Florican



Image: Lesser Florican  
© Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj

The smallest of the bustard family, Lesser Florican is renowned for its spectacular leaping breeding display. However, widespread loss of its grassland habitat in South Asia have led to rapid declines of this Critically Endangered species.

**W**idespread and abundant in the 19th century, Lesser Florican's decline is inextricably linked to that of the lush lowland grasslands of India. In better times, this small bustard with distinctive twisted moustaches could often be seen leaping above the tall vegetation in an elaborate courtship display. It was initially listed as Critically Endangered in the 1994 Red List, but improved surveys indicated a slower rate of decline, and it was moved to Endangered. This seems to have sent a message that conservation action could be delayed – and because no-one took advantage of this crucial window of opportunity, the species' decline simply continued unchecked. In 2021, Lesser Florican was once again

reclassified as Critically Endangered, barely able to cling to the final patches of habitat that remain. Vast areas of natural grassland have been converted to agricultural land, and what's left is being degraded by overgrazing, invasive plants and disrupted rainfall patterns resulting from climate change. These dangers are compounded by the threat of feral dogs, hunting and egg-collecting. Even in flight, the species isn't safe – researchers suspect that collisions with infrastructure such as roads and powerlines cause significant mortality.

Unlike more 'fashionable' habitats such as rainforests and coral reefs, grasslands like these often risk being overlooked – but the BirdLife Partnership is trying to change this. The Bombay Natural History Society

(BNHS, BirdLife in India) and other local conservation organisations have been working with farmers in one of the species' final strongholds, Ajmer in Rajasthan, to raise awareness and incentivise protection of the species. The landscape at Ajmer is now taken over by crops, so it is not an optimal habitat. Nevertheless, BNHS's project has managed to remove invasive *Prosopis* trees – native to the Americas – in a bid to restore natural ecosystems, and has established a community conservation reserve for organic, low-intensity farming. This should hopefully buy the species valuable time.

"Of all the bird conservation crises in India this is the most urgent and yet the most neglected," says BirdLife's Nigel Collar, who also serves as co-chair of the Bustard Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. "We only have a few years to save this astonishing species, and BNHS needs all the support it can get to expand its valiant efforts." 🟩

(SOURCE: <https://www.birdlife.org/news/2023/01/17/one-to-watch-lesser-florican/>)





Coral disease results in the death of important ecosystems.

Image: Flickr/ ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies

# Ecologists concerned about Asia's coral health as yellow-band disease wipes out Thailand's reefs

As temperatures rise, coral bleaching events and disease outbreaks are becoming more frequent. Coral restoration ecologist **Carly Randall** tells Eco-Business that warming oceans may be putting Asia's reefs in peril.

A report by **Portia Tan**

**A**n outbreak of yellow-band disease, historically only found in the Caribbean reefs but that has recently killed corals over vast stretches of Thailand's sea floor, is raising alarm bells among scientists and marine ecologists in the region.

The worry is that more of Asia Pacific's beautiful corals — from Australia's Great Barrier Reef to the Tubbataha in the Philippines and Raja Ampat in Indonesia — could be at risk.

Yellow-band disease, so named for the colour it turns corals before destroying them, was first detected in Asia's reefs late last year. The rapidly spreading disease had affected stretches of corals near Pattaya, off Thailand's east coast. By the time it was detected, it had already spread across roughly 600 acres of the sea. Local marine ecologists reported seeing it wherever they went.

There are challenges, however, to diagnosing coral diseases and attributing causality. Scientists studying the recent outbreak have been struggling to make sense of the event and find an eventual cure or a way to slow the progression of the disease. Dr. Carly Randall, an ecologist at the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), told Eco-Business that "corals only have a few ways to show signs of disease" and it is unknown yet whether the yellow-band disease found to have killed Thailand's reefs is caused by the same pathogen(s) as in the Caribbean.

"We do know, however, that climate warming is increasing the incidence of coral diseases and making corals more susceptible to opportunistic pathogens, which reduces their immunity. With the warmer-than-average summer temperatures, this could be what led to the disease showing up in Thailand," she said.

"I think it is a very serious issue... and along with warming oceans, should be considered as a conse-



Dr. Carly Randall said that **climate warming is increasing the incidence of coral diseases.**

*Image: Australian Institute of Marine Science*

quence of climate change...If we want to see reduced disease outbreaks, we need to address climate change."

Randall, whose marine science career began in the Caribbean, is an expert on reef restoration who has researched mitigation techniques against yellow-band disease. She added that "signs of disease could occur on corals anywhere" and the worry is that disease incidence will increase in the region, following heat stress. "We have seen new diseases spreading rapidly in recent years, which is concerning."

Scientists believe overfishing, pollution and rising water temperatures because of climate change may be making the reefs more vulnerable to yellow-band disease. Records now show that the world's oceans were the hottest ever recorded in 2022 — an international team of scientists working on a new ocean heat analysis found an ever-deeper layer of warm water on the ocean surface.

More than 90 per cent of global warming heat is absorbed by the

ocean. Randall highlighted coral rescue and biobanking as two options to consider if the outbreak in Thailand reaches a point deemed uncontrollable. "If we can determine what is causing it, we may be able to develop targeted treatments that can be used in the future," she said, but ultimately the world needs to work on addressing the underlying problem — rising emissions.

Coral rescue typically involves identifying reefs that are more resilient to climate change and extracting their genes to seed them in other areas. Samples of endangered coral can also be stored in biobanks in order to preserve the species.

In Thailand, marine ecologists are now actively monitoring the situation. They have gone on diving expeditions to photograph infected corals, take measurements and photographs, as well as collect samples for examination.

Thai marine authorities are using social media to track the reports of infected reefs, and have also sought the public's help to report sightings of corals they think are affected.

Corals are one of the world's most important natural resources and the pillars on which marine and coastal ecosystems are built. The loss of corals can have calamitous impacts as a reef contributes to many services, from providing a habitat to an immense number of marine species, to protecting the coast from storms, and serving as a source of food.

The loss of reefs could bring with it the loss of eco-tourism which many locals earn their livelihoods from. The commercial fishing industry would also be at risk.

In total, the loss of resources and services provided by coral reef systems could cost the world as much as US\$375 billion annually. 🌱

*(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/ecologists-concerned-about-asias-coral-health-as-yellow-band-disease-wipes-out-thailands-reefs/>)*





Coal mine in West Bengal, India.

Image: Choti Hussain, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

# Black days ahead if coal city does not change

Unsafe and disaster-prone, extractive towns like Kolkata, capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, are still attractive to migrant workers, writes **Shatabdi Das**

**T**he coalfields around Asansol, 210km northwest of Kolkata in West Bengal have provided a way of life for workers since colonial times. But for the thousands drawn to the area for job opportunities, those same mines also carry the risk of death.

Along with the prosperity coal has brought for mining companies comes pollution, shaft collapses and displacement.

These problems have continued since the 19th century when indiscriminate extraction and unscientific methods of mining led to land subsidence, mine fires, air, water

and land pollution, displacement and mining related health issues.

Yet the promise of employment, housing, water, transport, health-care centres and schools acted as a magnet and these towns continued to draw people to the coalfields and subsequent mines digging for other mineral reserves such as iron ore, manganese and bauxite.

Asansol owes its development to the growth of coal mines, but its sustainability as an extractive town now faces ecological limits while other mining towns in the area face a long battle ahead to become environmentally liveable and sus-



tainable. Coal mining represented the new modern economy of Bengal under which the region flourished during colonial times. The region, in the Raniganj Coalfield of West Bengal, at the fringe of the Chota Nagpur Plateau in Eastern India, has been a hub of commercial coal production since 1840.

Asansol, then a railway hub, became the focus for the growth in the coal producing region and supported Kolkata as a secondary enclave and home to migrant workers. Mining practices have been haphazard, unplanned and unscientific.

As a result, the urban centres in the coal region are threatened by unstable ground and land subsidence. Safety concerns for collieries, towns and surrounding areas only surfaced since the nationalisation of coal mines in India in the 1970s.

The hunger for coal means once-productive farmland is swallowed up by mines. Despite the risks, displaced people still encroach into the peripheral areas of mines to scavenge coal.

Environmental measures and subsidence control schemes were outlined in a 2009 Master Plan. Land use development now falls under the remit of the Asansol Durgapur Development Authority which works closely with Eastern Coalfields Limited and the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited Regional Institute in Asansol.

Though the government, mining company and development authority sometimes address the issues of subsidence and mine fires, it is difficult to implement checks and controls at every mine site.

The hunger for coal means once-productive farmland is swallowed up by mines. Open-cast mines operate near residential areas on the city boundary. Despite the risks, displaced people still encroach into the peripheral areas of mines to scavenge coal.

As mining companies buy up more land, there is less for farming. Other areas near mines become unproductive. Land acquisition contracts do not always proceed as planned, triggering loss of livelihood, worse employment conditions and reduced incomes.

Development projects such as the construction of dams, industrial townships, expansion of coal mines and growth of infrastructure and transport projects have displaced more than 100,000 people since the 1950s. Land loss and the failure to

subsequent demand for more land. And migrant workers continue to come despite poorer contractual arrangements and fewer social protections due to outsourcing. Allied industries such as iron pigment and ingot manufacturing plants, refractories and brick kilns also provide possibilities of employment.

As Asansol confronts the pressures of urban sprawl toward open pit mines, safety issues and pollution — among the worst in India — land development needs to be more attuned to the hazards.



**Picking at the seams of mines becomes the only way to eke out a living for many people in the coal mining towns of West Bengal.** Image: Nit1994, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

adapt to alternative livelihoods at times cause distress migration.

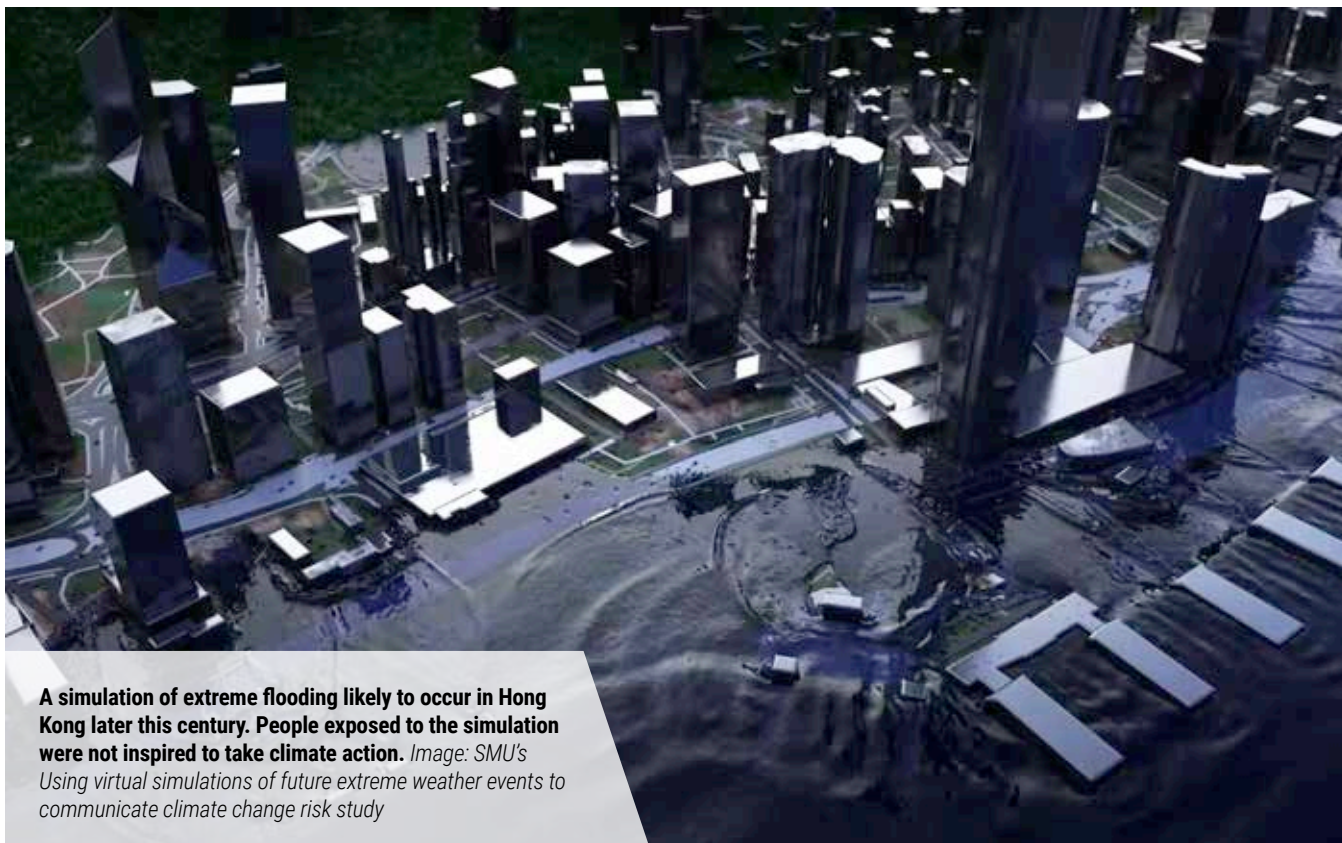
The Sonapur-Bazari open-cast mine area has been a prominent zone of displacement. Travelling this urban industrial corridor, you see people on bicycles with overflowing bags of coal collected from the fringes pits. With farming jobs disappearing, picking at the seams of abandoned mines becomes the only way to eke out a living.

Urban sprawl to the edge of mines leads to safety concerns. However, as mining is the impetus for economic growth, towns around the coalfield continue to grow, causing a

Reforestation, stricter control of mine operations, greater safety efforts, accessibility to water and transport services all need a greater focus to reduce regional imbalances. 📍

*Shatabdi Das is a researcher with the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata. This article is part of a Special Report on 'Cities after colonialism', produced in collaboration with the Calcutta Research Group. Originally published under Creative Commons by 360info™.*

*(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/black-days-ahead-if-coal-city-does-not-change/>)*



# Extreme weather warnings fail to trigger climate action: study

People exposed to a 3D simulation of a devastating super-typhoon that submerged Hong Kong were unlikely to see climate change as a risk or make planet-conscious lifestyle changes. This was particularly true for climate sceptics and people who already lead eco-conscious lives, writes **Robin Hicks**

**A**pocalyptic images of raging typhoons, rising seas and submerged buildings do not scare people into worrying about climate change or shifting to planet-friendly lifestyles, a new study suggests. A group of Hong Kong residents exposed

to a virtual simulation of a super-typhoon projected to hit Hong Kong sometime between 2050 and 2100 were not motivated to change their behaviour, and were actually less inclined to see climate change as a risk or take climate action.

The simulation was based on Typhoon Mangkhut, which battered

parts of the Philippines, Guam and China in 2018, killing 134 people and causing US\$3.8 billion in damage. Storms like Mangkhut are projected to get more frequent and intense as seas warm and sea-levels rise.

But individuals who experienced what the future climate reality could be like were not motivated to make

behavioural changes, particularly climate sceptics and people who already live more eco-friendly lives, the study of 1,500 Hongkongers by Singapore Management University (SMU) found.

Climate sceptics – people who do not believe that anthropogenic climate change is happening and that the simulated storm surges are not going to occur – doubled down on their views and showed a major decrease in climate risk perception.

So did people leading more environmentally-conscious lives who are already aware of the risks of climate change.

Those who identified as neither climate sceptics or tree-huggers showed only a slight positive increase in climate risk perception.

“Visualising the devastating impacts of climate change play out in the cities we live in should provide the wake-up call needed to modify individual behaviour and support costly climate adaptation and mitigation measures. Unfortunately, our results suggest that ‘seeing is not believing’, especially for climate sceptics,” said Dr Terry van Gevelt, assistant professor of Urban Sustainability College of Integrative Studies, SMU.

### Why weather warnings don't work

The experient failed to shock people into taking climate change more seriously because of the “psychological distance” between them and extreme weather events, which were deemed too far into the future compared to here-and-now issues.

Some respondents said that they felt powerless to address climate change, so were not inclined to change their behaviour. Others stated that the simulated storm surge was not sufficiently destructive to worry them, and noted that video did not feature any people.

Van Gevelt told Eco-Business that as Hong Kong has some of the

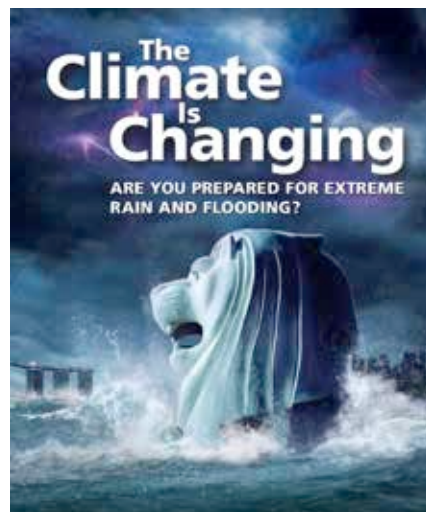
“

**This is not science fiction. We could see sea surges of six metres in Central [i.e. Hong Kong's central business district]. But just showing people what will happen does not move the needle for climate action.”**

–DR TERRY VAN GEVELT  
Assistant Professor, Urban Sustainability  
College of Integrative Studies,  
Singapore Management University

world's best climate defences, it is “hard to get people to think that climate impacts will get much worse”.

Unlike many cities in East and Southeast Asia, Hong Kong has strong coastal defences, drainage and building designs that can withstand heavy storms. But these defences may not cope with more



A 2021 advertisement by Singapore's water agency PUB warning of rising seas and extreme flooding. Image: PUB

intense and frequent extreme weather events as global temperatures rise.

Hong Kong has already warmed by 1.8°C compared to the global average of 1.2°C. Regional rival Singapore is also warming faster than the rest of the world.

Van Gevelt noted that Singapore has been more active than Hong Kong at communicating the dangers of climate change to its citizens. In 2021, the city-state's water agency PUB ran a dramatic campaign that featured submerged landmarks and a couple rushing to protect a boy from a tsunami.

By contrast, Hong Kong frames climate change with a greater focus on self-responsibility and bottom-up behavioural change in public campaigns.

“Singapore is aware of what needs to be done [to adapt to climate change] and needs public support. The government cushions its population from a lot [from reality], and the lack of immediacy of climate change is a big barrier to traditional forms of communication,” he said.

Governments, civic society and businesses need to “accept the complexity” of communicating climate change and tailor messaging to specific audiences in order to be effective, van Gevelt added.

Storytelling that allows individuals to choose their own scenarios is usually the most effective way to raise climate risk awareness, said van Gevelt, but noted that tailoring messaging to individuals can be expensive.

SMU's study emerges amid reports of rising climate anxiety globally, particularly among young people. A 2021 10-country study of 16- to 25-year-olds found that 84 per cent were at least “moderately worried” about the climate crisis. 📌

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/extreme-weather-warnings-fail-to-trigger-climate-action-study/>)





Photo of a Turkish man holding the hand of his 15-year-old daughter, who died in the earthquake in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, close to the epicenter.

Image: Adem Altan/AFP/Getty Images

# HOW TO PREVENT HUMANITARIAN CRISES

With the looming climate catastrophe threatening to compound the effects of conflict and supply-chain disruptions, the international community must be more proactive in addressing humanitarian needs. By predicting risks and acting before events become emergencies, aid organisations can deliver assistance more effectively, says **Myriam Castaneda Solares**

**T**he world is in the midst of the worst food crisis in modern history. As a confluence of geopolitical, economic, and climate crises fuels global shortages, a staggering 326 million people in dozens of countries need humanitarian aid, with 222 million facing acute food insecurity and up to 50 million at risk of starving to death.

The poorest countries have been hit the hardest by the rise in global food prices caused by the war in Ukraine. And with the looming climate catastrophe threatening to compound the effects of conflict and supply-chain disruptions, the humanitarian sector must adopt a more proactive, anticipatory approach to the growing hunger crisis.

Until relatively recently, humanitarian organisations did not pay much attention to climate change. But the proliferation of weather-related humanitarian emergencies has caused the sector to recognise the threat that the climate crisis poses to low-income countries and to the global food system.

While the deadly floods and heatwaves that have struck Europe over the last two years have shown that even countries considered to be relatively safe are not immune to extreme weather events, developing countries are much more vulnerable. In 2021, 94 per cent of internally displaced people became so as a result of climate-related hazards. Last year's floods in Pakistan, which shocked the world, submerged one-third of the country, claimed more than 1,730 lives, affected 33 million people, and caused economic losses estimated at US\$16.3 billion.

With climate change causing humanitarian crises all over the world, the number of people in need of aid has increased by 40 per cent over the past year. In response to the growing need, funding for humanitarian causes has nearly doubled over the past decade,

reaching US\$31.3 billion in 2021. But while funding has increased, the challenge facing international agencies and NGOs today is to maximise the impact of these resources and empower local and national organisations.

As matters currently stand, two-thirds of all direct contributions to humanitarian causes go to United Nations agencies and prominent international organisations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent. While these large institutions play a crucial role, community-based initiatives often have a better grasp of local contexts. The world's largest donors and NGOs seemed to acknowledge this when they launched the Grand Bargain initiative in 2016, com-

**With climate change causing humanitarian crises all over the world, the number of people in need of aid has increased by 40 per cent over the past year.**

mitting to providing 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local organisations. But seven years after the agreement was announced, the figure is still less than 2 per cent.


So far, the sector's modus operandi has been reactive. Whether it is Haiti, Ethiopia, or Pakistan, the methods are the same: a crisis emerges, a humanitarian appeal is launched, funding is raised, and assistance is delivered many days (if not months) later. But by relying on climate science, we can anticipate risks and address humanitarian needs before they become emergencies.

Anticipatory action, defined as "acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold," involves fore-

casting mechanisms and pre-agreed triggers and thresholds for releasing funds in advance. By responding to needs in this way, we can deliver aid more effectively and in a more dignified way. In 2019, for example, the Senegalese government and Start Network each purchased insurance policies against drought, allowing them to receive funding for humanitarian action and coordinate measures to protect at-risk communities.

But anticipatory action also has its limits. As a recent report by Start Network shows, not all crises can be forecasted or modeled. Even so, adopting this approach would allow humanitarian actors and organisations to be proactive, improve efficiency, and prevent life-threatening events from developing into large-scale disasters.

The global aid system needs rapid reform. While some progress has been made in recent years, much of it has been transactional rather than transformative. To be sure, the problems we face are complicated and multidimensional, and we cannot disregard the political dimension of humanitarian action. Some may believe that necessity or desperation will force the sector to change for the better, but scaling up anticipatory and locally-led action represents a far more promising path.

The ongoing climate crisis offers a unique opportunity for evidence-based humanitarian reform. In our data-driven world, there is no reason to wait until disaster strikes. By anticipating risks and planning ahead, we can protect vulnerable communities and make the world a safer place. 

*Myriam Castaneda Solares is Advocacy Lead at Start Network, a global network of humanitarian NGOs.*

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*(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/how-to-prevent-humanitarian-crises/>)*





A woman patient at a district hospital in India. Image: World Bank Photo Collectio, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.

# Preparing now for the next health emergencies

To limit the impact of the coming crises on lives and livelihoods, governments must take urgent action to boost the resilience of their health systems, says **Mamta Murthi**

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses and lack of preparedness of health systems globally. When the virus was at its peak, many low- and middle-income countries struggled to save lives while sustaining essential medical services such as maternal health care, routine childhood immunization, and the treatment of non-communicable

diseases. After this traumatic period, it is tempting to hope that the worst is behind us. Unfortunately, the future is likely to bring more frequent public-health crises, owing to climate change, urbanization, deforestation, water shortages, land-use changes, the transmission of pathogens from animals to humans, and conflict-induced fragility.

To limit the impact of the coming crises on lives and livelihoods,



governments must take urgent action to boost the resilience of their health systems. According to a recent World Bank report, a resilient health system is integrated, enabling more rapid identification of threats and risk factors; agile, and thus able to respond quickly to evolving needs; absorptive, to contain shocks; and adaptive, to minimize health service disruptions.

The World Bank has been working with low- and middle-income countries on this resilience agenda. Our \$US34 billion global health portfolio includes more than 240 projects that help countries take a comprehensive approach to improving outcomes, especially for poor and vulnerable people, by strengthening primary care and key public-health functions.

For example, in June 2022, the World Bank approved \$US258 million for Pakistan's National Health Support Program, which aims to strengthen the health workforce and equip community health centres to respond better to emergencies and deliver quality services, particularly to the most vulnerable communities.

The newly created Pandemic Fund is an additional tool to fill critical gaps by helping channel much-needed financial support to developing countries as they shore up prevention and response measures and improve readiness before the next health crisis.

Established with the support of the G20, the fund is governed by an inclusive board comprising representatives from sovereign donors, recipient-country governments, philanthropic foundations, and civil-society organizations. The Pandemic Fund has already secured pledges of \$US1.6 billion, and the first round of funding has just been announced.

These additional, long-term resources will help countries strengthen their public health systems, raise risk awareness, improve

early warning functions, and expand the number of community health workers. Strong risk communication and community engagement can increase trust and build the solid partnerships that underpin a swift and efficient crisis response.

As countries progress toward post-pandemic recovery, they face additional challenges such as inflation, debt sustainability, climate change, aging populations, a high burden of chronic disease, and challenges to socioeconomic and gender equality. Resilient health systems can mitigate the impact of these challenges by improving the readiness of services to prevent and manage other health crises and by strengthening essential functions.

Needs and approaches will vary across countries and regions. For example, Cambodia, located in a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases, plans to enhance multisectoral collaboration to incorporate human, animal, and environmental health. Kenya seeks to bolster its surveillance and laboratory capacity for infection control. And Bangladesh aims to increase the capacity of its health facilities, workforce, and microbiology laboratories for coping with future pandemics.

Around the world, robust health governance and strong public-health institutions, backed by stable legal and regulatory frameworks, will be crucial to ensure evidence-based decision-making and crisis planning. Countries will also need to create fiscal space and attract and use external resources wisely, with the understanding that investing in integrated and resilient systems will deliver the greatest impact.


The most cost-effective investments strengthen public-health functions, health promotion, disease prevention, and primary healthcare services, thereby minimizing disruptions when shocks

hit. By preventing the much larger costs associated with public health emergencies, such outlays yield long-term dividends.

Building resilience requires partnerships within and beyond the health sector, as well as engagement with civil society and the private sector, which played an important role in the Covid-19 response. Protecting against health shocks also involves boosting research capacity and embracing innovation by fast-tracking new medical technologies or expanding digital technology in healthcare delivery.

The task is immense, but past crises offer valuable lessons and show what can be achieved. For example, the Ebola outbreak of 2014-16, which killed more than 11,000 people in West Africa, accelerated the establishment of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention across the continent, improving the region's surveillance and monitoring capacities.

As the Covid-19 pandemic wanes, this, too, is no time for complacency. We have all witnessed the pandemic's devastating effects. The World Health Organization estimated that nearly 15 million excess deaths worldwide in 2020 and 2021 could be attributed to Covid-19, which has also undermined hard-won gains in poverty reduction, education, health, and gender equality.

Enhancing resilience and readiness requires decisive action. With more crises sure to come, countries that make the right political choices for lasting and sustained policies now will be in the best position to protect the health of their populations and economies. 

*Mamta Murthi is Vice President for Human Development at the World Bank.*

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*(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/preparing-now-for-the-next-health-emergencies/>)*



# The IUCN Red List: Identifying the birds that most need our help

Red: a colour of alarm, urgency, passion and energy. For most conservationists, “The Red List” evokes all four of these feelings, perhaps all at once. The Red List tells us which species are most in danger and which to conserve first. It’s also a powerful tool for persuading governments to protect threatened species.

In full, it’s called The IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species TM, and BirdLife International is the unique global authority for birds, coordinating the process of evaluating all of the world’s bird species

against the Red List categories and criteria in order to assess their extinction risk.

The Red List is nicknamed the “barometer of life”, for it is a rich compendium of information on the threats to species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and

information on conservation actions that can be taken to reduce their risk of extinction.

It’s much more than a list, however. It’s the culmination of decades of work, efforts from thousands of people, reports from the field, production of scientific papers, countless calls, emails, and discussions on BirdLife’s Globally Threatened Birds Forums. Those that contribute are our BirdLife Partners around the globe, a virtual army of ornithology experts and professionals studying specific species, to bird tour guides who notice changes day-in and day-out; from, to seasoned conservationists with a regional or global perspective. In a few cases, we tap



- **Extinct (EX):** no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died.
- **Extinct in the Wild (EW):** known only to survive in captivity, cultivation or well outside its natural range.
- **Critically Endangered (CR):** facing extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.
- **Endangered (EN):** facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild.
- **Vulnerable (VU):** facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.
- **Near threatened (NT):** close to qualifying, or likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future.
- **Least Concern (LC):** population is stable enough that it is unlikely to face extinction in the near future

into the only people who can access very remote areas and have been lucky enough to see particularly rare species.

To assign each species to a Red List category, the BirdLife Global Science Team assesses the size and trend of its population and geographic range. Doing this objectively and consistently across all species ensures reliable, comparable assessments that hold up globally.

Every year, the team burns the candle at both ends to reach conclusions about the state of the world's birds, assessing a portion of the globe's 11,000 + bird species, with a more extensive overhaul every four years. Every time, scores of bird species are moved to higher or lower categories of threat.

The Red List is one list that you do not want to be at the top of, however. A species being "uplisted"

means that it is at greater risk of extinction, and that is happening all too often. But more than showing an observed change on a barometer, a bird species reaching the threshold for "globally threatened" means that BirdLife is officially ringing a great big red warning bell from the roof. As conservationists, we are alarmed and called to action by an uplisting; and we celebrate and learn lessons from a "downlisting" – an event that, pleasingly, is more common than you might think, thanks partly to the dedicated work of BirdLife Partners around the globe.

Overall, we have recently moved 40 species to a higher threat category – a stark reminder of the carnage human activity continues to wreak on nature. But elsewhere, several species have shown signs of recovery – proof that conservation works, and that the Red List is not a one-way elevator to extinction.

For many of the 40 species 'uplisted' in 2020, this is not the end but the beginning of their road to recovery. 🟩

(Source: <https://www.birdlife.org/projects/iucn-red-list/>)



Melissa Howes-Whitcross releases a tagged Secretarybird (Endangered) © Caroline Howes



# Insurance industry net-zero protocol launched at Davos ‘opens door to greenwashing’: NGO

Insure Our Future, a non-profit that opposes insurers underwriting fossil fuel expansion, has criticised a new target-setting protocol unveiled by the Net Zero Insurance Alliance for lacking ambition. The protocol does not mandate insurance firms to reduce the Scope 3 emissions of their customers, it says.

A report by **Robin Hicks**

**A** United Nations-backed alliance launched to push the insurance industry to slash underwritten greenhouse gas emissions to safe levels has been called into question by environmental campaign groups for lacking ambition.

Launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the Net-Zero Insurance Alliance (NZIA) target-setting protocol aims to align the 29 NZIA members with a 1.5°C global warming limit as stipulated in the Paris climate accord with a framework for cutting climate-wrecking emissions. The insurance trade can play an important role in the energy transition by divesting assets from fossil fuel projects. In some places, such as Florida, consumers are struggling to get insurance for extreme weather events that are forecast to become more damaging as the climate crisis intensifies.

The launch of the first version of NZIA's protocol requires NZIA members to set and disclose initial decarbonisation targets by 31 July. It was

hailed a “landmark breakthrough” at the launch event in Davos by NZIA chair and group chief risk officer of insurance giant AXA Renaud Guidée, who said the protocol would lead to “unprecedented and ambitious” climate targets from insurers.

The protocol builds on the launch of a global accounting standard to measure emissions from insurance portfolios developed by the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF) and the NZIA. It emerges 18 months after NZIA's launch at the 2021 G20 Climate Summit in Venice by eight of the world's biggest insurers and reinsurers. NZIA has since grown to 29 members, accounting for 15 per cent of global insurance premium volume.


However, NZIA's decarbonisation plan has drawn criticism from activists who say the protocol “opens the door to corporate greenwashing” because it does not mandate insurance firms reduce the Scope 3 emissions – emissions from the full value chain – of their customers.

Insure Our Future, a non-profit campaigning to stop the insurance of new and expanded fossil fuel

projects, said the new protocol enables insurers to disclose the operational emissions of the coal, oil and gas firms they insure but ignore the much larger emissions from burning the fossil fuels that their cover enables.

It also enables insurers to aim for emissions cuts that are as low as 34 per cent by 2030, which is significantly below the reduction targets of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 1.5°C report of 43 per cent and the 50 per cent reduction goals mandated by the Race to Zero campaign, a UN-backed initiative rallying non-state actors to halve global emissions by 2030.

The non-profit also noted that some insurers have offered the new protocol as an alternative to fossil fuel exclusion policies, which NGOs are agitating for. The protocol does not cover the lines of business which are typically used to insure new power plants, allowing insurers to make net-zero claims while they continue to insure fossil fuel projects. Peter Bosshard, global coordinator of the Insure Our Future campaign, said the NZIA “offers a fig leaf for business as usual” and does not align the insurance trade with the climate-critical 1.5C global warming limit. “Insurance companies should go beyond this low-ambition protocol and follow the science when they set their decarbonisation targets,” he said.

Global insured losses from natural catastrophes in first half of last year reached US\$35 billion, 22 per cent above the average of past ten years. A 2022 study by Swiss Re, a reinsurer, found that economic losses from climate-related natural disasters are growing by 5 to 7 per cent a year as the effects of a warming planet intensify. 

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/insurance-industry-net-zero-protocol-launched-at-davos-opens-door-to-greenwashing-ngo/>)

# “Growing Together” with Sustainability

Greenply Industries Ltd releases its maiden ESG Report outlining the roadmap to attain its sustainability goal

**G**reenply Industries Limited, one of India's largest interior infrastructure brands with over 30 years of experience in manufacturing a comprehensive range of plywood, block boards, decorative veneers, flush doors, and other allied products, has yet again taken a leadership role by releasing its first Sustainability Report. The report has been developed referring to the guidance under the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards, highlighting the brand's sustainability journey through its initiative 'ESG360'. This is the first sustainability report released by any brand in the Indian wood panel industry, marking a dynamic change in this sector.

As a part of its ESG journey, Greenply will be strengthening its systems and processes in order to generate data and track progress against key performance indicators based on the material topics. Going forward, Greenply will be reporting across the six capitals as per the Value Reporting Foundation which includes manufacturing capital, natural capital, social capital, intellectual capital, financial capital and human capital. The six capitals model will provide the company with a balanced approach that will not only improve its investment



decision-making processes, but also integrate Sustainable Development as a behavior and an aspirational set of goals for the brand.

Speaking on the report launch, Manoj Tulsian, Joint Managing Director & CEO, Greenply Industries Ltd said, “Sustainability has been embedded in our roots over the years. We take this philosophy ahead as part of our core strategy as we embark on a formal journey with ESG initiative while we grow responsibly. With ‘ESG360’, Greenply has already started cultivating a business strategy that confers due respect to people and the planet. We are very optimistic that this sustainability report is a foundation stone for all our endeavors towards transforming into a progressively sustainable and resilient organization in the years to come.”

Led by a sustainability-oriented approach, Greenply has been undertaking extensive plantation activities over the past several decades leading to responsible procurement

of raw materials. Besides environmental protection, the plantation activity helps maintain the financial viability of the ecosystem as it generates employment for the local inhabitants too. Greenply has also attained the FSC® – FM (Forest Management) Certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) for its sustainable plantation unit located in Tizit, Nagaland, and is the first company to have successfully achieved this certification in the interior infrastructure segment in India. To date, Greenply has planted around 19.5 million saplings covering an area nearly of 24,500 acres of plantation.

Greenply strives to be a net zero-waste company. The Company consumes all the waste products as fuel in the boilers, for example: wood chips formed during the plywood manufacturing process are used for energy generation. Even the wastewater from the production is channeled into the reservoirs that provide water for sprinklers, helping to replenish the ground water table. Greenply has been undertaking activities to reduce emissions and move towards renewable energy generation. Rooftop Solar panels are installed at all the manufacturing facilities for the generation of green energy. Additionally, electric vehicles and EV forklift are deployed for inhouse transportation needs. The company is the first one in the wood & panel industry to introduce a range of Zero Emission (E-0) products keeping in mind the health interest of its consumers by reducing formaldehyde emission to negligible or equal to zero, thus safeguarding the indoor air quality. 🌱



Kurpsai Dam, in Kyrgyzstan, built in 1976. Image: Flickr/ Ninara.

# World's largest dams to lose 'disturbing' 25 per cent of storage capacity by 2050

In Asia, Japan is especially vulnerable as silt builds up in ageing reservoirs. Populous China and India are also among countries reliant on dams for power and water storage, writes By **Liang Lei**

**T**he world is set to face more headaches in power generation and water supply as dams silt up, a United Nations (UN) study warns.

Reservoirs that feed the world's 50,000 biggest dams will fill up with enough sediments by 2050 to lose

the equivalent of a years' worth of water needed in India, China, Indonesia, France and Canada combined, researchers wrote.

Sediment build-up in the reservoirs behind dams is largely unavoidable as rivers will always carry rocks and sand downstream. Apart from reducing the amount of

water that can be stored for use in dry seasons, large debris can also damage hydropower turbines.

The authors of the study, published in December in open-source journal Sustainability, applied average sedimentation rates from past research to dams, registered in 150 countries, since the year the dams were built.

Many old structures in Europe and North America have already lost up to 25 per cent of their initial capacity in 2022, above the global average of 16 per cent, the authors found. Elsewhere, Japan is particu-



larly affected – some of its dams are over a century old, and in total reservoir capacity is down 40 per cent.

By 2050, Japan's capacity loss would be close to 50 per cent, matching that of Seychelles, a country of islands off East Africa. The United States, Canada and many European countries would lose around 30 per cent of their dam capacity.

"The overall magnitude of water storage losses due to sedimentation is quite disturbing," the authors say, adding that the losses are unlikely to be offset by new dams, since fewer are being constructed today compared to the 1950s.

### Vulnerable Asia

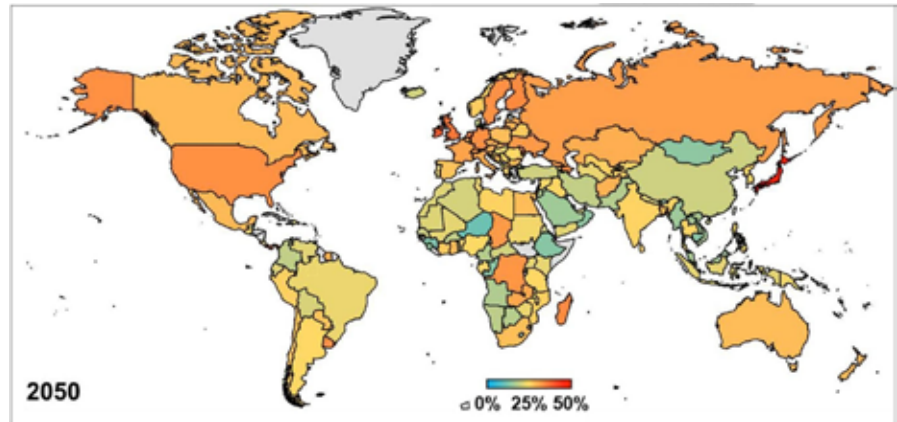
Apart from Japan, dam and hydropower projects in Asia are relatively young, so reservoirs in the region are less silted up.

However, China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, are among the world's largest builders of dams, sharing over 20,000 projects between them. Major economies Japan and South Korea are also in the top 10.

"In Asia, the region where 60 per cent of the world's population lives, water storage is crucial in sustaining water and food security. It will face a more challenging future if it loses 23 per cent of its water storage in large dams," the study's authors wrote.

The study also concedes that detailed studies of individual dams could return different results. A 2009 study in China found that average reservoir capacity is already down 66 per cent, a much bigger drop than the 10 per cent decline in the latest UN study. In Brazil and Lesotho, the UN study's figures are marginally higher than those of locally produced studies.

"Clearly, this study's results need to be interpreted by local authorities with consideration given to local specifics and factors," said co-author Dr Duminda Perera, a researcher at



Estimated loss of dam storage capacity by country in 2050. Japan is set to be one of the hardest hit. Image: Perera, Williams and Smakhtin.

the institute for water, environment and health of the United Nations University, based in Canada.


"What is most important to underline is the disturbing overall magnitude of water storage losses due to sedimentation. This adds to the list of world water development issues we need to address," Perera added.

Dr Li Dongfeng, a geography researcher from the National University of Singapore not involved in the UN study, said that heavily silted dam reservoirs face additional risks,

such as being breached by extreme flooding caused by typhoons, as well as local earthquakes.

The UN study did not account for the effect of climate change on sedimentation rates. A separate research paper last year, which Li co-authored, found that higher temperatures could melt frozen rivers and cause running ones to carry more debris. Replanting forests upstream could reduce soil running into rivers, Li said.

Solutions to dam sedimentation have been proposed, but they come with drawbacks. For example, dredging silt can be costly. Sediment can be flushed downstream, but the sudden input of silt downstream could decimate wildlife. Raising dam walls comes with structural concerns. Building special sediment bypasses is gaining traction for its smaller environmental impact, the UN study said.

Hydropower dams can produce renewable electricity to replace pollutive fossil fuels, but they have also been found to cause harm by altering a river's profile and flooding riverbanks upstream, where forests and human settlements once stood. 

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/worlds-largest-dams-to-lose-disturbing-25-per-cent-of-storage-capacity-by-2050/>)

**In Asia, the region where 60 per cent of the world's population lives, water storage is crucial in sustaining water and food security. It will face a more challenging future if it loses 23 per cent of its water storage in large dams**



In food and agriculture, deep-tech has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by optimising farming and reducing food waste.

Image: Ken Chew/flickr

# THE SECOND GREEN REVOLUTION WILL BE DIGITISED

Six decades after the Green Revolution began, the rise of robotics and artificial intelligence may usher in another agricultural transformation. By enabling farmers to grow more while using fewer resources and generating less waste, these tools could make food production cheaper and more sustainable, says **Maximo Torero**

**F**arming is one of the world's oldest and most far-reaching endeavours. Meeting the growing food demands of the global population – projected to

reach ten billion by 2050 – amid accelerating climate change presents an unprecedented high-wire act that requires human ingenuity, good governance, and technology. The last time the agriculture sector

went through a seismic shift like this was when new technologies, such as high-yielding wheat and rice seeds, chemical fertilisers, and irrigation technologies, kicked off the Green Revolution in the 1960s.

In the following three decades, cereal production in famine-prone Asia doubled, and wheat and rice became cheaper, even though the population increased by 60 per cent during this period.

Unfortunately, the Green Revolution brought with it a host of environmental costs. Lax regulations and generous subsidies made fertilisers and pesticides cheap, and farmers, with no training, used them excessively, leaving soil damaged and waterways polluted. As new crops took over, traditional plant varieties were lost, contributing to biodiversity loss.

The rise of robotics and artificial intelligence might help usher in a second, even greener Green Revolution. Robots are already harvesting crops, weeding, and collecting data to improve soil management. Soon, they will be as common in farm pastures and greenhouses as they are in medical labs or Amazon warehouses. The hope is that AI can help meet food and climate goals by adding more precision to agriculture, thus allowing farmers to grow more and waste less.

AI-powered programs, like IBM's Watson, combine data on weather patterns, crop yields, and market prices to advise farmers regarding the best time to plant, the precise amount of fertilisers to use, and when to harvest for peak ripeness. Researchers at Microsoft and Wageningen University in the Netherlands are growing cucumbers with the help of algorithms, combining the efforts of humans and AI to boost yields while using fewer natural resources.

In California, a state that grows irrigated fruits and vegetables at a large scale, such technologies mean real savings in seasonal labor requirements. For example, a US\$150,000 "grape-gobbling robot" can sort two tons of grapes in 12 minutes, replacing 15 human workers – as well as reducing the

use of fertilisers, pesticides, and water, while producing higher yields. In the past, agricultural automation was characterised by large industrial farms using heavy machinery to boost yields. Mechanisation on this scale increased producers' dependence on fossil fuels and the unbridled use of chemicals. The steep cost also meant that small farmers, especially in poorer countries, lacked access, creating an uneven playing field.

Digital technologies are changing this to benefit both large-scale and small-scale farms. Farmers have taken a page from ride-sharing apps like Uber, using GPS tracking devices and fleet-management software that allows small producers to share assets required for agricultural mechanisation. Some companies, like TROTRO Tractor in Ghana and Tun Yat in Myanmar, allow small farmers to share the cost of renting a tractor they could not afford alone.

Digital support can also upgrade traditional mechanisation, even if it is not advanced technology. For example, GPS devices that track cattle ("smart collars") and transmit data about animals' health and movements can determine the amount of feed to dispense and automate the feeding process, improving productivity.

The great advantage of robotics is its potential for cost-effectiveness, allowing small farmers to compete with their larger counterparts. Like computers and smartphones, these machines, once manufactured in large volumes, should become much less expensive, thus paving the way for wider use.


But robotics and AI-based tools, which favor highly skilled farmers over low-skilled ones, have the potential to deepen existing inequality. They could further alienate the world's poorest people, especially those who live in rural areas and eke out a living on a

small plot of land without access to markets or financial services.

To ensure that agricultural automation, from tractors to drones, is inclusive, governments should invest in essential infrastructure, including electricity and broadband connectivity in rural areas. They should also provide training on these digital tools to create a new class of skilled farmers who can operate more advanced technologies – and can create new, high-skill opportunities for rural youth.

To be sure, technology alone will not right the world's wrongs when it comes to delivering food more sustainably or making farming more efficient and equitable. Nor can it transform agriculture overnight. From California to Kenya, robotics and AI are still expensive and tend to favor larger farms over smaller ones. Moreover, greater use of robotics could encourage the expansion of monoculture farming systems, as robotic machines require uniformity to function efficiently. That would lead to a loss of genetic diversity.

Robotics and AI in agriculture are still at an early stage of development. Thoughtful policy and rigorous impact assessments of its adoption are required to realise the Second Green Revolution's full potential.

Robots are not substitutes for human farmers. But in a future with billions of extra mouths to feed, they can make food more sustainable, available, and cheaper to produce. It's high time to give machines a chance. 

*Maximo Torero is Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*

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*[www.project-syndicate.org](http://www.project-syndicate.org)*

*(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/the-second-green-revolution-will-be-digitised/>)*





# Zero-waste brands stir up India's beauty and personal care industry

Seeking a share of the \$15 billion industry, companies say they need better packaging and recycling support, writes Aparna Gupta

**“Z**ero waste” has joined the growing list of buzzwords in India’s conscious beauty segment, which is already peppered with the likes of “natural”, “organic” and “chemical-free”. In sync with the global movement towards sustainability, mainstream as well as niche brands

in India are starting to take small steps to help reduce and manage the waste they generate.

From lipsticks and foundations to all kinds of lotions and serums, most beauty and personal care products come packaged in plastic. While the government claims that nearly 50 per cent of plastic used in India is recycled, the rest is dumped,

landfilled or incinerated. Now, some start-ups are banking on consumers’ desire to not only look and feel good but to do good – to the environment, to growers of natural produce, and so on. From reducing plastic packaging to offering take-back-and-recycle programmes, many brands are attempting to offer consumers a “zero-waste” option.

“Sustainability and going zero waste have taken centre-stage in the beauty world in the last few years, and much of this can be attributed directly to consumer demand,” says Antara Kundu, General Manager for marketing at The Body Shop (Asia South). “With the younger consumer demographic driving growth for beauty brands – especially in the direct-to-consumer space – being verifiably responsible as a beauty brand is not just the right thing to do but also proving to be a sound business choice.”

Although companies are optimistic about the prospects of their zero-waste products, they are handicapped by the lack of sustainable packaging options and wider availability of recycling facilities. Also, companies say, it is important to separate myths from science, and take a holistic lifecycle and carbon footprint view.

### What are zero-waste products?

As per the Plastic Pollution Coalition, the beauty industry produces more than 120 billion units of plastic packaging, most of which is not recyclable, says Neeti Mehra, a slow-living coach and a key opinion leader on sustainability practices in India. “Add to this unsold and expired inventory,” she says, “While ‘zero-waste’ implies no waste, typically zero-waste products create as minimal an amount of waste as possible.”

The traditional Indian beauty regimes came from natural ingredients – oil for your hair and body; amla, reetha and shikakai (all plant-based) powders for soap and shampoo. “But cut to modern times, the lack of time, the need for convenience, the rise of social media and a fresh set of beauty standards, and the ready availability of packaged products have taken over our beauty shelves,” Mehra says, “While we welcome convenience, to not harm the environment and have a

thing of beauty pile up in landfills, the consumer needs to be mindful of consumption and which business practices to support.”

### Brands rise to the challenge

Several start-up brands are taking a lifecycle approach to their products.

Mumbai-based Aminu is one brand that claims to pay as much attention to the authenticity of ingredients as it does to the impact on the environment. Co-founder Aman Mohunta says Aminu has included sustainable packaging, conserving water, and avoiding single-use plastic into its business model. “We use natural gums instead of microplastic-based acrylates in our formulas. We use glass jars/bottles

gubelli, founder of the Hyderabad-based brand. “It set the trend, and now several other brands follow us and have started creating similar packaging. I’m glad we are starting this in the country.” Daughter Earth has also launched other product lines with similar packaging.

Founders Pritesh and Megha Asher of Juicy Chemistry call the zero-waste movement a necessity. They say their glass bottles and tubs are meant for reuse, and their packaging is minimal. “We’ve recently forayed into makeup via our new brand Color Chemistry. Its packaging is primarily made of bamboo, glass, and paper.”

The company is making sustainable choices at the production and

**Sustainability and going zero waste have taken centre-stage in the beauty world in the last few years, and much of this can be attributed directly to consumer demand**

instead of plastic. We use paper wrap instead of single-use shrink-wrap plastic, and crinkled paper made from waste rather than bubble wrap,” he says, adding, that thanks to increasing environmental awareness, it is easier for brands today to adopt sustainable practices than it was even five years ago.

Daughter Earth is a brand that has launched concealers in paper packaging made from post-consumer recycled waste. The only other material is an aluminium tray that contains the product. “This one, to me, was big. We gave the customer something completely biodegradable and compostable once the metal tray is removed,” says Prasanthy Guru-

sourcing stage, too – it segregates and composts its organic waste such as fruit peel, and picks misshapen natural produce that most consumers leave on the shelf. “Rice water is a common ingredient in some of our products, so we often have a Juicy feast of sorts from the rice produced. Any remaining organic food material from our production is sent to animal shelters,” says Pritesh Asher.

The Body Shop recently opened its sustainability-focused activist workshops in Mumbai and Delhi as a commitment to its “Return Recycle Repeat” in-store plastic recycling programme. Under its renewed sustainability goals, the brand has

pledged to drive up its recycling goals to at least 1 million plastic bottles by 2024. Currently, all its product lines globally contain 75 per cent post-consumer recycled plastic, including from India.

Mehra, the slow-living coach, lists some other notable sustainability-focused brands – Bare Necessities provides personal, home and lifestyle products as well as educates people on how to live a zero-waste life; vegan label Asa Beauty offers refills for products such as lipsticks and lip tints; Switch Fix is a plastic-free, plant-based clean and conscious personal care brand for shampoos, conditioner bars and skincare.


than plastic when it is not reused at least three times. Let's say the fill volume of a particular product is 3 ml. Tiny glass bottle, won't be used ever again, worse than having a plastic bottle for the same fill volume," she says, "Unfortunately, it is easy to label glass as good and plastic as bad, but that's not what the science shows."

As such, some companies such as Juicy Chemistry use as little plastic as possible, and only when it is strictly needed – for example, in the twist-up mechanism of a lipstick or the pump of a bottle. "Earlier, we had implemented a take-back programme wherein we'd incentivise the consumer to send us back

the plastic we use should be repurposed or reused in our packaging, stores, accessories and fixtures," says Kundru of The Body Shop, "We have worked for many decades with the food industry to source ingredients deemed "food waste" and create amazingly natural and efficient products with them. This includes strawberry seed oil, banana and ginger extracts from fruits and veggies not deemed well-shaped enough for supermarkets." The vision, she says, is to create truly clean formulations and work towards fully biodegradable products that can safely decompose on land and in aquatic environments.

## The challenges

Packaging is one of the main challenges for most companies. Founders struggle with scouting sustainable packaging vendors and often have to turn to China or other countries for importing sustainable packaging solutions. "As a brand, packaging is my single largest pain point. I know I can nail the formulation, and create world-class skincare, but when it comes to packaging, I depend on a packaging manufacturer," says Gurugubelli, "The innovation in China and the US doesn't happen here [in India] – mainly because the market is not big enough to support it."

At the same time, recycling solutions are not widely available, making it less likely that consumers will send end-of-life packaging for recycling. "It is a struggle for customers to recycle empty bottles. And it is near impossible for each brand to reach out to every customer individually without adding to the carbon footprint," says Mohunta. 

*Aparna Gupta is a Mumbai-based beauty and wellness writer and consultant.*

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/zero-waste-brands-stir-up-indias-beauty-and-personal-care-industry/?sw-login=true>)

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Refills are, in fact, a very promising albeit as-yet slow-moving category, some believe. "As of now, the number of customers who bother to pick a refill to be sustainable is small," says Gurugubelli of Daughter Earth. "However, we still do refills for people passionate about sustainability, whose numbers are growing."

Many mainstream consumer goods companies, as well as luxury brands such as the French L'Occitane are also offering refillable products.

## No easy choices

Although plastic gets a bad rap, in some situations it is the best choice, says Gurugubelli, while pointing out the flip-side of glass. "Glass is worse

their empty products for recycling. Eventually, we realised that while the thought was well-intentioned, it didn't quite serve our purpose, as the resulting carbon footprint was too high," says Pritesh Asher. "We then decided to change our approach and become plastic-positive. This means that we take a third party's help to recycle more plastic than we use. Plastic neutrality would be to recycle the same amount of plastic as we use."

Recently, L'Occitane India undertook a recycling programme in collaboration with a social enterprise, Saahas Zero Waste, to recycle all the packaging that customers returned.

"Our long-term goal towards product packaging is to work towards a fully closed loop, i.e. all



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