

CSR TODAY

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COP29

SIX KEY REASONS WHY INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FINANCE IS A 'WILD WEST'

Developed nations have committed to providing billions of dollars of 'climate finance' to developing countries, as part of the global effort to tackle climate change.



CSR TODAY

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73% decline in wildlife populations in 50 years is concerning



Rajesh Tiwari
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The Living Planet Report 2024 highlights that ecological degradation combined with climate change increases the likelihood of reaching local and regional tipping points.

There has been a steep 73% decline in the average size of monitored wildlife populations in just 50 years (1970-2020), according to WWF's Living Planet Report (LPR) 2024.

The report warns that, as the Earth approaches dangerous tipping points posing grave threats to humanity, a huge collective effort will be required over the next five years to tackle the dual climate and nature crises.

India's concern is much more.

While CSR is playing a major role in conservation efforts - a lot more could be done.

The Living Planet Index (LPI), provided by Zoological Society of London, includes almost 35,000 population trends of 5,495 species from 1970-2020. The strongest decline is reported in freshwater ecosystems 85%, followed by terrestrial 69% and marine 56%.

Habitat loss and degradation, driven primarily by our food systems, is the most reported threat to wildlife populations around the world, followed by overexploitation, invasive species and disease. Pollution is an additional threat for wildlife populations in Asia and the Pacific, which have recorded a staggering 60% average decline.

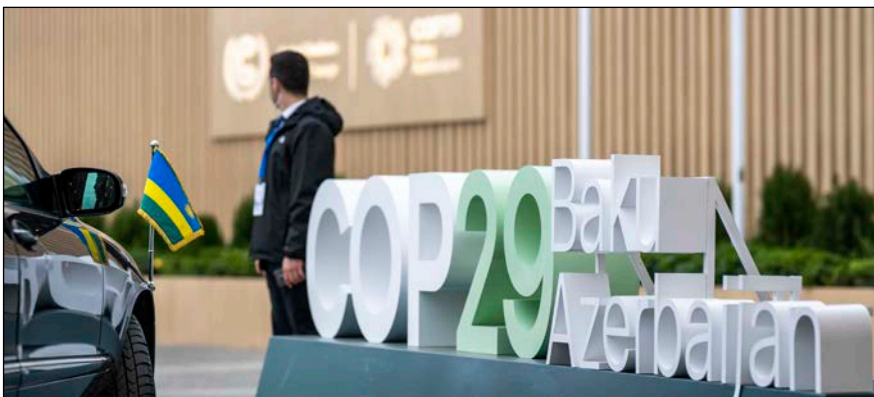
Declines in wildlife populations can act as an early warning indicator of increasing extinction risk and the potential loss of healthy ecosystems. When ecosystems are damaged, they can become more vulnerable to tipping points - being pushed beyond a critical

threshold resulting in substantial and potentially irreversible change. Potential global tipping points, such as the dieback of the Amazon rainforest and the mass die-off of coral reefs, could create shockwaves far beyond the immediate area impacting food security and livelihoods.

The decline of the three vulture species in India—white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), Indian vulture (*Gyps indicus*), and slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*)—is alarming. Research shows that these species have seen dramatic population decreases, particularly between 1992 and 2002. A 2022 nationwide vulture survey by BNHS highlights the extent of this decline: the white-rumped vulture population has dropped by 67%, the Indian vulture by 48%, and the slender-billed vulture by a staggering 89% compared to their populations in 2002. This situation underscores the urgent need for conservation measures to protect these critical scavengers and maintain ecological balance.

Despite a decline in many wildlife populations in India, some populations have stabilized and shown recovery, largely due to proactive government initiatives, effective habitat management, and robust scientific monitoring, combined with community engagement and public support. Notably, India is home to the largest population of wild tigers globally. The All-India Tiger Estimation 2022 estimated a mean of 3,682 tigers, a significant increase from the 2,967 estimated in 2018. 

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IIT Guwahati Researchers Develop Sustainable Method for Ammonium Removal from Wastewater Using Microalgae and Bacteria

A research team from Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati led by Prof. Kannan Pakshirajan has developed a groundbreaking method to remove ammonium from wastewater by using a combination of microalgae and bacteria. This approach not only offers a sustainable solution but also drastically cuts down on energy consumption compared to traditional wastewater treatment methods.

The research, supported by the Department of Science & Technology – Fund for Improvement of S&T Infrastructure (DST-FIST) program, has been published in the prestigious Chemical Engineering Journal. The paper was co-authored by Prof. Kannan Pakshirajan from the Department of Bioscience and Bioengineering, and Prof. G. Pugazhenthii from the Department of Chemical Engineering, alongside post-doctoral and research scholars Dr. Arun Sakthivel, Dr. Surjith Ramasamy, and Mr. Sumeet Kheria at IIT Guwahati.

Ammonium in wastewater, derived from sources like domestic sewage, industrial waste, agricultural runoff, and landfills, poses serious environmental risks. It can lead to harmful algal blooms, increased water acidity, and oxygen depletion in aquatic ecosystems. Traditional

ammonium removal methods involve oxygenation, which accounts for up to 90% of a treatment plant's energy consumption.

Prof. Pakshirajan's team designed a photo-sequencing batch reactor



(L to R) Prof. Kannan Pakshirajan, Dept of Bioscience and Bioengineering, with Mr. Sumeet Kheria, Research Scholar, IIT Guwahati

(PSBR), where microalgae produce oxygen during photosynthesis, which is then utilized by nitrifying bacteria to convert ammonium into nitrate, followed by denitrification under anoxic condition using denitrifying bacteria to form nitrogen as the end product. This eliminates the need for external oxygen aeration, making the process significantly more

energy-efficient. Highlighting the importance of this research, Prof. Kannan Pakshirajan, Department of Bioscience and Bioengineering, IIT Guwahati, said, "Our system offers a sustainable solution for treating wastewater while cutting down on energy costs. By harnessing the oxygen naturally produced by microalgae, we can make the process not only more efficient but also highly cost-effective."

The research combines scientific modelling with real-world data to ensure high ammonium removal rates under various conditions. The system demonstrated an energy savings of up to 91.33% in comparison

to conventional aeration methods used in wastewater treatment plants, making it an eco-friendly and cost-effective alternative.

This innovative method marks a significant step forward in sustainable wastewater treatment, offering practical applications for reducing the environmental impact of wastewater across industries.

Karnataka Bank Empowers Students with Innovative KBL Peak Education Loan and KBL Genius Integrated Savings Account

With a view to empower the younger generations and contribute to India's growing knowledge economy, Karnataka Bank Ltd. today announced the launch of two innovative financial products: KBL Peak, an education loan with up to Rs 2 crores financing and comprehensive coverage, and KBL Genius, a student savings account featuring a first-of-its-kind free cyber insurance and exclusive benefits.

The launch event was graced by prominent dignitaries in education and banking, P.S.Venkatesh Babu and Dr. Pradipkumar Dixit, representing support by strong education institutional alliances across India. The launch was chaired by Srikrishnan H, Managing Director & CEO, and Mr. Sekhar Rao, Executive Director of Karnataka Bank.

Srikrishnan emphasized the significant role that Karnataka Bank plays in financially empowering students and their parents to access quality education. "With India's demographic dividend at its peak, investing in our youth is not just a social responsibility but a strategic imperative," he stated. "With the KBL PEAK Education Loan and KBL GENIUS Savings Account, Karnataka Bank aims to help students pursue their academic goals and aspirations with financial freedom, contributing to a brighter future for both individuals and the nation."

The KBL PEAK Education Loan is a comprehensive product that supports students pursuing higher education in India and abroad. With loan amounts up to Rs 2 crores, KBL Peak covers a wide range of expenses, including tuition fees,

accommodation, travel, books, and laptops. It offers a flexible interest rate structure based on factors like the applicant's educational institution ranking and co-applicant's credit score, making it accessible to students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, KBL Peak provides a pre-admission sanction letter, simplifying the admission process, and includes credit life insurance for both the student and the parent, ensuring comprehensive financial protection. The product also offers a concession in Rate of interest for the Girl Student pursuing higher studies in STEM courses.

The KBL GENIUS Savings Account is a student-focused product available in two variants: KBL GENIUS Signature and KBL GENIUS Advantage. This account is designed to introduce students to essential

banking services and foster lifelong financial literacy. With features like a minimum average balance (MAB) requirement, seamless digital transactions, and exclusive benefits on debit cards, KBL Genius empowers students to manage their finances effectively. Uniquely, KBL Genius also includes a first-of-its-kind free cyber insurance coverage, safeguarding students in today's digital world.

Sekhar Rao, Executive Director, highlighted the bank's commitment to societal growth through education and how these products will contribute to the bank's success. "By investing in students, we invest in the future," he noted. "KBL PEAK and KBL GENIUS are crafted to provide the necessary financial foundation for students to pursue their dreams and contribute meaningfully to society. With KBL Peak, we're capturing a significant share of the growing education loan market, offering competitive loan amounts and unique features like credit life insurance for both student and parent. This will enhance our loan portfolio and strengthen our position in the market. And with KBL Genius, we're not just acquiring new customers; we're cultivating lifelong relationships".

By offering a complete financial ecosystem with a first-of-its-kind free cyber insurance, lounge access, and complementary products like travel insurance and forex assistance, Karnataka Bank aims to integrate itself into every aspect of the student journey. This translates to increased customer loyalty, higher product penetration, and ultimately, enhanced profitability for Karnataka Bank.

The KBL GENIUS Savings Account is a student-focused product available in two variants: KBL GENIUS Signature and KBL GENIUS Advantage. This account is designed to introduce students to essential banking services and foster lifelong financial literacy.

New World Bank Program to Support 400,000 Farmers in India's Kerala State, Raise up to \$9 Million Capital for Agribusinesses

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has approved a new program to support farmers in Kerala adapt to climate change and promote agri-entrepreneurs to market value-added products. It will also leverage at least \$9 million of commercial finance including for agri-food small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially for women. As the leading producer of spices such as cardamom, vanilla and nutmeg, Kerala accounts for about 20 percent of the India's total agri-food exports. However, climate change is impeding these achievements. Natural disasters like floods and forest fires, as well as challenges to reach broader markets, have been impacting farmer households.

The \$200 million Kerala Climate Resilient Agri-Value Chain Modernization (KERA) Project will help strengthen the resilience of the state's agricultural sector to climate change. About 400,000 farmers will benefit through better access to climate-smart practices. These include replanting of climate-resilient varieties of coffee, cardamom and rubber and help expand Kerala's "food parks" into rural areas.

These parks will have essential infrastructure such as water, power, and waste management to support agribusinesses in food processing and value-added products.

"This project will further infuse private sector investment and integrate agricultural value chains for the benefit of farmers and SMEs," said Auguste Tano Kouamé, the World Bank's Country Director for India. "Moreover, it will support agri-based SMEs—especially women who currently own only 23 percent of MSMEs in the state—to gain access to commercial finance by providing training for business plans and to strengthen their commercial viability." The project also aims to form productive alliances between farmer groups and agribusinesses. The alliances will help strengthen the linkages between producers and buyers, with the public sector playing a facilitating role. In addition, it will incubate agri-tech startups.

"This Project will help to increase productivity for staple food crops such as rice while reducing GHG emissions," said Chris Jackson, Azeb Mekonnen, and Amadou Dem, the Task Team Leaders for the project. "The increase in productivity and strengthening of agricultural value chains will help maintain the competitiveness of Kerala's agricultural sector and will help create jobs and increase incomes."

The \$200 million loan from the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has a final maturity of 23.5 years, including a grace period of 6 years.

Nita M. Ambani pledges free screenings and treatment to over 1,00,000 women and children from marginalized communities

Nita M. Ambani, Founder and Chairperson of Reliance Foundation, announced the launch of a New Health Seva Plan that prioritises essential screenings and treatments for children, adolescent girls and women. As part of this New Health Seva Plan, Nita M. Ambani has pledged free screening and treatment for congenital heart disease amongst 50,000 children, free screening and treatment of breast and cervical cancer amongst 50,000 women and free cervical cancer vaccination for 10,000 adolescent girls to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital.

Nita M. Ambani, Founder and Chairperson of Reliance Foundation, said, "For 10 years, Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital has been driven by our vision to make world-class healthcare accessible and affordable to every Indian. Together, we have touched millions of lives and offered hope to countless families. As we celebrate this milestone, we have launched a New Health Seva Plan, free of cost, for children and women from marginalized communities. For we believe that good health is the foundation of a prosperous nation, and healthy women and children are the bedrock of a thriving society."

Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital has completed a decade of providing exceptional healthcare services. In the past decade, our Hospital has touched the lives of 2.75 million Indians, including over 1.5 lakh children. Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital is a pioneer in delivering best in class clinical care to its patients, state of the art technology and achieved remarkable milestones in the past decade. Among the innumerable achievements, Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital has conducted more than 500 organ transplants, and hold the record for transplanting 6 organs within 24 hours saving multiple lives. Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital has also been recognized as the No. 1 Multi-Specialty Hospital in India consistently.

IREDA CSR Initiative: Union Minister Shri Pralhad Joshi Flags Off 10 Battery-Operated Vehicles at Jagannath Temple

Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Pralhad Joshi, in the presence of Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shripad Yesso Naik, flagged off 10 battery-operated vehicles today at the Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri.

This initiative, under the CSR program of the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA), aims to promote eco-friendly mobility and improve accessibility for visitors, particularly benefiting senior citizens and divyangs at this revered heritage site.

Joshi, while handing over the vehicle keys to Arabinda Kumar Padhee, Chief Administrator of Shree Jagannath Temple Administration, emphasized the importance of sustainable solutions at cultural landmarks. He stated, “The deployment of battery-operated vehicles at this historic temple underscores our commitment to green energy and offers visitors an accessible and environmentally friendly transport option. IREDA’s support for sustainable CSR projects like this reflects its unwavering dedication to the nation’s green mission and to enhancing visitor experiences at significant heritage sites.”

Pradip Kumar Das, Chairman & Managing Director, IREDA, highlighted the company’s dedication to sustainability, saying, “IREDA is honored to contribute to the development of heritage sites through eco-friendly solutions like these 10 battery-operated vehicles. This project aligns with our mission of promoting sustainable and renewable



energy solutions in every sphere of life and aims to provide eco-friendly mobility options for visitors.”

Dr. B. K. Mohanty, Director (Finance), IREDA, Siddharth Shankar Swain, District Magistrate, Puri, along with other senior officials from the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE), Shree Jagannath Temple Administration, and IREDA were also present at

the ceremony. The Union Minister, Minister of State, CMD, IREDA, and other officials from MNRE and IREDA offered prayers at the Lord Jagannath Temple.

Sculpting India’s Green Journey: Sand Artist Sudarsan Pattnaik’s Tribute at Puri Beach

CMD, IREDA, along with Director



(Finance) and Team IREDA, visited Puri Beach to witness a remarkable sand sculpture by internationally renowned sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik. The sculpture, celebrating India's achievement of crossing the 200 GW renewable energy milestone, featured an image of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the logos of IREDA and MNRE. The artwork served as a creative tribute to India's commitment to expanding its renewable energy capacity and advancing towards a sustainable energy future.

Hyundai Motor India Foundation enhances access to essential healthcare in Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir

Hyundai Motor India Foundation (HMIF), the CSR arm of Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL), inaugurated 5 new Telemedicine Centres under its Sparsh Sanjeevani healthcare initiative, extending quality healthcare services to the remote, high-altitude regions of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir. The newly launched Telemedicine Centres will provide vital healthcare services, enhancing the connection between healthcare providers and underserved communities in rural and remote areas across Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.

With the addition of the new Telemedicine Centres, residents of some of India's most challenging terrains will now have easier access to essential healthcare, effectively bringing quality medical consultations to remote, mountainous regions. HMIF's flagship healthcare initiative - Sparsh Sanjeevani, now boasts a large network of 52



Telemedicine Centres throughout India, reaching over 1.5 million people from rural communities.

Commenting on the inauguration of the Telemedicine Centres, Puneet Anand, Vertical Head - Corporate

Communication & Social, HMIL, said, "Access to quality healthcare is essential for the well-being and progress of every community. Through HMIF's Sparsh Sanjeevani program, we are committed to Hyundai's global vision of 'Progress for Humanity,' working to reach communities in remote regions with primary healthcare services. By expanding into Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir, these new Telemedicine Centres will ensure essential health consultations to populations residing in some of the country's most rugged landscapes."



The winners of the Schaeffler Social Innovator Fellowship Program 2024.

Photo: Schaeffler India

Schaeffler India Honors 'Social Innovator Fellowship Program' Winners for Sustainability and Innovation

Schaeffler India, a leading motion technology company in partnership with 'Buddy4Study Foundation' has announced the winners of its 2024 edition of the 'Schaeffler India Social Innovator Fellowship Program'. The initiative aims to recognise and reward social entrepreneurs developing unique sustainable solutions that have the potential to positively impact and benefit society at large. It is also part of Schaeffler India's flagship Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative HOPE, reinforcing its commitment to Healthcare, Occupational skill development, Preservation of Heritage & Environment and Empowerment of society.

Marking its third edition, this year's fellowship program invited applicants between the ages of 18

– 35 across different institutions including IITs, IIMs, NITs, non-profit organizations, and early-stage startups, to pitch their ideas and prototype solution across six key categories. These include Environmental Sustainability, Renewable Energy, Carbon Neutrality, Circular Economy, Natural Resource Management, and Application of Technology in the Social Sector.

Eligible participants included individuals or groups who undergo a rigorous screening process, which encompasses stringent evaluations and multiple rounds of live video prototype demonstrations.

The top 10 exceptional projects were awarded a fellowship grant of Rs. 1.5 lakh, each. Additionally, winners were conferred with a 24-week hybrid mentorship at IIMA

Ventures formerly (IIMA-CIIE), a startup incubator founded by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. Winners also gain the opportunity to connect and benefit from Schaeffler India's network of industry partners, and fellow innovators in the program.

Since its enrolment opened in July 2024, the program has received over 276 registrations from over 25 states, including the Northeast, West Bengal, Jammu & Kashmir, and more, with 78 shortlisted applicants for assessment.

Harsha Kadam, MD and CEO of Schaeffler India emphasized the company's focus on motion technology as a driver for positive change and stated, "At Schaeffler India, we are dedicated to advancing motion to foster a sustainable, efficient, and

resilient world. The remarkable response to this year's Social Innovator Fellowship Program highlights the potential of India's youth to be agents of transformative change. Sustainability and innovation are inherently linked, and through this initiative, we are committed to nurturing young innovators who will help shape the future of India, where both people and the planet can thrive."

The Social Innovator Fellowship Program embodies Schaeffler India's commitment to integrating sustainability and innovation as a catalyst for tackling social

challenges and fostering impactful community development. By supporting innovation that addresses sustainability challenges, the company is not only advancing its technological leadership but also contributing to India's broader environmental and social goals.

The award ceremony was graced by Mr Munish Bhatia, Co-Founder, India Accelerator & CEO, Bharat Ventures, and Mr Praveen Bhadada, CXO Advisor and Mentor along with the Leadership Team of Schaeffler India.

Schaeffler India's dedication to social innovation extends beyond this

program. Through its CSR initiative, HOPE, the company consistently explores new ways to empower communities. The company is also actively involved in initiatives aligned with its sustainability goals, including promoting STEM education in underserved communities, supporting Water Conservation, Agroforestry & Climate Resilient Agriculture, and investing in projects that contribute to Community Health. These initiatives reflect Schaeffler's broader vision of integrating motion technology with sustainable practices to drive progress and societal well-being.

SBI Empowers Rural Youth Entrepreneurs through Jagriti Yatra 2024 to Drive India's Vision of a 'Viksit Bharat'

State Bank of India, the country's largest bank has partnered with Jagriti Yatra 2024, supporting an inspiring 8,000-km, 15-day entrepreneurial journey across India's Tier 2 and Tier 3 regions. Through this partnership, SBI is helping create opportunities for 500 young aspirants to explore entrepreneurial avenues, receive expert mentorship, and engage in practical, hands-on learning. By fostering the growth of young entrepreneurs, SBI aims to advance the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, ensuring that aspiring innovators have the skills and resources necessary to drive sustainable economic development and contribute to a self-reliant India.

In a continued effort to encourage entrepreneurship across the nation, State Bank of India has been empowering every Indian with training and financial assistance. The bank has established 152 Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs), focusing on skill development and training rural



SBI MD, Shri Rana Ashutosh Kumar Singh addresses young entrepreneurs at the flag-off event of Jagriti Yatra 2024

youth to help them build their own micro-enterprises. These institutes have successfully trained over 11.5 lakh candidates, with 74% of them establishing self-employment opportunities. Additionally, with a SHG loan portfolio exceeding Rs 50,000 crores, SBI is a market leader in the Self-Help Group (SHG) loan segment, providing financial support to more than 1 crore women members. Beyond SHGs, the bank

has disbursed over Rs 49,000 crore Mudra loans and approximately Rs 1,550 crore PM SVANidhi loans during FY24, reinforcing its role in enabling sustainable entrepreneurship and economic empowerment across India.

Reflecting on the partnership, Rana Ashutosh Kumar Singh, MD, SBI, said, "At SBI, we believe that entrepreneurship is the cornerstone of a self-reliant and progressive India. As we work towards the vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047, it is essential to empower young entrepreneurs with the skills, resources, and opportunities they need to drive innovation and growth across the nation. Our association with Jagriti Yatra underscores our commitment to fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs who will play a pivotal role in shaping India's future. By supporting initiatives like Jagriti Yatra, we aim to contribute to a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem that drives sustainable development and prosperity for all."



200 Million Artisans to host Kula Conclave 2024 in Goa

200 Million Artisans, an impact-first, ecosystem enabler championing India's cultural economy, is all set to host the 2nd edition of Kula Conclave 2024 at Goa's Kala Academy from December 2-4. This year's theme, Innovation Futures for Climate and Inclusion, marks a pivotal moment for India's craft economy.

A highlight of this year's Conclave is the launch of Kula Innovate, an initiative designed to address the R&D gap impacting 80% of craft-led enterprises in India's Creative Manufacturing and Handmade (CMH) sector. Launched in August 2024, the challenge has already received 175 applications and raised ₹1.3 Crores (\$160k) through strategic partnerships.

An exceptional lineup of thought leaders and industry pioneers will guide discussions across core themes: Inclusive Capital, Climate Action, Dignified Employment, Future-Ready Innovation, and Ecosystem Building. Distinguished speakers include Gaurav Jai Gupta,

designer; Audrey Selian, Director, Artha Impact (Rianta Capital, Zurich); Sumati Mattu, CEO of Group Strategy Projects at Aditya Birla Fashion & Retail Ltd; Ruchira Das, Director of Arts India at British Council India; Huda Jaffer, Director of SELCO Foundation; Roopa Mehta, CEO of Sasha Association for Craft Producers; Hyeyoung Cho, Curator and Chairperson of The Korea Association of Art and Design;



Mimi Nicklin, Founder of Empathy Everywhere; Manish Saxena, Lead Advisor at Aadyam Handwoven; and celebrated artist Subodh Kerkar, the Founder of the Museum of Goa.

Priya Krishnamoorthy, Founder of 200 Million Artisans, shared: "This year, Kula is uniting diverse communities to co-create the future of handmade with the goal to unlock capital and resources for enterprises driving creativity and craft-led innovation."

Kula Conclave 2024 is a first-of-its-kind networking forum designed to bridge the inclusive capital and networks gap for India's upcoming creative-cultural, and craft-led brands, social businesses and start-ups. The 3-day, invite-only event will be facilitating meaningful collaborations between 250+ change-makers from across India who are committed to reimagining the potential of India's Creative Manufacturing and Handmade (CMH) Sector.

Unlike many other conferences, Kula is co-designed with the community - 20+ stakeholders including founders of leading organisations and craft-led brands including P-TAL, Brown Living, Kadam Haat, Urvashi Kaur, MeMeraki, Desi Hangover, Material Library of India, Fashion Revolution India, Karghewale, Indian Institute of Crafts and Design, Breakaway Journeys, Somaiya Kala Vidya, Varnam Craft Collective. Beyond the sessions, the Conclave will also feature installations by craft-based enterprises, diverse cultural experiences offered by Goa-based organisations, and lots more.

Kula also brings together a diverse community of investment actors committed to supporting future-ready ideas and enterprises including Artha Impact (Rianta Capital, Zurich), Beyond Capital Ventures, HCL Foundation, Upaya Social Ventures, Tata Trusts, and GetVantage.



Snake species named after Leonardo DiCaprio

A new genus and snake species discovered in the Himalayas have been named after Leonardo DiCaprio, an American actor, film producer and environmentalist.

Leonardo DiCaprio has been actively involved in creating awareness about global climate change, increased biodiversity loss, and human health issues through pollution - and the name has been given to honour his work.

The discovery was made by a team of researchers from Germany, India, and the United Kingdom.

The research paper was authored by Zeeshan A. Mirza of the Max Planck Institute for Biology, Tübingen (Germany), Virender K. Bhardwaj and H. T. Lalremsanga of the Mizoram University (India), Saunak Pal of the Newcastle University (UK), Gernot Vogel of the Society for Southeast Asian Herpetology (Germany), Patrick D. Campbell of the Natural History Museum (UK) and Harhisl Patel of the Thackeray Wildlife Foundation (India), according to a press statement issued in Mumbai.

The snake was first found by Virender Bhardwaj while exploring his backyard in June 2020. He was at home in the western Himalayas during the pandemic. He photographed

some species he found and uploaded them to Instagram, which popped up in Zeeshan Mirza's Instagram search feed. The photograph of this snake led to an investigation that took three years to identify this snake.

The snake resembled *Liopeltis rappi*, a species known to be distributed in the eastern Himalayas. However, the population from



Himachal Pradesh differed from the true *Liopeltis rappi* found in Sikkim in several aspects of the scales on the head and general colouration. This was confirmed after examining specimens from natural history museums across Europe, the USA and India. DNA sequences generated of this snake did not match any known genus, and the team grew to include DNA and morphological data for other related species from across Asia. The complication of molecular and morphological data suggested that the snake from Himachal

Pradesh is related to *Liopeltis rappi* but differs in several aspects to be called a new species, and these two species belong to a new genus that is endemic to the Himalayas.

The paper was submitted early this year and was published in the recent issue of the international journal *Scientific Reports*. "The work not only resolved the status of the Himalayan species but also resolved a taxonomic confusion regarding the genera *Liopeltis* and *Gongylosoma* that lasted 180 years. The work provides a newly revised classification of these two genera that are distributed across Asia," the statement said.

The members of the genus *Anguiculus* are small and are currently known by two species. These snakes are found at elevations above 1500 meters across the Himalayas.

The newly described species, '*Anguiculus dicaprio*' is distributed from central Nepal to Chamba district in Himachal Pradesh, whereas *Anguiculus rappii* is distributed in Sikkim, Bhutan and

Arunachal Pradesh. These snakes are mostly active from late May to August and are not found at other times of the year. Nothing is known about the biology of the two species.

Anguiculus rappii is rare and has not been recorded in the last couple of decades.

Orion Innovation unveils Smart Computer Lab to empower Government School Students in Coimbatore



Orion Innovation, a leading digital transformation and product development services firm, reaffirms its commitment to supporting local communities in India through its OI Empower program, a CSR initiative that leverages technology education to empower underprivileged youth. This initiative will benefit students from the Corporation Higher Secondary School in Udayampalayam, Coimbatore.

OI Empower, Orion's flagship CSR initiative, is dedicated to expanding access to quality education and technological resources for underprivileged communities, driving meaningful growth and development. Through a series of impactful projects, OI Empower aims to enhance learning environments



and provide students with essential skills to succeed in the digital era. Alongside establishing a new computer lab, Orion employees and their

families will volunteer at the school, offering expert coaching in key tech areas where our engineers excel, ensuring students receive guidance

and support tailored for the digital landscape. During the inauguration, Arun Paul, Head of Human Resources at Orion Innovation, expressed his satisfaction in leading this initiative. "We are proud to launch our technology enabled computer lab for underprivileged children, reflecting our commitment to positively impacting the community. By providing access to advanced technology and resources, we aim to enhance their education and help students gain important skills for the future. This initiative is about preparing them for success in a digital world."

Funded by Orion Innovation, this newly upgraded smart computer lab is equipped with desktop computers, smartboards, and UPS systems, enabling virtual interactions and immersive learning experiences. This setup represents a substantial improvement over the school's previous basic arrangement of chairs, tables, and outdated, non-functional computers, now offering students an enhanced and continuous learning environment.

At the launch, Ramesh Babu Muthuvel, Vice President of Orion Innovation, stated, "We are excited to inaugurate our new Computer Lab, underscoring our commitment to community service. This state-of-the-art facility will provide access to technology and training programs to enhance digital literacy, thereby making a positive impact on the education of children in underprivileged areas. The dedication and enthusiasm of our employees and their family members, who volunteered to teach STEM subjects and life skills over the weekends, fill us with immense pride."

Orion Innovation remains committed to supporting local communities and fostering sustainable growth through its corporate social responsibility programs, continuing to focus on creating a meaningful impact on society.



Adani Foundation at ACC Gagal enables early TB detection in Bilaspur with donation of portable X-Ray machine

ACC, the cement and building material company of the diversified Adani Portfolio, is committed to community welfare through enhanced healthcare access for all. Along with the Adani Foundation, the Company has donated a portable X-ray machine to the District Tuberculosis (TB) Hospital in rural Bilaspur. This initiative aims to help detect TB early, a major health issue in the region.

The 'Mini90' X-ray machine is lightweight and easy to carry, making it perfect for use in remote and hilly areas. It helps doctors diagnose patients quickly by providing clear images, which is especially important for checking chest, spine, and head conditions.

This X-ray machine donation will allow for better screening, resulting in faster treatment for people who need it the most in rural areas, wherein such devices may not be easily accessible. TB remains a serious concern in Bilaspur, with 249 cases per 100,000 people. This X-ray machine will help identify more cases and ensure quicker treatment.



Finnair's science-based climate target sets the company on an ambitious path to reduce its carbon emissions by 2033

Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) Validates Finnair's Pioneering Path in Emissions Reduction as Airline Leverages Sustainable Aviation Fuel and Efficiency Upgrades

Finnair has redefined its climate commitments and set a new science-based target to reduce its carbon emissions intensity (CO₂e/RTK) by 34.5 % by 2033 from a 2023 baseline. The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) has validated Finnair's target. Translated to absolute CO₂e emissions, the target equates to a reduction of approximately 13% in CO₂e emissions using the parameters that have been established for the period.

SBTi requires airlines to decarbonize within their own operations, and Finnair's toolkit to reaching the target is comprised of investing in Sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) beyond regulatory requirements, further improving operational efficiency, optimizing its network, and eventually updating its fleet renewal plan. Increasing the use of SAF accounts for over half of the targeted CO₂e reduction for Finnair.

"Progress towards achieving the target will not be linear, as there are still challenges regarding the availability and affordability of SAF, the most important tool in our toolkit over the next ten years. We need to see rapid progress in the SAF market to support the decarbonization initiatives in aviation industry", says Finnair's CEO Turkka Kuusisto.

"The Finnair team is committed to doing our part to address the challenges involved, and we will work with dedication and

determination towards our new science-based target."

In connection with setting the new mid-term target, Finnair has reviewed its long-term climate target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2045. After careful consideration, Finnair has decided to align its long-term climate ambition with the industry's united objective of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Finnair's previous long-term target was set in 2019, before the heavy losses brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, and before the war in Ukraine led to the closure of Russian airspace and losing access to the emission-efficient short route between Europe and Asia. Also, the carbon neutrality goal was largely based on offsetting emissions, whereas achieving a net-zero target involves a significantly smaller role for offsets. With Finnair's commitment to science-based targets for CO₂ reductions, the focus is on reducing the airline's own operational emissions, and the long-term aim is aligned with this.

"Right now, our focus is on the next ten years and achieving our science-based target of reducing our CO₂e emissions intensity by 34.5% by 2033. At the same time, we continue to support the common goal of the industry to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 as outlined by the International Air Transport Association (IATA)," Kuusisto says.

Finnair's SBTi target in detail

- Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) independently assesses

companies' climate goals to ensure they align with the latest climate science. Climate targets validated by the SBTi guide companies on how much and how quickly they need to reduce their carbon emissions to meet the Paris Agreement's goals — limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

- Finnair's SBTi target requires the airline to reduce its carbon emissions intensity (CO₂e/RTK) by 34.5% by 2033, using 2023 as the baseline year. This target translates into an approximate 13% reduction in Finnair's absolute CO₂e emissions over this period. The absolute emissions reduction is an estimated figure based on variables such as annual growth forecasts, which may change in the future.
- Carbon emissions intensity is defined as the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions per revenue tonne kilometre (RTK), which is a measure of passenger and cargo payload carried by Finnair. In 2023, Finnair's carbon emissions intensity was 976 CO₂e/RTK.
- The target encompasses 'well-to-wake' emissions that accounts for the complete lifecycle emissions from the jet fuel used by Finnair, including direct emissions from the use of jet fuel in flight (scope 1) as well as indirect emissions from the extraction, production, and distribution of that fuel (scope 3).
- Finnair will monitor and annually report its progress against the target in its sustainability reports.



Solar-Powered Bags Illuminate a Brighter Future for Adivasi Students

The Sheetal Lodha Foundation's 'Supporting Education' initiative successfully concluded its Solar Bag Distribution event at Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai. The event aimed at empowering 70 students from the Adivasi communities of Tumnipada, Koknipada, and Navapada by providing them with solar-powered bags to overcome the challenges posed by the lack of electricity in their villages.

The initiative, spearheaded by Yashvi Lodha, daughter of Sheetal and Abhinandan Lodha, distributed the solar-powered bags, ensuring that students have access to a reliable source of light for their studies and daily activities after sunset. The event was a heartening success, with enthusiastic participation from students, community members, and local officials. The event was also graced by the presence of Abhinandan Lodha, father of Yashvi Lodha and Chairman of Lodha Ventures and forest officials,



Yashvi Lodha along with Abhinandan Lodha at the Donation Drive during the Solar Bag Distribution event

including N.B. Muthe, Range Forest Officer, and Raju Patolde, Vanpal from the Forest Department.

The event began with a lively musical performance by The Lucky Charms, a teenage band that energized the audience with uplifting Hindi songs. The distribution ceremony was followed by an inspirational address from Ms. Yashvi Lodha, encouraging the children to continue their education despite the challenges they face. Yashvi Lodha

shared her thoughts on the initiative, stating, "Education is the medium to the path to a brighter future, and every child deserves the chance to learn and grow without limitations. Through the Solar Bag Initiative, we aim to bridge the gap for students who face daily challenges due to lack of electricity. These solar-powered bags are not just tools for studying—they are a symbol of hope, resilience and light for all these students."

After the address, Yashvi, along with Mr. Abhinandan Lodha and the forest officials personally handed out the solar bags to the students, who expressed excitement and gratitude for this life-changing gift.

A significant impact on the community

The initiative aims to remove one of the major barriers to education in these communities—the lack of lighting after sunset. With these solar-powered bags, students can now study without interruption, making strides towards a brighter future.

IIT Guwahati Develops Sustainable Geopolymer to Transform Industrial Waste into Eco-Friendly Building Material

The breakthrough opens new opportunities for industries, municipalities, and governments to embrace sustainable construction while tackling industrial waste management challenges.



(In the middle) Prof. Anil K. Mishra, along with his research scholars at IIT Guwahati

A research team at Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati led by Prof. Anil K. Mishra from the Department of Civil Engineering, has developed an innovative solution to two major global challenges: industrial waste management and sustainable construction. Their research focuses on creating a geopolymer using industrial by-products and waste materials, such as water treatment sludge (WTS), fly ash (FA), and ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBS).

With the rapid pace of urbanization and industrialization, managing industrial waste has become a critical global issue. Among the various types of industrial waste, water treatment sludge poses significant challenges due to its high water content and organic components. Water treatment plants worldwide generate approximately 100,000 tons of sludge daily. Traditional disposal methods, like landfilling or

using sludge as soil additives, have proven to be costly and environmentally risky, as heavy metals can leach into groundwater.

Speaking on the research, Prof. Anil K. Mishra said, "Our research provides a solution by converting WTS and industrial byproducts like fly ash and GGBS into a geopolymer. Geopolymers are renowned for their high strength, durability, and minimal environmental impact. Through the process of geopolymerisation, silicon and aluminum from these materials react with alkaline activators to form a three-dimensional alumino-silicate structure. This results in a material that matches traditional cement in performance while significantly reducing carbon emissions and energy consumption."

The findings of this study were published in the prestigious journal *Construction and Building Materials*, co-authored by Prof. Anil K. Mishra and his research scholars Mr. Alok

Bijalwan and Mr. Bitupan Sonowal from IIT Guwahati.

One of the key applications of the WTS-FA-GGBS geopolymer is in road construction. The research team evaluated the mechanical properties of the geopolymer, specifically its suitability as a subgrade material for roads and pavements. The subgrade layer forms the foundation of roads, determining the pavement's strength and longevity. Using the WTS-based geopolymer as a stabilizer was found to significantly enhance road performance, particularly in soft or weak soils.

In addition to WTS, the team is also focused on geopolymerising construction and demolition (C&D) waste, which exceeds 10 billion tons annually and constitutes over 35% of global waste. They have developed applications for C&D waste, including base and subbase layers for road pavements and paver blocks, contributing to effective waste



Eco-Friendly Building Materials using Industrial Waste

management and reduced environmental impact.

Furthermore, the team is investigating the treatment of landfill-mined fine fractions from old municipal solid waste dumpsites, offering promising solutions while supporting circular economy initiatives. They are also exploring the stabilization of petroleum sludge by incorporating fly ash and GGBS, aiming to immobilize hazardous heavy metals and prevent

environmental leaching. Tests conducted by the IIT Guwahati team, including Unconfined Compressive Strength (UCS) and California Bearing Ratio (CBR) assessments, revealed that the WTS-FA-GGBS geopolymer exceeds the minimum strength requirements for cement-stabilized subgrade materials. Durability tests confirmed its ability to withstand extreme environmental conditions, making it a reliable choice for infrastructure

projects across diverse climates. Crucially, the geopolymer is non-toxic. Leaching tests demonstrated that heavy metal concentrations in the geopolymer leachate are well within the safety limits set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), ensuring that it poses no risks to the environment or human health, even in large-scale applications.

This research by Prof. Mishra's team addresses several key concerns in modern civil engineering and waste management. By recycling industrial waste, the project helps reduce landfill burden and minimizes the environmental damage caused by traditional disposal methods. The innovative geopolymer technology opens new avenues for industries, municipalities, and governments to adopt eco-friendly construction practices while addressing the growing issue of industrial waste disposal.

As India continues to urbanize and industrialize, innovations like this play a vital role in building a greener, more sustainable future.

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BluPine Energy launches vocational training programs and community development initiatives in Punjab

BluPine Energy, a leading renewable energy services company in India, launches impactful initiatives to empower communities in and around its operating assets and foster sustainable development in Punjab. These new initiatives include installing solar-powered lighting, establishing a Mini Science Center, and providing youth with vocational training in three villages of Punjab's Mansa district (Khaira Khurd, Mankhera, and Jhanda Kalan).

The vocational training programs, which will run for six months, are designed to empower 120 students, with 50% female participants. BluPine Energy's efforts go beyond training and ensuring placement opportunities for successful candidates. These programs are part of BluPine Energy's commitment to fostering economic development, gender inclusion, and skills enhancement at the grassroots level. The organization is also working towards

bridging the skill gaps, specifically aiming to uplift marginalized individuals by equipping them with industry-relevant skills.

Beyond vocational training, BluPine Energy is also investing in educational infrastructure to benefit local communities. The initiative includes establishing mini science centers in local schools for students from grades 8 to 10, encouraging scientific curiosity and practical learning in classrooms. Additionally, BluPine Energy is installing solar-powered streetlights across these villages, significantly enhancing community safety, mobility, and sustainability in public spaces.

Sanjeev Bhatia, CFO, BluPine Energy, inaugurated all the centers and stated, "Our mission at BluPine Energy is not only to advance renewable energy but also to empower communities with opportunities for sustainable growth". He further said "These initiatives in Punjab are

an important step toward building strong, self-sufficient communities by equipping youth with valuable skills and improving education. At BluPine, we're proud to support these communities in creating a sustainable future where everyone has the chance to succeed. This project goes beyond renewable energy, offering vocational training and building key infrastructure for education and safety. By focusing on gender equality and inclusion, we're helping to create a diverse workforce that drives local growth. Together, we're working towards a brighter, more equitable society for the future".

Through its holistic approach, BluPine Energy aims to lay a solid foundation for a more resilient, self-sufficient community. This initiative aligns with BluPine Energy's broader mission towards just transition by uplifting underserved regions through inclusive, community-centered programs.

CSR INDIA UNITED

Grade 10 Student Becomes Youngest CEO of a Leading AI Company for 24 Hours

ConveGenius.AI might be an ed-tech powerhouse bridging the learning achievement gap in tier-2, tier-3 and rural areas but behind their simple product interfaces and colourful dashboards, are millions of students who are aiming to thrive in education and in life, to build a better future for themselves and their families.

This Children's Day was truly special at ConveGenius. They invited Angel, a grade 10 student and a Swiftchat user of over three years to join as the CEO Of The Day. Angel's journey is truly unique – from being a blood cancer survivor to a Swiftchat user since the Covid-19 pandemic—Angel represents lakhs of students in India who don't have the privilege of time and money. Angel's story of resilience, courage, and passion for growth, is a true testament to the voices of the students ConveGenius serves through its different products and offerings.

For a day, the young learner swapped her school bag for the CEO's chair, offering the team at ConveGenius a view from the ground up—a glimpse into the daily reality of a 10th-grader with a fierce drive to learn. Angel spent the day offering ConveGenius' team invaluable user insights from her own experiences and those of her peers. Angel's perspective provided

a refreshing “ground-level” view of the company's AI-driven products. Touring the departments—from Product, Technology, to Business and Marketing—she shared practical, imaginative ideas to enhance differ-



ent products. “Make the monsters funny, not scary,” she suggested, seeing the potential of gamification. She even envisioned a “power cap” and “flying shoes” for the platform mascot, Swiftee, to make learning adventures more engaging. On the SwiftChat App, Angel proposed features like better search results and a coin-earning system, making the learning experience seamless and rewarding. “It would be so motivating,” she shared, “and I can even

show my parents the coins I earn as proof of learning.”

“Angel's suggestions may sound simple, but they're gold,” said Shikhar Gupta, Chief Product Officer at ConveGenius. “Children like her remind us of why we're here. It's not just about completion rates or scores—it's about making learning meaningful, connecting with real students in ways that matter.”

When ConveGenius Co-founder & MD, Jairaj Bhattacharya welcomed Angel to the office that morning, he knew her ideas would be insightful. What he didn't expect was the energy she brought to every conversation, her practical sense of fun, and her clear-headed view on what a learning platform should do. “Angel reminded us that behind every data point is a child like her—a real person with dreams, challenges, and the power to inspire,” he said.

For Angel, the day was transformative. “Knowing my ideas can make a difference feels amazing,” she said, her face lighting up with a smile. “Maybe one day, I'll start my own company like ConveGenius.”

With Angel's infectious energy, the team at ConveGenius was inspired to strive further in the #SabkaAI movement and create meaningful learning experiences in AI regardless of their

background. By listening to students like Angel, ConveGenius is creating a human-centred approach to Ed-Tech that resonates with the aspirations and imaginations of young learners.

This Children's Day, the company recommitted to its goal of impacting one billion students worldwide by building tools that don't just engage students but empower them to thrive. And thanks to Angel, their path forward now shines a little brighter.



I-STEM takes its efforts to boost Research Collaboration to Ladakh for the First Time

An initiative of the Office of Principal Scientific Adviser, I-STEM is working towards revolutionizing research collaboration in India by enhancing Industry's and Startups' accessibility to research facilities & labs

I-STEM (Indian Science, Technology, and Engineering facilities Map), an initiative from the Office of Principal Scientific Adviser, Government of India, has taken its efforts to revolutionise research collaboration in India by enhancing industries and Startups' accessibility to research facilities and labs to the Ladakh Region for the First Time.

I-STEM conducted its flagship 'Samavesha' at the University of Ladakh on 5th November 2024 to create awareness of the I-STEM National Portal. The Samavesha Project connects industries, researchers and start-ups looking to avail advanced scientific equipment with an academic institution that has the requisite equipment. This saves the researchers, industry and

start-ups the prohibitive capital expenditure of purchasing advanced equipment. At the National level, this prevents duplication of resources in the research institutions.

Under the leadership of Prof. (Dr.) S.K. Mehta, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, University of Ladakh, this was the first time the Samavesha event was being organized in North India, marking a significant milestone for boosting research in the region.

This event, the sixth Samavesha event nationally, was intended to create awareness of the impact and accessibility of the I-STEM National Portal under the tagline 'Linking Researchers and Resources.' As

a visionary platform, I-STEM is a comprehensive aggregator, connecting researchers to publicly funded laboratories and scientific equipment across India.

Highlighting the need for such events in remote parts of the country, Dr. Harilal Bhaskar, Chief Operating Officer and National Coordinator, I-STEM, said, “The vision of I-STEM is to create a future where one million New-Age researchers, brimming with ideas, are seamlessly connected to a network of 10,000 cutting-edge labs across India. By 2024, I-STEM aims not only to connect individuals to equipment but also to ignite a collaborative ecosystem where start-ups, industries, and academia co-create the next wave of innovation.”

Dr. Harilal Bhaskar added, “I-STEM looks forward to new institutions and researchers registering and participating in the event. Public users and research labs are encouraged to provide feedback during the event to inform future decisions about the I-STEM program.”

Dr. Harilal Bhaskar also explained how the I-STEM portal can be a game-changer for academic researchers, startups, and industries alike, positioning I-STEM as one of the major Government-funded aggregator platforms transforming India’s R&D landscape. He emphasized that the event would enable participants to engage in knowledge-sharing, explore research opportunities, and access resources to drive advancements in the region.

Key academic and administrative figures attended the workshop. They included Dr. Subrat Sharma, Dean of Research; Dr. Jigmet Yangchan, Chief Scientist and Head, MRI & CISIC; Dr. Mohd Hussain, Dean of Sciences and Coordinator, DST-PURSE; and Dr. Jigmet Dachen, DSW and I/C administration, University of Ladakh. Esteemed guests included Dr. Harilal Bhaskar, National Coordinator and Chief Operating Officer of I-STEM,



and Mr. Narmdeshwar Pandey, Functional Manager at I-STEM.

The program also saw active participation from faculty members and participants from various institutions. The School of Agricultural Science and Technology (Leh campus), Government Polytechnic College, Leh, and the Science Departments of the Leh and Kargil campuses of the University of Ladakh played significant roles in ensuring the event’s success.

Addressing the workshop, Dr. Subrat Sharma, Dean of Research, University of Ladakh (UoL), emphasized the critical role of connecting the advanced instruments at the Centralized Interdisciplinary Science Instrumentation Center (CISIC) lab at UoL through the I-STEM portal. He highlighted how this integration would open new avenues for researchers across the Himalayan region, providing access to state-of-the-art facilities and fostering collaboration.

By linking these sophisticated tools to the I-STEM platform, researchers would not only gain access to cutting-edge technologies but also stay updated on the latest advancements across various disciplines.

Dr. Mohammed Hussain, Dean of Sciences, University of Ladakh, highlighted the significance of the SAMAVESHA program in promoting academic and scientific dialogue. He expressed deep appreciation for all

individuals and teams who contributed to the event’s resounding success. Dr. Hussain’s heartfelt gratitude recognized the collective effort and collaboration behind the program, emphasizing that such initiatives are pivotal in strengthening research networks and fostering innovation.

Narmdeshwar Pandey, Functional Manager at I-STEM, provided an insightful overview of I-STEM, highlighting essential topics such as institution and user registration, listing of equipment by institutions on the national portal, and search and booking options available to public users. Following his presentation, he led a Q&A session to address participant questions. He also introduced the software platforms offered through I-STEM to Indian academic users free of charge, including COMSOL and MATLAB.

Dr. Nilza Othzes, Project Associate, DST-PURSE, spoke about the contributions of all stakeholders in making the SAMAVESHA event a success. She expressed gratitude to the speakers, participants, organizers, and all supporting teams whose hard work and dedication made the event possible. This collaboration with the University of Ladakh is particularly symbolic, as it represents a commitment to expanding academic and research opportunities in the Ladakh region, helping to bridge gaps and elevate the region’s scientific community.



Amway India Joins Hands with The Akshaya Patra Foundation to provide meals to children

Nutriline Marks 90 Years with a Commitment to Health: Providing 90,000 Nutritious Meals and Conducting Nutrition and Hygiene Workshops in Government Schools

Amway India, one of the leading companies supporting health and wellbeing needs, is addressing the critical issue of childhood malnutrition through a transformative initiative to support a healthier future for India's underprivileged children. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, 7.7% of children (around 43 lakh) in India are malnourished, highlighting a critical issue that the government is

prioritizing with efforts to improve nutritional outcomes. Committed to the cause of childhood malnutrition, as part of Nutrilite's 90th-anniversary celebration, Amway, supported by its distributors and employees, has collaborated with The Akshaya Patra Foundation to sponsor over 90,000 nutritious meals for children in government schools.

In the spirit of Children's Day, the initiative extended further with educational sessions to empower

students with knowledge about nutrition, hygiene, mental health, and balanced diets. Amway volunteers actively participated by serving nutritious meals to the children. This impactful initiative spanned eight key locations: Delhi, Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, Pune, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and Chennai, aiming to spark meaningful change for a brighter future.

Commenting on the Children's Day initiative, Rajneesh Chopra, Managing Director, Amway India, said, "For nine decades our flagship nutrition brand, Nutrilite, has been inspiring people to live a healthy life by promoting optimal health and wellbeing. As part of Nutrilite's



90th-anniversary celebrations, with the support of our distributors and employees, we are proud to collaborate with The Akshaya Patra Foundation to provide over 90,000 nutritious meals to children in government schools alongside imparting essential nutrition education. Through this initiative, students gain valuable knowledge on making healthier choices—covering balanced diets, mental health, and hygiene practices—empowering them to lead brighter, healthier lives. We firmly believe that proper nutrition is the foundation for the growth and success of young minds. In a country where India contributes a third of the global burden of malnutrition, nurturing children through

adequate nutrition is not just important—it is essential. To this end, we're steadfast in our commitment to building a healthier nation for a better tomorrow."

Commenting on the occasion, Shridhar Vyankat of Akshaya Patra Foundation, said, "We are happy to collaborate with Amway India once again. With their generous support, we can provide over 90,000 nutritious meals to government school children through our 72 kitchens nationwide. This partnership goes beyond just feeding children; it helps to ensure a healthier future for the next generation. We sincerely thank the Ministry of Education, Government of India, and the state governments for their unwavering support, which

enables us to continue nourishing children across the country."

Amway India's efforts and initiatives are aligned with its health and wellbeing vision that resonates with the Government of India's aim of building a healthier nation. In addition to partnering with Akshaya Patra to promote good nutrition, this Children's Day Amway also organized awareness initiatives under the theme "Feed with Kindness – Preparation and Distribution of Nutritious Food" in association with its Power of 5 program partner ChildFund India across its program locations in Mumbai, Kolkata and Lucknow, as well as its Village Health Program partner, S R Trust (Meenakshi Mission Hospital & Research Center) in Dindigul district, promoting the importance of nutrition and community support. Amway has a long-standing association with the Akshaya Patra Foundation to promote the importance of nutrition. This includes sponsoring mid-day meals for 1,600 students and conducting nutrition education sessions for underprivileged children in 2022. In 2021, as part of its COVID relief efforts, Amway—supported by its distributors and employees—distributed thousands of nutrition kits across Gurugram, Thane, Panvel, Chennai, and Bhubaneswar, reaching over 10,000 individuals affected by the pandemic.





Indusface Empowers Thousands of Students Against Cyber Risks Through Nationwide CyberShiksha Sessions

Indusface, a leading Application Security SaaS provider with a global client base spanning over 5,000 customers in 95 countries, is conducting CyberShiksha, a nationwide initiative to raise cybersecurity awareness among students. Coinciding with Cybersecurity Awareness Month, CyberShiksha is an integral part of Indusface's commitment to preparing young audiences with essential cybersecurity knowledge, helping them stay safe and informed in today's digital world.

Amid the rising online risks faced by students, recent reports underscore the need for focused cybersecurity education. A 2022 report by McAfee revealed that 85% of Indian

children have experienced cyberbullying—the highest rate globally—while other studies indicate that over one-third of students face cyber dangers such as financial threats, identity theft, and scams.

Through CyberShiksha, Indusface has already reached over 6,000 students across multiple schools, providing them with practical insights into cybersecurity, including cyber laws, cyber helpline resources, and actionable safety practices for responsible online behavior. This initiative has equipped students with essential skills and the confidence to navigate the digital world responsibly.

In recent sessions, CyberShiksha engaged with several students at

Cygnus World School from grades 7 to 11, and a similar number of students at Auxilium Convent High School from grades 8 to 12. Other schools, including Pramukh Swami Vidhya Mandir in Chansad village, Podar International School in Vadodara, and Auro Mirra International School in Bangalore, have also hosted these impactful sessions. With plans to expand to even more schools, CyberShiksha is set to benefit thousands more in the coming months.

Speaking on the initiative, Nandini Tandon, Co-Founder and Chief People Officer at Indusface, commented, “As cyber threats evolve, our responsibility to protect

younger generations becomes increasingly critical. Through CyberShiksha, we are not only creating awareness but also fostering a proactive approach to online safety. By equipping students with the right knowledge and tools, we aim to build a generation that is resilient and cyber-aware.”

In addition to students, teachers and school staff members have acknowledged the positive impact of these sessions on their own cybersecurity awareness. Educators have found that CyberShiksha equips them with new perspectives and practical tips to help protect

themselves and their students. R. Kumar, a teacher at Cygnus World School, shared, “The CyberShiksha session was an eye-opener not only for the students but for us as well. We learned about security practices that we can implement in our own lives and pass on to our students. CyberShiksha is more than just an awareness program—it’s an essential toolkit for today’s digital age.”

The CyberShiksha sessions cover critical topics like recognizing phishing scams, the risks associated with unverified downloads, and common cybercrimes, such as financial

fraud. Students also learn to build strong passwords, enable multi-factor authentication, and pledge to follow safe online practices. School principals and teachers note that students are increasingly relating these safety practices to real-life experiences, highlighting the urgent need for sustained digital safety education. CyberShiksha also introduces students to career opportunities in cybersecurity, encouraging them to explore pathways from foundational diplomas to advanced degrees in information security, inspiring the next generation of cybersecurity professionals.

Hindware's 'Build a Toilet, Build Her Future' Initiative: Transforming Lives, One Toilet at a Time

Hindware Limited, India’s leading bathware brand, continues its mission to empower young girls and uplift communities through its “Build a Toilet, Build Her Future” program. Launched in 2020 under the aegis, #HygieneThatEmpowers CSR initiative, the program takes on a new dimension with the ‘Dare to Dream’ theme this year, leveraging the power of safe and accessible sanitation to empower girls to stay in school, pursue their dreams, and build a brighter future.

Inadequate sanitation facilities remain a critical issue in rural areas, significantly affecting girls’ education, contributing to the dropout of 23% of girls from school upon reaching puberty. Another survey from Sulabh International highlights that the girls in rural areas avoid school toilets during menstruation due to poor sanitation, leading to up to 60 days of absenteeism annually. To address this challenge, Hindware is committed to providing access to

clean and hygienic sanitation facilities. As part of the ‘Build a Toilet, Build Her Future’ program, the company has collaborated with the Pune-based NGO Manas Foundation and local communities and so far has successfully constructed 400+ toilets across 120+ schools in Delhi, Haryana, Roorkee, and Telangana. By end of FY25, the company will add another 100+ toilets, empowering thousands of girls to ensure that they have the opportunity to pursue their education uninterrupted.

Hindware is further leveraging social media to spread awareness about this noble cause and featuring stories of young girls whose lives have been transformed by the ‘Build a Toilet, Build Her Future’ program. By sharing these stories, Hindware aims to raise awareness, inspire action, and encourage greater support for initiatives that empower girls.

Sudhanshu Pokhriyal, CEO, Bath and Tiles Business at Hindware Limited, emphasised the impact of this initiative, saying, “This year’s

‘Dare to Dream’ theme embodies the essence of our ‘Build a Toilet, Build Her Future’ program by encouraging girls to envision and pursue a brighter future. Each toilet built and each school reached is a step closer to a nation where girls can focus on their education and realise their dreams. As we continue to expand this initiative, we are committed to empowering more girls, breaking down barriers, and building a stronger, more equitable India.”

Shashvat Somany, Head of Strategy, Somany Impresa Group and Independent Director, Hindware Limited, added, “As we enter the fifth year of the ‘Build a Toilet, Build Her Future’ campaign, our commitment to empowering young girls through access to adequate sanitation remains steadfast. By ensuring girls can attend school uninterrupted, we are investing in India’s future. We are grateful for the continued support of our partners and communities in making this a reality.”

Unnati Coffee Partners with Tribal Communities in Odisha to Promote Sustainable Agriculture and Ecotourism

In the heart of Odisha's Koraput district, a pioneering initiative is changing the lives of tribal communities of village Padalput by integrating sustainable coffee farming with ecotourism. Project Unnati Coffee, a partnership between ISWAR (Integrated Social Welfare and Research Centre) and Coca-Cola India is helping the tribal village of Punjishil, 500 km from Bhubaneswar, home to 45 families of the Paroja tribe, build a sustainable source of income while preserving its rich biodiversity.

This innovative approach is improving livelihoods and creating a new model of economic growth that is rooted in environmental stewardship and community empowerment.

Recognizing opportunities, ISWAR started working with the Paroja tribe, integrating sustainable coffee farming with ecotourism. We provided training and resources to help villagers cultivate coffee sustainably on the biodiverse land surrounding their village. Young tribals were trained as guides and are now leading treks through the coffee plantations and forest trails, offering travelers insights into coffee cultivation.

The tribal families opened their homes to visitors, offering traditional meals and overnight stays, creating a bridge between cultures while providing a stable income for the village.

Piyush Ranjan Mishra, CEO, ISWAR, said: "Project Unnati Coffee has not only improved livelihoods but also inspired the community to embrace sustainable practices. By integrating coffee farming with



ecotourism, we've seen a transformation in Punjishil."

This initiative is enhancing productivity and quality, strengthening the Farmers Producer Organization, and creating strong market linkages. Together we are building a model that benefits not just farmers but the local economy at large."

What sets Project Unnati Coffee apart is its focus on empowering women and promoting community-driven leadership. Women in Punjishil have are managing key roles in coffee production, food services, and tourism operations. Through cooperatives, they've been

able to generate a stable income, leading to better health, nutrition, and education within the village. Children who had to drop out of school to help their families are now attending school regularly, with a hope of having a brighter future.

"After a lot of hard work and setbacks, we struggled to get fruit from our coffee plants in the last few years. But after the training, the yield has been much better, and we're hopeful for a good income this season. Given the success, we plan to plant coffee across all the hillocks next season," Tulabati Badanayak, a tribal farmer from Koraput.



This global gender imbalance in leadership translates directly to climate negotiations, where national representatives mirror the gender disparities of their governments. In South Asia, only 16.6 per cent of parliamentarians are women. Globally, only 23.3 per cent of cabinet ministers are women. *Image: Paul Kagame, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

IMBALANCE OF POWER: WOMEN AT INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

Women's representation at UN climate conferences has barely improved in 30 years, particularly women from South Asia, writes **Shalinee Kumari**, Dialogue Earth

As the 29th UN climate conference opened in Baku, Azerbaijan, one thing remains the same: men will occupied most seats at the climate talks.

Much has changed since the UN's first Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1995. But the proportion of women representatives has remained stalled, at about a third of participants.

According to data from the Women's Environment and Development Organization, women represented only 34 per cent of party delegates and 19 per cent of heads of delegation at COP28 last year. In comparison, 16 years ago at COP14, women comprised 31 per cent of party delegates. This minimal progress is despite increasing calls for gender mainstreaming in climate action.

Why are women delegates missing at COPs?

In January this year, the organising committee for COP29 appointed 28 men and no women. After facing significant criticism, 12 women were added (and one more man).

She Changes Climate, an organisation founded in 2020 that advocates for equal gender representation at climate negotiations, called the initial decision "a regressive step". It asked for equal representation in the committee: "Climate change affects the whole world, not half of it."

Afia Salam, a journalist and media development specialist focusing on climate change, environment and gender-sensitive reporting, tells Dialogue Earth that ensuring the voices of women are included often requires drastic measures, such as "gatecrashing committee meetings" in Pakistan.

"It is a man's world," says Salam. "You see far more men than women in international climate negotiations. This has a lot to do with the

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Since they have been at the centre of caregiving, they are also thinking about children and elders. When women craft solutions, they are more likely to be inclusive.

—AFIA SALAM
Journalist, Pakistan

historical baggage, where women are often missing from places of prominence and decision-making [in the countries that representatives come from]."

This global gender imbalance in leadership translates directly to climate negotiations, where national representatives mirror the gender disparities of their governments. In South Asia, only 16.6 per cent of parliamentarians are women. Globally, only 23.3 per cent of cabinet ministers are women.

Worse, the portfolios they manage are often limited to gender, family and children affairs, social inclusion and development, as well as Indigenous and minority affairs. As important as these portfolios are, they do not set the agenda in the way that finance and energy do.

One barrier is social constraints related to gendered roles and responsibilities. Bharati Chaturvedi, founder and director of Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group in New Delhi, explains:

"Women are not a homogenous lot [and] different women have different circumstances and contexts; work responsibilities; domestic responsibilities."

She adds: "Negotiators may not necessarily be women from prestigious government services and therefore they might be required to put in several nights preparing and being away for a fortnight, which takes them away from domestic responsibilities for several weeks."

What can women bring to the climate discourse?

In the South Asian context, women are central to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while also playing a crucial role in agriculture. They make up 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, a sector that contributes 18 per cent to South Asia's GDP. Due to gender inequalities in the political, social and economic realms, women face higher risks from the impacts of climate change. This strengthens the case for their inclusion in climate action.

Salam highlights pervasive gender blindness in climate change policies and adaptation measures. "During disasters, something as basic as putting a relief kit together does not take into account the needs of the women; this nuance is being brought by women."

Salam says they "typically fail to include basic hygiene essentials, such as sanitary napkins, underwear, cloth towels, cotton pads, soap, along with special nutrition and dignity kits for pregnant and new mothers. In the absence of inclusive relief kits, people have stepped in to fill that gap."

Salam notes that having more women involved in climate discussions would lead to a more inclusive approach for other marginalised groups: "Since they have been at the centre of caregiving, they are also thinking about children and elders.

When women craft solutions, they are more likely to be inclusive.”

When women participate in climate change negotiations, it can potentially provide them access to technical spaces where key decisions on issues like mitigation strategies, adaptation measures and the financing of initiatives are made. This would allow them to play an important diplomatic role in decision-making, says Chaturvedi.

Among top examples of women negotiators influencing international climate talks is Sherry Rehman, the former climate minister of Pakistan. As the G77 chair at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, she led the negotiations on loss and damage for the G77,

however. Chaturvedi is cautious about assuming that more women at COPs would create significant impact, as strategic decision-making often happens centrally, within ministries. “A better outcome is that gender interests are incorporated into negotiations,” she says.

Salam agrees, and suggests the power and clout women hold at the table are more important than the numbers alone. “We have had powerful women with strong leadership capabilities in the past, but these were only exceptions, not the norm.”

Broader issues lie in the nature of COPs themselves. Many question the efficacy of COPs in driving meaningful climate action, especially when

share the same air pollution issues.” While such collaboration is challenging due to complex intergovernmental relationships, Chaturvedi argues that more investment in female solidarity- and confidence-building is essential. “The power of civil society is rooted in solidarity, and this solidarity would come from panels and conversations.”

There are small glimmers of hope, though. Last year, the COP28 presidency urged parties to bring gender-balanced delegations. Parties also agreed that the final review of the implementation of the enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) will be concluded this month. Established in 2014 at COP20

Through an open letter, the Women and Gender Constituency has urged negotiators at COP29 to include gender-responsive measures in climate policies and address the barriers preventing women’s full participation in climate negotiations. Time will tell if gender equality truly gains ground in climate change decision-making.

where a commitment to set up a dedicated Loss and Damage Fund was made.

Meanwhile, Sunita Narain, an environmental policy researcher from India, served on COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber’s advisory panel. As director general of the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi, Narain is a prominent advocate for recognising historical responsibility when considering greenhouse gas emissions.

Not everything lies in the numbers


The mere presence of women in climate negotiations does not guarantee influence or systemic change,

civil society groups face restrictions. Chaturvedi notes: “When you shut down protests, you are also shutting down a lot of women’s voices, because there are a lot of women in the justice conversation.”

Key to women’s solidarity is South Asian cooperation

Political crises compound the climate crisis in the absence of regional cooperation. Salam highlights the urgent need for cross-border cooperation between India and Pakistan: “We are independent countries, but we have shared problems. We have transboundary rivers and hence we share similar water problems. Delhi and Lahore

in Peru, the LWPG aims to advance gender balance and ensure women’s equal and meaningful participation.

Through an open letter, the Women and Gender Constituency has urged negotiators at COP29 to include gender-responsive measures in climate policies and address the barriers preventing women’s full participation in climate negotiations. Time will tell if gender equality truly gains ground in climate change decision-making. 

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An investigation by Reuters in 2023 uncovered US\$3 billion of finance reported to the UNFCCC that had gone towards “programmes that do little or nothing to ease the effects of climate change”. *Image: Paul Kagame, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*



COP29

SIX KEY REASONS WHY INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FINANCE IS A ‘WILD WEST’

Developed nations have committed to providing billions of dollars of ‘climate finance’ to developing countries, as part of the global effort to tackle climate change. Carbon Brief team - Josh Gabbatiss, Vera Deleja-Hotko, Gustav Elfving, Lyse Mauvais, Sevilay Nur Saraçlar - presents a perspective.



At the COP29 climate summit, nations must decide on a new global goal to replace the existing target of US\$100 billion each year. Delivering this money is widely viewed as important for helping vulnerable nations in the global south and maintaining trust between countries in UN climate talks.

Yet, for decades, climate finance has been plagued by accusations of exaggerated numbers, poor transparency and money going to “questionable” places. Much of this stems from a lack of consensus on what counts as “climate finance”.

Most climate finance comes from the aid budgets of a handful of developed states, including western Europe, the US and Japan. Governments use their own criteria to assess “climate finance”, often prompting criticism from civil society groups and developing countries.

Most climate finance goes towards legitimate causes. However, analysis of the available data reveals examples of countries reporting funds going to, say, fossil fuels and airports. Some donors report finance that may never be spent and others hand out loans that, ultimately, see them making a profit. These activities are all allowed under the UN climate finance system.

As countries gather to negotiate a new climate-finance target at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, Carbon Brief – in no particular order – explores six of the issues that make climate finance such a “wild west”.

1. THERE IS NO AGREED DEFINITION OF WHAT COUNTS AS ‘CLIMATE FINANCE’

There is no universal agreement on

what should, or should not, count towards the international “climate finance” provided by developed countries to developing countries.

Unofficial definitions, including those of the UN Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), broadly agree that climate finance should support activities that cut emissions or help adapt to climate change.

As for the types of finance that should count, nations decided that the US\$100 billion target would cover “a wide variety of sources”, including public money, support via multilateral development banks (MDBs) and private investment spurred by public spending.

However, the kinds of activities and finance streams falling into these broad categories are open to interpretation. In practice, governments of developed countries use their own methodologies and set their own rules when reporting climate finance.

Developed countries also pledged to provide climate finance that is “new and additional” – a term often taken to mean extra funding on top of other aid programmes. However, this framing is contested and, in practice, much of the reported climate finance comes from existing development budgets.

Prof Romain Weikmans, an international climate-finance researcher at the Free University of Brussels, tells Carbon Brief that developed countries have “diverging understandings on what should count as climate finance and on how to count it”. He adds that reporting requirements negotiated at the UN “allow countries to remain vague”.

Many expert analyses have concluded that self-reporting by governments, facing political pressure to act on climate change, contributes to an “overestimation” of total climate finance.

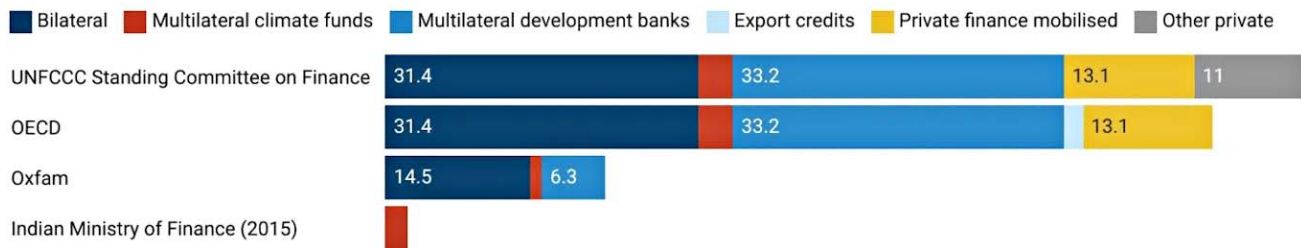
While it was widely reported that, based on OECD data, developed countries met the US\$100 billion target two years late in 2022, Weikmans says the lack of a universal definition “makes it impossible to assess whether the US\$100 billion has been met or not”.

The chart below shows how different assumptions about “climate finance” by key financial organisations lead to divergent estimates of how much has been provided.

Igor Shishlov, head of climate finance at Perspectives Climate Group, tells Carbon Brief that the lack of clarity contributes to an “erosion of trust” in climate negotiations between developed and developing countries. These tensions have existed since the start of UN

Different interpretations of 'climate finance' yield very different numbers

Estimates of climate finance totals, \$bn, by channel, in 2020



Source: UNFCCC, OECD, Oxfam, Indian Ministry of Finance

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Estimates of climate finance, US\$ billion, by channel of provision, from different organisations. Oxfam's figures present its figures as an average of the years 2019 and 2020, and the Indian Ministry of Finance only conducted its assessment on a one-off basis in 2015.

Source: Figures compiled by UNFCCC SCF, Oxfam.

climate negotiations in the 1990s. An attempt by COP presidencies in 2015 to “reassure” nations about progress towards the US\$100 billion goal with a special OECD report ended up sparking more disputes.

(A response at the time from the Indian Ministry of Finance – reflected in the chart above – estimated that climate finance was 26 times smaller than the OECD estimate. This was based on money that had been paid out, rather than pledged, from climate funds deemed “new and additional”).

Efforts since then to agree on a definition have failed. Joe Thwaites, a senior advocate on international climate finance at NRDC, tells Carbon Brief that both developed and developing countries contribute to this deadlock:

“Developed countries oppose a definition that would restrict climate finance to certain financial instruments, while petrostates oppose a definition that would exclude counting funding for fossil-fuel projects as climate finance.”

As countries negotiate the “new collective quantified goal” (NCQG) for climate finance at COP29, observers say it is unlikely that nations will make significant progress on a comprehensive definition.

2. CLIMATE-FINANCE ACCOUNTING IS NOT CONSISTENT OR TRANSPARENT

The systems for climate-finance accounting have been described as full of “inconsistencies” and “discrepancies”, as well as “prone to huge overestimations”.

Joseph Kraus, senior policy director at the ONE Campaign, which has attempted its own assessment of climate finance based on available data, tells Carbon Brief:

“Climate finance accounting is like the wild west: Every climate finance provider makes its own rules about what to count. Predictably, that makes it virtually impossible to get accurate numbers.”

Governments report their climate-finance contributions to three major international bodies: the OECD; the UNFCCC; and, in the case of EU member states, the European Commission.

Most climate finance is drawn from developed countries’ aid budgets and they register their bilateral contributions in the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS). Officials then mark projects as being related to climate mitigation or adaptation.

This “Rio marker system” was implemented in 1998 to assess whether aid projects align with the three “Rio Conventions” on climate change,

biodiversity and desertification. The tags were never meant to define the amount of “climate finance” counted under the UN system. They have effectively filled the gap left by the lack of official guidance.

Most developed countries use the data submitted to the OECD CRS to guide what they report as “official” climate finance in reports to the UNFCCC. Only a handful, including the UK and the US, assess projects on a more case-by-case basis.

Governments use the Rio Markers to calculate climate finance in different ways. Most say they count 100 per cent of the projects where climate has been marked as a “principal” objective towards their UNFCCC totals.

Projects where climate is deemed “significant”, implying a partial focus on climate, vary a lot more. Countries state that they report between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of these projects as climate finance.

Analysts have warned that the blanket application of fixed percentages is arbitrary and can lead to figures being inflated. They also note that, in practice, UNFCCC and OECD figures are difficult to compare and do not always match up in the ways countries report them.

The figures for bilateral climate finance that developed countries

report to the UNFCCC are used as the basis for the OECD's annual reports of progress towards the US\$100 billion goal. They are combined with the OECD's figures for MDBs, multi-lateral funds and the private sector.

(These are generally cited as the definitive figures for US\$100 billion tracking, although they are contested. The OECD does not provide a breakdown of contributors to the target and its reports are released two years in arrears, making real-time scrutiny difficult.)

While the OECD screens projects reported in its system, it has no power to amend those that have been marked "incorrectly". Analysis by Development Initiatives of climate-related aid projects found countries, such as France, Japan and Australia, frequently tagged projects that "deviated" from OECD guidance – those that include fossil fuels, for example.

Independent audits in Denmark, the Netherlands and the EU have all found significant evidence of "climate" projects being mislabelled, or their relevance overstated.

Reflecting on the wider state of climate-finance accounting, Thwaites tells Carbon Brief:

"I think understanding of climate finance is getting better, both through improvements in official reporting and through greater scrutiny from journalists and civil society. But as those third-party audits have shown, there is much room for improvement."

All of this is further complicated by the lack of transparency from governments, when reporting their official climate-finance contributions to the UNFCCC. The lack of detail in submissions makes it difficult to assess the relevance of each project for tackling climate change.

For example, NGO FragDenStaat has documented its difficulties evaluating the German government's claim that its climate finance reached a "record level" in 2022.

Poor transparency makes it difficult for those in developing countries as well. Turkish banks have received millions of dollars in climate finance from Germany and France, but there is little information provided either by the banks or the donors on how it is used.

"Citizens have no access to any information about these public funds," Özgür Gürbüz, campaign director of the Turkish NGO Ekosfer, tells Carbon Brief.

Sehr Raheja, a programme officer specialising in climate finance at the Centre for Science and Environment in India, tells Carbon Brief:

"Implications...include the inability to clearly hold actors accountable, or even first understand the complete reality of the situation of climate finance for developing countries."

Such scrutiny is important. The UK has traditionally been viewed as one of the more rigorous climate-finance reporters, but the government loosened its accounting system in 2023 to bring it more in line with those of less strict donors.

In doing so, an independent audit found that the UK added an extra £1.7 billion (US\$2.2 billion) to its projected climate finance spending without contributing any new funds, as the chart below shows.

3. SOME CLIMATE FINANCE IS NOT HELPING TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate-finance databases contain details of tens of thousands of projects operating in developing countries around the world. Most of these projects have clear links to tackling climate change. They might, for example, support solar power projects in Kenya, the construction of a train line in India, or improving the climate resilience of drought-prone farms in Guatemala.

However, among them are aid projects that may bring benefits to the target countries, but have little

or no relevance for tackling climate change. Some could even undermine such efforts, by supporting fossil fuels and carbon-intensive sectors.

Stacy-ann Robinson, a climate-adaptation finance researcher at Emory University in the US state of Georgia, tells Carbon Brief that some climate finance "has been going to questionable places to support objectives that are clearly not related to... reducing vulnerability or increasing resilience". Some assessments indicate that "inaccurately" categorised climate projects are relatively common among the largest donors, notably Japan and France. NGOs have also identified many "troubling and high-emitting projects" reported as climate finance by MDBs.

Over the years, researchers and journalists have unearthed climate finance being used to, for example, buy uniforms for park rangers, support anti-terrorism programmes and fund luxury hotels.

However, the overall lack of transparency makes it difficult to ascertain exactly how much money from these "questionable" projects is feeding into the official totals reported to the OECD.

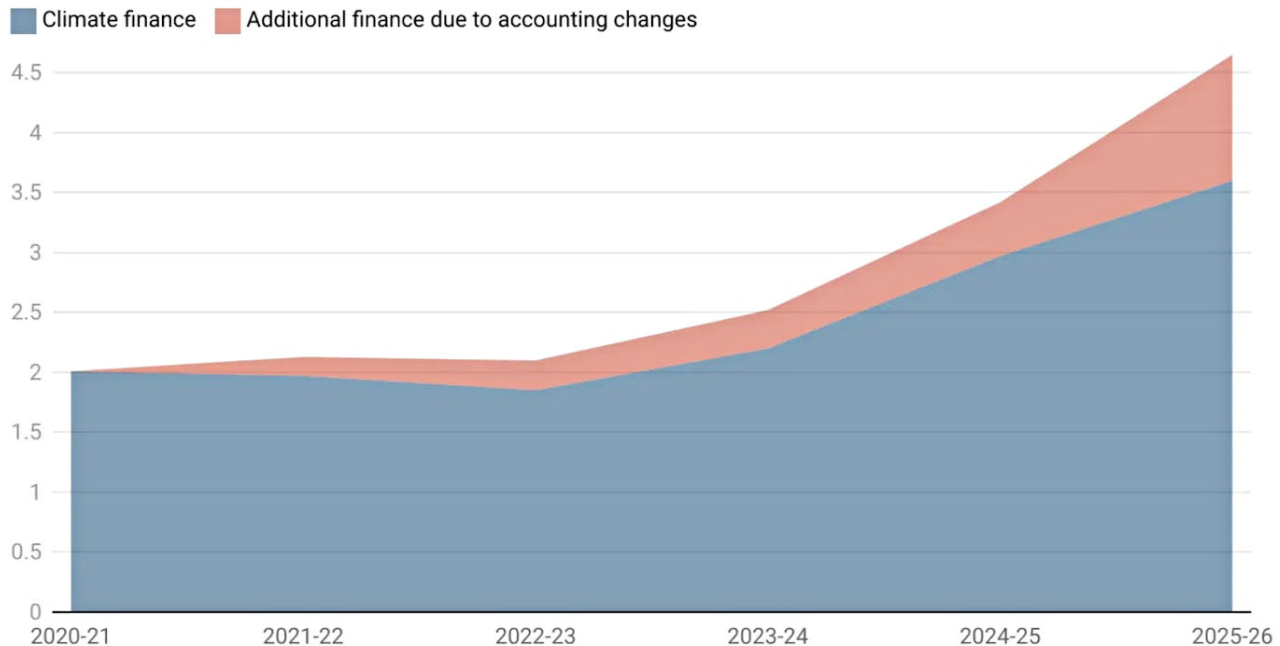
An investigation by Reuters in 2023 uncovered US\$3 billion of finance reported to the UNFCCC that had gone towards "programmes that do little or nothing to ease the effects of climate change". However, Reuters noted that its review only covered around 10 per cent of countries' submissions.

Carbon Brief has identified at least US\$6.5 billion of finance attributed to projects involving coal, oil and gas that has been tagged as climate-related in the OECD's climate-related aid database, over the decade from 2012-2021. If countries have followed their own guidelines for reporting climate finance, much of this money will have been reported to the UNFCCC.

Japan is frequently cited for labelling fossil-fuel finance as climate

The UK government added an extra \$2.2bn to its climate finance forecast by expanding its definition of 'climate finance'

Annual UK international climate finance, \$bn



Source: Carbon Brief analysis, UK government data

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Annual UK international climate finance spending, £ billion, by financial year for the period 2011-12 to 2025-26. The red area indicated finance that has been included in the totals following changes to the UK government’s methodology for calculating its climate finance. The blue area indicates climate finance before those methodology changes, with the figures for 2023-24 to 2025-26 representing the average value from a range of forecasts. Source: Carbon Brief analysis, UK government data.

finance, including billions of dollars for coal- and gas-fired power plants in places such as Bangladesh and Indonesia.

However, Carbon Brief’s assessment of the data reveals that some European countries have also been reporting smaller amounts of fossil fuel-related “climate finance”.

For example, Sweden counted around €5m for a gas-fired power plant in Mozambique between 2012 and 2015, while Germany supported a gas power plant in the Ivory Coast in 2022. In both cases, the governments have confirmed to Carbon Brief that projects marked in the OECD registry were also reported to the UNFCCC.

Defenders of fossil-fuel finance argue that developing countries

need investment in cleaner or more efficient fossil-fuel infrastructure – and that this does, in fact, reduce emissions. Others argue that these funds simply should not be labelled as climate-related.

Another example of questionable climate finance comes from the French development finance institution Proparco, which provided a €20m loan to Cabo Verde Airports in 2023, a subsidiary of French construction company Vinci Group.

This project was too recent to have been officially reported to the UNFCCC. However, Proparco has reported that 20 per cent of its financing for the project would lead to “climate co-benefits”, such as “renewable energy investments, the installation of LED lighting and the replace-

ment of air-conditioning systems”. At the same time, Vinci Group says its other goal is to help Cabo Verde boost tourism through increased traffic at its airports. The company has celebrated “record passenger numbers” at its Cabo Verde airports, where traffic increased by 17 per cent year-on-year in August thanks to rising passenger flows from western Europe.

4. RELIANCE ON LOANS 'OVERSTATES' CLIMATE FINANCE FLOWS

Most climate finance is delivered as loans to developing countries and their institutions. This is one of the most contentious issues in international climate-finance reporting. More than half of the bilateral

finance committed by wealthy countries – and around three-quarters of the investments by MDBs – comes in the form of loans, as shown by the red bars in the figure below.

In fact, the nations that consistently rank among the largest climate-finance providers – Japan, France and the US – all provide the majority of their climate finance as loans.

Loans have to be paid back, leading to climate finance returning to contributor countries as profits, through repayments plus interest. This has led to accusations by civil society groups that developed countries “overstate” their climate finance by leaning heavily on loans.

Public climate-finance institutions generally offer loans at lower-than-market “concessional” rates, or else with longer repayment periods.

However, Carbon Brief analysis shows that at least US\$18 billion of official climate finance reported by developed countries between 2015 and 2020 – roughly 10 per cent of the total – was “non-concessional”, as the chart below shows. (While less desirable than loans officially described as “concessional”, these public institution loans are still generally offered at better-than-market rates.)

The reliance on loans is especially controversial amid the debt crisis facing many developing countries.

The world’s least-developed countries and small-island developing states collectively spent twice as much repaying debts in 2022 as they received in climate finance, according to analysis by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

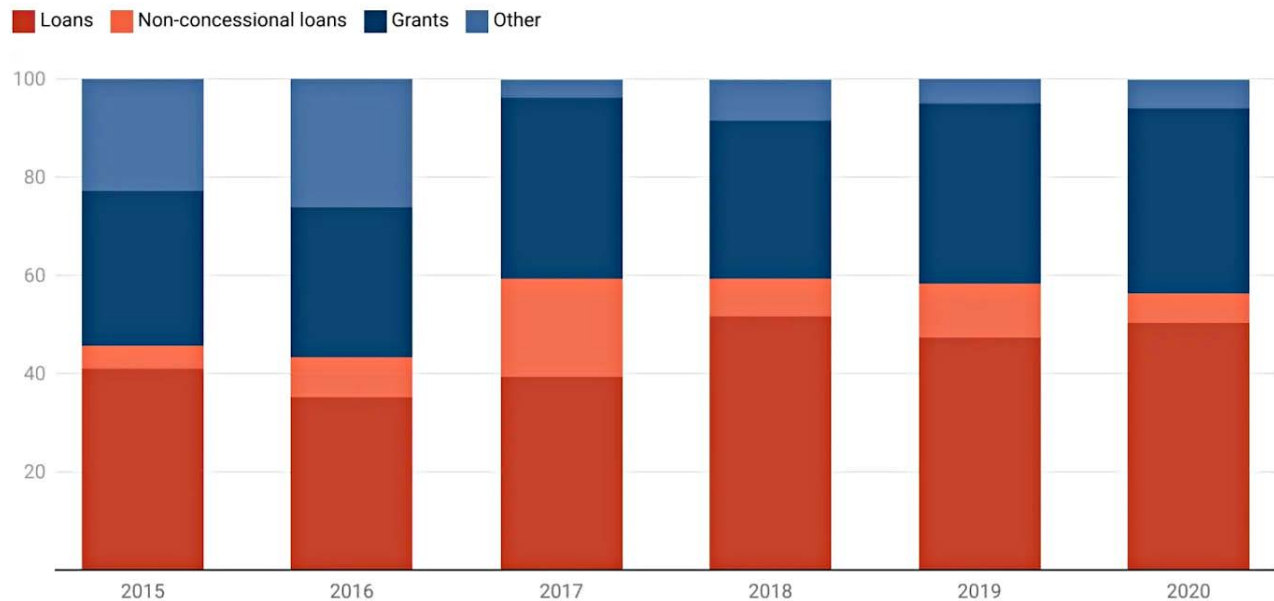
There has been considerable pressure from civil society, researchers, developing countries and even UN climate chief Simon Stiell to increase the “concessional” of climate finance.

NGOs, such as Oxfam, argue that climate-related loans should be reported as “grant equivalents”, rather than at face value. This is a measure of how much the developed-country government is subsidising the loan.

Since 2018, development aid reported in the OECD’s database has been expressed in grant equivalents in order to better communicate the “financial effort” being made by donors. However, when the OECD reports progress towards the US\$100 billion climate-finance goal, drawing from developed countries’ reports to the UNFCCC, it still uses face-value figures for loans. This is one of the key reasons

Developed countries provide more than half of their climate finance as loans – many of them at near-market rates

% of annual bilateral climate finance reported by developed countries



Source: Carbon Brief analysis, UNFCCC biennial report data compiled by Reuters



Bilateral climate finance reported by developing countries to the UNFCCC, broken down by per cent of “non-concessional” loans (light red), all other loans (dark red), grants (dark blue) and other types of finance, such as export credits (light blue).

Source: Carbon Brief analysis, UNFCCC biennial report data compiled by Reuters.

that developing countries have disputed these figures.

Oxfam releases an annual report that drastically downgrades the OECD figures, primarily by using grant equivalent values. Rather than exceeding the US\$100 billion goal in 2022, the NGO argues that developed countries' true financial effort only amounted to around US\$28-35 billion that year.

From 2024, countries will be able to start reporting loans in grant-equivalent amounts to the UNFCCC in the newly introduced "biennial transparency reports" (BTRs) that all nations must file under the Paris Agreement. However, they are not required to do so, meaning it is unlikely that an "official" total for grant-equivalent loans will be available.

5. COUNTRIES ARE REPORTING MONEY THAT MAY NEVER GET SPENT

Climate finance only has an impact when it is provided – or "disbursed" – to people and institutions who can use the money.

Yet some countries, including France, Germany and Denmark, choose not to report the amount of climate finance they have actually provided to developing countries.

Instead, they record the amount they have "committed", or else a mix of committed and provided sums. These numbers feed into the totals reported by national governments and they count towards the US\$100 billion target, even if the money has not left the donor country.

The OECD defines a commitment as a "firm written obligation by a government or official agency". Over time, the amount of money provided should match the amount committed.

But between a nation committing money and handing it out, all sorts of things can change, as Mattias Söderberg, global climate lead at the NGO DanChurchAid, tells Carbon Brief:

"In some situations, projects are interrupted. Changes in the context or in the projects or within partners, for example, when there was a coup in Mali, means that committed funds may not be disbursed as planned."

Climate projects could also collapse because a new government in the donor country decides to cancel the project for political or financial reasons. Other issues, such as shifting exchange rates, can also lead to divergences between committed and disbursed funds.

The reliance on commitments to meet climate-finance targets has drawn criticism. In its 2015 critique of progress towards the US\$100 billion target, the Indian government said it needed "actual disbursements" rather than "promises, pledges or multi-year commitments about promised sums in the future".

An analysis by ONE Campaign of climate-related aid reported to the OECD found that, of US\$616 billion committed since 2013, data was missing for US\$69 billion of disbursements and another US\$228 billion had not yet been disbursed. (This data is not a direct reflection of "climate finance" under the UN, but it is a rough proxy.)

Some lag between commitments and payments is to be expected. Countries tend to commit to big climate-finance projects and then gradually pay out the money over time. However, civil society groups have highlighted "significant differences" between committed and provided sums.

In recent years, EU member states have had to start reporting both commitments and disbursements. The chart below shows the sizable gap between the money Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy pledge and the amount they provide.

(It is worth noting that there is significant variability. Sweden sometimes provides more finance than it commits, whereas, in two

years, France did not report disbursements at all.)

Identifying climate-finance projects that have completely failed to pay out is difficult. Governments are not obliged to report to the UNFCCC when they have provided finance and neither do they have to update the record to reflect any cancellations or changes.

Reuters identified three French climate projects between 2016-2018 – collectively worth half a billion dollars – that had been cancelled. This equates to 4 per cent of France's climate finance over this period.

"Commitments look better, so more effort is put into reporting them than into tracking actual disbursements," Kraus from ONE Campaign tells Carbon Brief.

Civil society groups argue that all governments should start reporting disbursements to reduce the risk of "over-reporting".

6. CLIMATE FINANCE IS USED TO BOOST DONORS' ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Developed nations provide climate finance in a variety of different ways.

In projects that involve building infrastructure, such as windfarms and train lines, companies must be enlisted to work on the engineering and construction. Often, donor governments will work with firms based in their own countries to carry out climate projects.

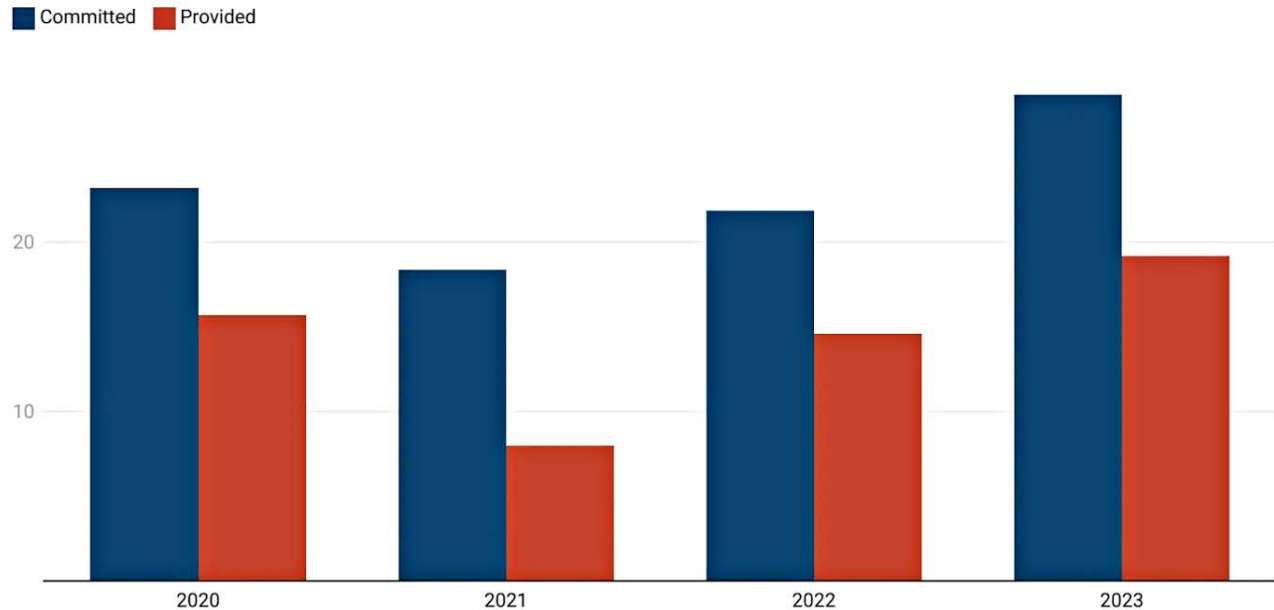
The French Development Agency (AFD) has reported that the majority of its aid is entrusted to projects involving at least one French "economic actor", resulting in significant economic benefits for the country.

Meanwhile, one-third of Japanese climate loans are given with the condition that Japanese companies are hired to work on the project, according to Reuters analysis of OECD data.

Stacy-ann Robinson of Emory University notes that this is not a "black-and-white" issue, as some-

European donors are reporting far less climate finance being provided to developing countries than the amounts they are committing

Climate finance committed/provided, \$bn, by the top five EU member-state donors



Source: Carbon Brief analysis, EU Governance Regulation data

CarbonBrief
CLEAR ON CLIMATE

Total climate finance reported by the top five EU member state donors - Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy - that has been “committed” (blue) or “provided” (red) to developing countries each year. Source: Carbon Brief analysis, EU Governance Regulation data.

times a company from the donor nation will be best placed to carry out the project. However, she notes that it has implications for capacity building in developing countries.

France has committed billions of dollars towards rail infrastructure in developing countries. Given France’s global leadership in the sector, a significant share of these projects have been implemented by French companies.

Project-level data about which companies are awarded contracts is not reported to the UNFCCC. However, one climate-finance project identified by Carbon Brief involves €230m worth of loans provided by AFD for an express regional train in the Senegalese capital, Dakar. This was co-funded with an extra €1 billion from development banks. While the project has clear benefits for

the decarbonisation of transport in Dakar, it also helped several French companies expand their activities in the region.

These include Eiffage, which built the infrastructure; Systra, which provided engineering consultancy services; Thales and Engie, which together won a €225m project to design and build the electricity infrastructure for the train; and Alstom, which supplied trains.

Reflecting on this issue, Robinson tells Carbon Brief:

“Perhaps we need regulations around the conditionalities associated with [climate] finance that would reduce the possibility of only French companies, for example, being able to work on these climate-finance projects.”

Another way climate finance might benefit donor nations is through proj-

ects that involve hiring consultants and other experts based domestically. One paper notes how such projects can result in money “flowing back to developed countries”.

Previous Carbon Brief analysis found that one-tenth of the climate funds disbursed by the UK between 2010 and 2023 had gone to private consultancies, largely based in the UK. 

This article was developed with the support of Journalismfund Europe. Carbon Brief worked with journalists based in France, Germany, Sweden and Turkey, and they provided input on how different countries have been providing international climate finance.

This story was published with permission from Carbon Brief.

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/cop29-six-key-reasons-why-international-climate-finance-is-a-wild-west/>)



Less than 1 per cent of overseas aid spent on climate action, including protecting biodiversity, goes directly to Indigenous Peoples, according to a 2021 report by non-profit Rainforest Foundation Norway. Image: CIFOR-ICRAF, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN ARE ON NATURE'S FRONT LINES BUT GET LITTLE FUNDING

From COP16 talks to the Amazon, women lead the fight to protect Latin America biodiversity, but end up with few conservation funds.

Women are often on the frontlines of protecting Latin America's crucial biodiversity, from guarding rivers against pollution to keeping illegal gold miners and oil companies at bay in the Amazon

rainforest. And at the United Nations COP16 nature summit this week in Cali, Colombia, women are well represented in political leadership, too.

Colombia's environment minister and COP16 president Susana Muhamad, along with environment ministers from Ecuador and Brazil and vice ministers from Peru,

Colombia and Panama are at the negotiating table.

"When women take over, they make things happen," said Valéria Paye, executive director at the Indigenous Fund of the Brazilian Amazon (PODÁALI).

But according to new data, of the US\$28.5 billion in international

government aid for women and girls between 2016 and 2020, only 1.4 per cent went to organisations working with Indigenous women, who protect many of the world's most biodiverse areas.

“Women have often been excluded from funding because of assumptions about their capacities and doubts about their ability to manage projects,” said Omaira Bolaños, Latin America director of the Rights and Resources Initiative, which produced the report with the Women in Global South Alliance.

“However, even without financial support, they have been effectively protecting their forests,” she said at COP16. From 2019 and 2022, the report also found there was a 2 per cent decrease in development funding for NGOs working on gender issues, with Indigenous and Afro-descendant women's rights organisations especially missing out.

Biodiversity is diminishing at a rapid rate, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, which saw their recorded wildlife populations drop by 95 per cent between 1970 and 2020, according to a recent WWF report.

Delegates in Cali are close to agreeing ways to boost the role of Indigenous groups in biodiversity decision-making, raising hopes it will ease the way for Indigenous women to access a larger share of the pot of money allocated to nature conservation.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate-driven extreme weather, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, because as carers and mothers they are often responsible for putting food on the table and fetching water.

Valeria Paye from PODÁALI, said a permanent presence for Indigenous groups within the official United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity process could help to close an historic gap in access to nature finance.



Women have often been excluded from funding because of assumptions about their capacities and doubts about their ability to manage projects. However, even without financial support, they have been effectively protecting their forests.

—OMAIRA BOLAÑOS

Latin America director, Rights and Resources Initiative

Under the current UN structure, “resources are practically inaccessible,” she said, with most of the money going to “established mega funds” such as the World Bank.

PODÁALI is part of a network of seven development funds managed by Indigenous, farming and Afro-descendant communities from Brazil's Amazon, six of which are managed by women.

“Even though we have the structure (to manage that money), we are not able to access (it),” she said.

As the summit nears its end, the issue of nature conservation finance continues to be a stumbling block.

An additional US\$163 million was pledged to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund on Monday to implement a nature protection deal agreed between nations at COP15 in Montreal in December 2022, bringing the total raised to about US\$400 million. Advocacy groups

have said the pledges fall far short of the billions of dollars envisioned for the fund which aims to stop biodiversity loss by 2030.

Fight for representation


Since 2001, there has been a push at United Nations environmental summits to consider the different needs, roles and responsibilities of women in climate and nature action.

The Global Biodiversity Framework agreed in Montreal includes a target to ensure a gender focus to boost women's participation and equality. But there is still no plan to track progress, said Alejandra Duarte, policy and research associate at global environmental network Women4Biodiversity.

“If I don't have data in the right social context, how am I going to implement strategies, projects, programs that address the needs of each place?” she asked at a COP16 event.

Indigenous leader Ginny Alba, the first and only Indigenous woman representing Colombia at the negotiating table as part of the Colombian delegation at COP16, wants more government and donor funding to go directly to Indigenous communities. Less than 1 per cent of overseas aid spent on climate action, including protecting biodiversity, goes directly to Indigenous Peoples, according to a 2021 report by non-profit Rainforest Foundation Norway.

“We are putting forward that Indigenous people, and women, have all the technical skills to directly manage our own resources in our territories that we govern,” said Alba, a member of the leading Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon.

“We need to make funding more accessible to Indigenous peoples, that's why it is important to be present in these spaces,” she said. 

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/indigenous-women-are-on-natures-front-lines-but-get-little-funding/>)



More than half of the world's top 100 polluting power plants in 2022, responsible for a disproportionate climate impact, are in China and India, according to satellite data from Climate Trace, an organisation that uses technology to track greenhouse gas emissions. Image: michael davis-burchat, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.

HOW DO COAL-FIRED POWER PLANTS HELP DRIVE CLIMATE CHANGE?

Success hinges on China and India, but experts say there is still time to switch from coal and save the planet.

Coal has powered the world's factories, heated homes and fuelled economies for more than a century, and usage driven by the power sector continues to rise despite global promises to kick the habit and save the

climate. As the most carbon-intensive fossil fuel and a big emitter of planet-warming carbon dioxide, several countries have pledged to quit coal, including Britain, which closed its last plant in September after 140 years of coal power.

Coal use must fall by 80 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030 to meet the global aim to hold warming to within 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times, in line with the Paris climate agreement, according to the United

Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Here's what you need to know about burning coal, how it affects climate change and which countries are phasing out coal-fired plants.

Why is burning coal so bad for the planet?

Coal produces large quantities of polluting emissions when burned, including sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which contribute to respiratory illnesses.

It also releases carbon dioxide, which traps heat in the atmosphere, leading to climate change with impacts ranging from drought to wildfires, floods to tropical storms.

The power sector must be completely decarbonised in advanced economies by 2035, and worldwide by 2040, if temperature rises are to stay within 1.5°C, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Yet every year, about 15.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide are generated by 2,000 gigawatts of coal power.

Which countries use the most coal energy and why?

While coal use has been gradually falling in recent years, the energy crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine saw global coal demand spike to a record high in 2022, rising by 4 per cent year-on-year to 8.42 billion tonnes (Bt).

More than half of the world's top 100 polluting power plants in 2022, responsible for a disproportionate climate impact, are in China and India, according to satellite data from Climate Trace, an organisation that uses technology to track greenhouse gas emissions.

China is expected to reach peak coal in 2025, and has pledged to wind down coal over 2026-2030, while India has no plans to retire coal plants before 2030.

Shutting an industry that employs hundreds of thousands of workers,

in both mines and plants, will be costly and complex.

Solutions for financing such a big transition include the Asian Development Bank's Energy Transition Mechanism and the European Union's Just Transition Fund. But more money is needed to support developing countries as they transition, say climate finance analysts.

Which countries have managed to quit coal power?

From Austria to Belgium, many European countries have phased out coal power completely.

Greece and Britain were the fastest at phasing out coal power, followed by Denmark, Spain, Portugal,

Overall, countries with the quickest coal exit plans have high incomes, have small populations, lower electricity demands, and relied on coal imports and ageing power plants.

But even countries with large coal mining sectors, such as Greece and the United States, were able to reduce coal power.

What is a just transition?

A just transition would ensure that workers and affected communities do not pay an excessive price as their nations switch to a future that is free of fossil fuels.

The International Labour Organization defines it as "greening the

According to the IEA, ramping up renewables, improving energy efficiency, cutting methane emissions and increasing electrification with new technologies could deliver more than 80 per cent of the drop in emissions needed by 2030.

Romania and Germany, according to the World Resources Institute.


In Britain, which relied on coal for nearly two centuries, the last coal-fired plant closed on Sept. 30 in the Midlands, a key cog in the Industrial Revolution.

Outside of Europe, the fastest reductions were recorded in the United States, Israel and Chile, which is retiring coal plants early, replacing them with wind and solar.

According to the IEA, ramping up renewables, improving energy efficiency, cutting methane emissions and increasing electrification with new technologies could deliver more than 80 per cent of the drop in emissions needed by 2030.

economy" in a fair and inclusive way, and a switch that spawns decent job opportunities. One example is via financial support.

For instance, Poland is due to get 3.85 billion euros (US\$4.31 billion) in EU money, the largest slice of the bloc's 17-billion-euro (US\$19.05 billion) Just Transition Fund.

It aims to support Europeans most affected by the energy transition with retraining in renewable energy, unemployment compensation, and financial lifelines to coal-rich regions. 

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/how-do-coal-fired-power-plants-help-drive-climate-change/>)



Whale sharks surface in Oslob, Cebu in central Philippines. The connection between land and ocean is of particular relevance to the third COP of 2024: in Saudi Arabia, members of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification will gather for their 16th conference. *Image: Klaus Stiefel, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

RIDING THE 2024 COPS WAVE: OCEAN ISSUES CONNECT EVERYTHING

Ocean issues cut across all three major UN conferences taking place at the end of 2024, writes **Felipe Cárcamo Moreno**, Dialogue Earth

Those who know how to surf understand that the rhythm of the waves changes. Clinging to the board, watching the ocean, you decide which wave to take or let go, calculating the direction. And suddenly you are already on your feet, gliding through the sea...

aligned with the rhythm of the ocean. Looking at the horizon, you can clearly see what is coming.

This year has been a decisive one in the management of the ecological crises that plague the ocean. We are currently surfing between three UN Conferences of the Parties (COPs), dedicated to three different UN

conventions. Each has a different agenda, but also several elements in common. Among them, the ocean stands out as a cross-cutting and potentially unifying theme.

But despite its importance, there is a deficit of attention being paid to the ocean and its three crises. Climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss on the seas are already manifesting in rising sea levels, record water temperatures, changes in precipitation, ocean acidification and deoxygenation, and the decline of ecosystems.

Three UN gatherings dominate the end-of-year environmental agenda: the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP16 in Colombia, the Framework Convention on Climate Change's COP29 in Azerbaijan, and the Convention to Combat Desertification's COP16 in Saudi Arabia. Will the ocean command the attention it demands? Let's dive in.

October | Biodiversity, COP16 | Cali

In 2022, the parties to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) set a milestone target of protecting 30 per cent of terrestrial and marine areas by 2030. As they gathered in Cali last month, it became clear that global ocean protection languishes far short of this goal.

Another UN treaty will be a key building block in reaching this goal: the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction – otherwise known as the High Seas Treaty.

Once it has been ratified by 60 countries (currently only 15 have done so, after France recently joined the list) it will enable the establishment of marine protected areas on the high seas, the two thirds of the ocean that lies beyond national jurisdiction. Protecting this will complement efforts to reach the KMGBF's 30 per cent target.

Ocean protection is further strengthened by other international

instruments negotiated in recent years: the Port State Measures Agreement and the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. Both are designed to combat illegal fishing and promote marine sustainability. Funding, however, remained a central and outstanding challenge at Cali's COP16.

The Latin American and Caribbean Network for a Sustainable Financial System (REDFIS) says funding specifically allocated to biodiversity protection and conservation in each country must be established.

The network says the current financial resources on the table are insufficient, and the critical situation of the debt markets in Global South countries is diverting funds that could combat climate change to pay off interest. REDFIS also says more effective mechanisms are needed to channel funds directly to those who protect nature. In particular, local communities, Indigenous peoples and African descendants who manage marine areas.

November | Climate change, COP29 | Baku

A turning point for climate change discussions to sufficiently incorporate the ocean is hopefully indicated by a recent report. Compiled by the facilitators of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's "ocean dialogue", the report emphasises the need for synergies between various UN multilateral frameworks.

For example, between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, and the Global Biodiversity Framework. The report stresses this collaboration is critical to the success of national policies on climate change, including adaptation and mitigation.

A central theme of COP29 will be how to implement climate pledges. The ocean dialogue report urges countries to unify their efforts to avoid duplication and strengthen col-

lective action on oceans. How to fund the climate pledges of developing countries will feature prominently.

For Latin America, it is crucial to establish a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) defining a level of international support for climate finance that effectively supports developing countries in protecting their waters. In addition, countries should integrate oceans into their Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans by 2025 – both of which detail countries' efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and adapt to climate change.

Technology is emerging as a controversial issue where ocean concerns meet climate change, particularly in two areas. The first is geoengineering for marine carbon sequestration, as supervised by the UN's International Maritime Organization. The consequences of such technologies are yet to be decisively proven. They could enlarge the ocean's absorption of carbon dioxide, but they could also fail to make a significant difference and further damage already battered ecosystems.

The second area is deep sea mining, supervised by the International Seabed Authority. Some experts worry this could disrupt carbon sequestration in the deep, while advocates say it is a vital source of elements needed for the green transition. Nations including several in Latin America are promoting a moratorium. That would allow for further scientific research on these little-understood deep-sea ecosystems, applying a precautionary principle in the face of possible environmental impacts.

For significant progress to be made in protecting the oceans in Baku, agreement on concrete action is needed for all the above areas.

December | Desertification, COP16 | Riyadh

The connection between land and

ocean is of particular relevance to the third COP of 2024: in Saudi Arabia, members of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification will gather for their 16th conference.

In addressing the intensification of droughts, the convention stresses the need to align efforts with the findings of the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The convention's approach is holistic: it highlights the interrelationship of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and encourages development that strengthens their resilience. It also recognises that pressures on ocean ecosystems and water resources are intimately linked to the need to secure food and water for millions of people.

This year has been marked by devastating cyclones and unprecedented ocean warming, alerting the world to the fundamental need to protect the oceans to mitigate climate change and safeguard biodiversity.

It is encouraging to note that behind every political decision there is a relentless activist struggle. One shaped by local, Indigenous and African-descendant communities that are increasingly mobilised to protect the oceans.

As surfers know, it takes balance to get on the board. Taming the waves of change, which are already crashing, demands a triple balance: being guided by scientific and local knowledge, taking permanent action that is forceful, and having high ambition in the work to mitigate climate change. Get it right and before we know it, we will be on our feet, gliding across the sea. ☐

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(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/riding-the-2024-cops-wave-ocean-issues-connect-everything/>)

MOO DENG

The celebrated hippo's real home has disappeared – will the world restore it?

The playful and pudgy mammal lives the life of a superstar in a Thai zoo enclosure, but widespread deforestation and constant disturbance have made it difficult for her fellow pygmy hippos to survive in the wild, writes **Huanyuan Zhang-Zheng** and **Sulemana Bawa**



Moo Deng lives with her mother and siblings in Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Chon Buri, Thailand.

Image: I Viewfinder/Shutterstock

The playful and pudgy mammal that went viral from its Thai zoo enclosure has a sad story to tell about her fellow hippos. Moo Deng is the two-month-old pygmy hippo who flicks her ears in joy and likes splashing in water. She lives the life of a superstar at Khao Kheow Open Zoo, where huge crowds have massed – but the chances of spotting her relatives in the wild are slim.

Pygmy hippos (*Choeropsis liberiensis*) are endangered and estimated to number fewer than 2,500. Their decline has been drastic: a long-term survey in a national park in Ivory Coast found 12,000 pygmy hippos in 1982; 5,000 in 1997 and

2,000 in 2011. Today, these hippos are scarce across their native west Africa.

Perhaps it's not surprising that pygmy hippos feel most comfortable deep in the forest. Early European explorers to Liberia wrote in their diaries that this hippo chooses to forage at night and conceal itself in the water or in dense vegetation during the day.

So secretive is this species that 19th-century explorers observed: "if someone walks across one of their paths or tunnels (used to navigate through thick vegetation), they will abandon that route for a while."

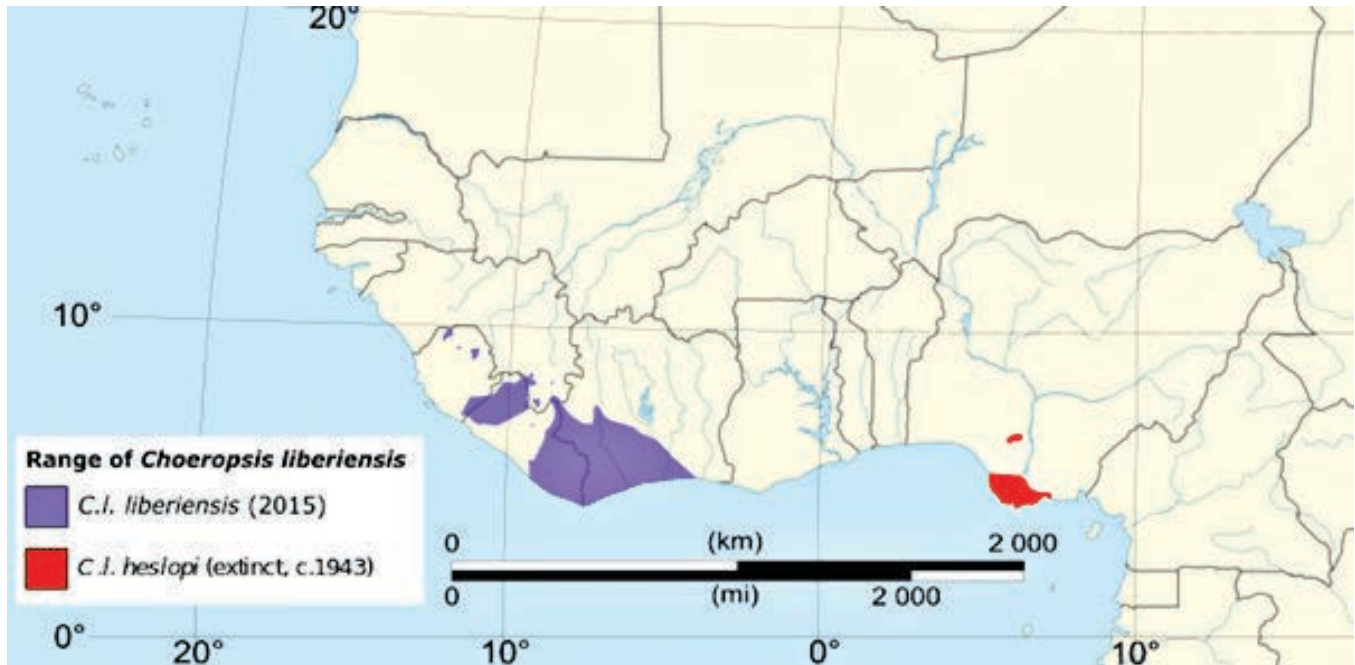
Sensitive souls

Widespread deforestation and constant disturbance have made it

difficult for pygmy hippos to survive, requiring as they do a combination of dense forests and swamps which already restricted them to a small area. West African forests have lost over 80 per cent of their original area, which confines wild pygmy hippos to small spots in Gola National Forest (Sierra Leone) and Sapo National Park (Liberia).

With their forests rapidly disappearing, there simply isn't enough space for pygmy hippos to find food, thrive and reproduce. A survey in the Gola rainforest and its surroundings revealed that many were hiding on former cropland outside the protected area.

Cocoa production is probably the biggest cause of forest loss, then gold



The world once had several pygmy hippo species. Only one remains, in West Africa. Image: IUCN, CC BY-SA

mining and unsustainable logging. These activities now encroach on forest reserves and other supposedly protected areas.

Previous forest conservation efforts have failed. Conservationists argue for a system to financially reward farmers and authorise local forestry communities to safeguard the forests and sustainably manage what remains, as opposed to a top-down model of state management and enforcement.

A world treasure

West Africa's forest loss is particularly heartbreaking as research shows that a remaining patch may be the most productive on Earth, surpassing even the Amazon rainforest.

Particularly productive forests harness more of the sun's energy and turn it into lots of palatable herbs and juicy fruits – more food to support animals like pygmy hippos, and so foster rich biodiversity.

Before extensive fieldwork beginning in 2016, researchers had underestimated the value of west African forests, particularly their capacity

to store carbon and thereby offset global warming. This oversight was partly the result of these forests being hidden by clouds, which makes satellite observation difficult, and their relative neglect by western researchers compared with other ecosystems elsewhere.

It's not just Moo Deng's wider family that is at risk. West African forests are home to more than 900 bird species and nearly 400 mammals – more than a quarter of all mammal species in Africa. Their future is highly threatened by extensive deforestation.

Underestimating the value of west African forests has kept them off the priority list for global forest restoration. It's sadly not surprising that deforestation continues. In 2022 alone Ghana lost 44,500 acres of forest (twice the size of Manchester), close to a 70 per cent increase from 2021.

Each tropical forest contributes irreplaceable biodiversity. From the elusive mammals of west Africa to the vibrant birds of south-east Asia, these ecosystems are equally important. Comprehensive plans

are needed to restore them which involve empowering local communities to manage their long-term health.

A global initiative to designate 30 per cent of Earth's land and ocean as protected by 2030 (known as 30x30) should not conserve a vast area in one or two places, ignoring Earth's other biodiversity hotspots. The lesson of Moo Deng's disappearing home should be to value ecosystems equally – and plan their preservation with equal care. ☐

Huanyuan Zhang-Zheng is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Geography and the environment, University of Oxford. He is responsible for building the Global Ecosystem Monitoring (GEM) Forests carbon cycle database. Huanyuan is a member of the Ecosystems Lab and NGE-E-Tropics lab.

Sulemana Bawa is a PhD candidate in conservation biology at the University of Oxford.

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(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/moo-deng-the-celebrated-hippos-real-home-has-disappeared-will-the-world-restore-it/>)



From 2002 to 2023, Sarawak lost 1.71 Mha of humid primary forest, making up 54 per cent of its total tree cover loss in the same time period. *Image: Fiona McAlpine*

PLANTATIONS ARE NOT FORESTS

Sarawak's so-called green revolution is little more than a wolf in sheep's clothing. Companies and the state government are operating in ways that not only devastate the environment but also marginalise remote Indigenous communities, writes **Fiona McAlpine**

We wind our way through a maze of logging roads in Sarawak, heading toward some of the state's so-called reforestation projects. Sarawak claims to be at the forefront of Malaysia's green revolution, planting millions of trees and launching its first carbon offset initiatives. But many on the ground fear that the green rush is just the latest threat to Indigenous land rights and is damaging forests on the ground with no demonstrable benefits to the climate as a whole.

Sarawak wants to boast 1 million hectares of tree plantations by 2025 but currently has half that. Where they're going to find the half a million hectare shortfall remains to be seen. Sarawak already has a patchwork of functioning and failed plantations, but none of these could be mistaken for forests. There are no fruiting trees for the small mammals to eat, and therefore no small mammals for the big predators to eat. There is no canopy for the arboreal animals, which make up many of the rare and endangered species in Sarawak such as the gibbon, slow loris, and binturong. Eucalyptus, along with many species of acacia, are considered toxic and poisonous to many animal species.

Hour after hour, we drive past unbroken stretches of oil palm plantations, the monotony only broken when we reach a lookout point. Stepping out of our trusty Hilux, we survey the landscape: an enormous, abandoned acacia plantation sprawls before us, stretching to the horizon. Hundreds of acres of failed, lifeless trees stand where vibrant forests once thrived. The scale of the devastation is staggering.

It's a relief when we reach the village of Punan Bah, a forest oasis in a sea of monoculture. Punan Bah sits on the mighty Rejang River, a paradise for those who manage to resist the logging, palm oil, and indus-



Oil palm, industrial timber, and natural forest side by side in the Lana plantation, Sarawak.

Image: Fiona McAlpine

trial timber plantation pressures. This resilience is thanks in part to our host, Gebril Atong, who once worked for the logging company Samling. He spent six years as a community liaison officer, working on some of the first industrial tree plantations in the area. He knows firsthand that environmental safeguards are not met, and he's seen the aftermath when communities take short-term payouts, sacrificing their ancestral lands.

"Look at these forests," Gebril says as we share a drink and watch the river roll by. "They call what they're doing reforestation, but no one can replace these forests."

While they don't support selective logging either, communities like Gebril's consider plantations to be a lot worse. Selective logging, when done correctly, spares smaller trees that can continue growing, allowing the forest a chance at long-term recovery. By comparison, Samling's tree plantations in this area flatten the forest entirely, dragging out all vegetation and starting again from scratch with foreign, invasive, fast-growing species.

The irony is that they call these plantations 'planted forest', which

means that hundreds of thousands of hectares of cleared, scarred land can count towards Malaysia's official forest cover count. It means Malaysia can announce they've lost no annual forest cover, to the cheers of the international community, while continuing to transform what were once native old growth ecosystems into pesticide-laden monocultures. It also potentially means that Sarawak can say they are pushing carbon projects by planting trees 'without losing any forest'.

Our home for the next few days is the community heritage hall, adorned with ceremonial hats, rattan handicrafts and carved oars — all crafted from the surrounding forest. When the community harvested two protected belian trees to build the hall, the company reported them to the forest department. Conversely, the Punan Bah community have reported the company for encroaching into their land. In both cases, nothing has happened.

The views of the company and the community are entirely at odds. The community argues the land the company encroached upon is their pulau galau — a type of reserve forest land that is sup-

posed to be respected as native customary land. The company, however, argues that the land is theirs under a licence to harvest because no official recognition for the community claims exists. Even the Punan Bah longhouse itself is within the plantation boundary.

The government will only issue native customary rights (NCR) to communities that can prove they used the land before 1958, based on aerial photographs from that time. But there are gaps and flaws, and the government often withholds these photos from the communities, leaving them with no clear basis for


don't fit the evidence framework, where you must show land use like rice fields or rows of fruit trees, with proof. Showing the village existed prior to the cutoff date is not sufficient, even though logic would insist that these remote, roadless communities were obviously living off the land at the time.

We venture out to look at some of the established industrial timber plantations. We drive to an area that was converted from natural forests to plantations since the pandemic, meaning none of it complies with the new EU deforestation regulations. Gebril explains the rules that

The Punan Bah community brought their land rights case to court and hope to set a precedent. While the case was heard years ago, they still await a decision. If the court rules in favour of the Punan Bah community, then it is very likely the companies will appeal, restarting the waiting game.

“What people don't realise, is it's not just about land grabbing,” explains Gebril. “If you take away our land you take away our culture and our identity. Without forests, we can't teach children words for plants, trees, animals, everything else. It all disappears, our whole culture.”

A silver lining is that the companies surrounding their land can't operate there while the court case is pending. So for the time being, we get to sit in the longhouse watching stunning birds, bats, dragonflies and the occasional macaque enjoying these last vestiges of rainforest, while it's still here.

Sarawak's so-called green revolution is little more than a wolf in sheep's clothing. Corporate interests and the state government are repeating past mistakes, operating in ways that not only devastate the environment but also further marginalise remote Indigenous communities. Plantations are not forests, and the façade of sustainability fools no one. These industrial monocultures pale in comparison to the rich biodiversity and ecological harmony of native forests, standing instead as stark symbols of corporate colonialism. The difference is clear, and we must act to protect what remains of these irreplaceable ecosystems before it's too late. 

Fiona McAlpine is Communications and Project Manager for The Borneo Project, a non-profit working with indigenous communities in Malaysian Borneo. To find out more about their work, head to borneoproject.org.

(Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/plantations-are-not-forests/>)



Gebril admiring his community forest from the longhouse. Image: Fiona McAlpine

their dispute. This approach ignores self-determination altogether. Yet Punan Bah has proof that few others have: the kelirieng, a series of ancient burial columns marking the graves of their aristocratic ancestors, some dating back to the mid-17th century.

To assert there is no evidence of the community using the forest before the mid-20th century is preposterous. But the kelirieng poles

he learned when he was trained in planting. He shows us areas where the oil palm trees are planted along the riverbank, in violation of riparian buffer rules. He shows us where fire has been used to clear land, against open fire regulations. He shows us where eucalyptus and acacia have been planted on steep hills, breaking the 25-degree limit. It's no wonder trees regularly end up blocking roads and clogging rivers.

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