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DISCOMs must intensify decarbonisation efforts

Rajesh Tiwari
Publisher
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Karnataka's achievement stems from a clear strategic alignment: higher renewable energy procurement combined with lower emissions intensity. In practical terms, this means cleaner power without sacrificing reliability or economic expansion.

The latest assessment by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis and Ember offers a revealing snapshot of India's evolving electricity transition — and at its center stands Karnataka, emerging as a leading force in decarbonising power systems. The recognition is not merely symbolic. It signals a deeper structural shift in how Indian states are approaching growth, sustainability, and energy security in an era defined by climate urgency.

Karnataka's achievement stems from a clear strategic alignment: higher renewable energy procurement combined with lower emissions intensity. In practical terms, this means cleaner power without sacrificing reliability or economic expansion. Such decoupling of growth from emissions has long been India's national aspiration. Karnataka demonstrates that it is not only possible but replicable when policy, infrastructure, and market incentives converge.

Yet the report's broader message is equally important: India's energy transition is not a uniform march forward but a multi-speed transformation shaped by geography, governance capacity, and economic priorities. States such as Himachal Pradesh and Kerala are advancing rapidly in renewable integration but must strengthen grid readiness and distribution company finances to sustain momentum. Meanwhile, Delhi and Haryana demonstrate that robust distributed solar adoption and financially stable DISCOMs can create a resilient and consumer-oriented power ecosystem. Even coal-reliant regions like Chhattisgarh illustrate how reliability improvements and minimal power shortages can coexist with transition efforts.

This diversity should not be mistaken for fragmentation. Rather, it represents a laboratory of policy experimentation. Each state's success illuminates a pathway others can adapt. For instance, Bihar has embraced innovative policy tools — green tariffs, time-of-day pricing aligned with solar generation, and early adoption of energy storage auctions. These initiatives show how regulatory creativity can compensate for resource limitations. Similarly, Rajasthan, with its strong renewable policy ecosystem and competitive green tariffs, underscores how clear investment signals accelerate market confidence.

The unevenness highlighted in the report ultimately reflects a structural truth about India's federal system: transitions occur locally even when ambitions are national. States such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra are improving through energy-efficiency interventions, while Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are laying foundations in green hydrogen and electric mobility. The challenge is not the pace of individual leaders but the widening gap between frontrunners and laggards. Without targeted reforms, disparities in institutional capacity and fiscal health may translate into unequal access to clean energy benefits.

What, then, makes Karnataka's leadership particularly instructive? Beyond renewable capacity, the state has cultivated enabling conditions: procurement frameworks that favor clean energy, policy continuity that reassures investors, and a system-wide approach to emissions reduction. This holistic orientation matters. Decarbonisation is not simply about installing solar panels or wind turbines; it requires synchronized progress in grid infrastructure, tariff design, digital metering, and financial discipline within distribution utilities.

The report implicitly calls for a shift in policy thinking — from one-size-fits-all targets to tailored interventions grounded in state-level realities. Strengthening DISCOM finances, ensuring cost-reflective tariffs, and expanding smart metering are not technocratic details but foundational reforms. They determine whether renewable expansion remains aspirational or becomes operational.

Contents

54 Families Get Safer Homes Through Max Estates and Habitat for Humanity India

Max Estates Limited, a leading Real Estate developer in the NCR region, in partnership with leading housing non-profit Habitat for Humanity India, has completed the second phase of its affordable housing initiative in Haryana's Rewari district, handing over 29 newly constructed homes in Bhudla village. Together with the 25 homes delivered earlier in Aakera village, the initiative has provided 54 families with safe, permanent housing. The project reflects Max Estates' LiveWell philosophy of creating environments that support healthier, more secure and fulfilling lives.

The completion was marked by a handover ceremony attended by homeowners, village representatives and teams from both organisations, celebrating not just new homes but greater stability and opportunity for the families. Access to secure housing, improved sanitation and better ventilation is expected to significantly enhance health and hygiene outcomes. Reliable shelter and improved kitchen infrastructure support safer food preparation, while adequate natural light enables children to study comfortably. Overall, the homes provide a strong foundation for family stability, dignity and economic progress. Sharing his perspective, Vachan Singh, Chief Operating Officer, Max Estates Limited, said, "At Max Estates, our commitment to Sevabhav — the spirit of service — guides everything we do. We believe that access to safe and adequate housing is fundamental to human dignity. Through our partnership with Habitat for Humanity India, we are proud to extend our LiveWell philosophy beyond our developments and into communities that need it most. The confidence and sense of ownership we see among these families reaffirm our belief that purpose-driven partnerships can truly transform lives". Commenting on the completion of the second phase, Anand Kumar Bolimera, National Director, Habitat for Humanity India, said, "The bright smiles and renewed sense of hope we witness as families step into their new homes inspire us to advance our mission of building homes, communities and hope. Each home here represents resilience, dignity and opportunity for a better future. This project not only reflects its tangible impact on families' lives but also demonstrates how collective action, guided by a shared vision for social good, can create lasting change at the community level. We are grateful to Max Estates for this partnership and also to the community for giving us this opportunity to serve."

The initiative highlights how collaboration between the private sector and social organisations can deliver meaningful community impact through affordable housing.

IIT Guwahati Strengthens Green Campus Initiative with ICICI Foundation Partnership

Making a significant step towards sustainable energy adoption, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth to establish a 2-Megawatt solar power plant on the campus. The initiative is a major step towards carbon dioxide emission reduction in the Northeast region.

In the presence of Prof. Devendra Jalihal, Director, IIT Guwahati, the MoU was signed on 9th February 2026 by Prof. Anjan Dutta, Dean, Infrastructure Planning & Management, IIT Guwahati, and Mr. Pgo Pumgouthang, Zonal Head, ICICI Foundation. It aims to expand IIT Guwahati's renewable energy infrastructure and support its commitment to sustainability. The project will contribute to cleaner energy generation while reducing dependency on grid electricity.

Other dignitaries present during the MoU signing event include Prof. Sukumar Nandi, Dean, Administration; Mr. K.K. Tewari, Registrar; and Prof. Sisir Kumar Nayak, Associate Dean 1, IPM; Prof. Akhilesh Kumar Maurya, Associate Dean 2, IPM; Prof. Prakash Kotecha, Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering; Dr. R. Anandalakshmi, Associate Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering; and Engineers from IIT Guwahati, along with Mr. Pankaj Ojha, Regional Head - Institutional Banking; Mr. Manoj Sen Deka, Regional Head – Retail; and Mr. Sanjib Choudhury, Chief Manager, from ICICI Bank; Mr. Naoroibam Rishikanta Singh, Lead Development Officer, ICICI Foundation; and Ms. Monika Thapa, Development Officer, ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth, among others.

The proposed solar setup is expected to generate approximately 2.8 million kWh of clean energy annually and will supply power to campus infrastructure including hostels, laboratories, and academic departments.

Speaking during the MoU signing event, Prof. Devendra Jalihal, Director, IIT Guwahati, said, "IIT Guwahati's collaboration with ICICI Foundation is a major step towards strengthening our commitment to sustainable and renewable energy. Through this partnership, we will ensure a greener campus while setting an example for the region to adopt clean energy."

As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative, ICICI Foundation will support the project through a donation of Rs. 6.26 crore. This funding will be utilised for execution of the solar infrastructure through project partners. IIT Guwahati will be responsible for implementation, operations, and long-term maintenance of the facility.

Speaking about collaboration with IIT Guwahati, Mr. Pgo Pumgouthang, Zonal Head, ICICI Foundation, said, "It is a privilege to collaborate with a credible institution like IIT Guwahati in promoting clean and green energy on campus. We are confident that this initiative will create a lasting environmental impact, benefitting the communities inside and outside the campus. We thank IIT Guwahati for their support and cooperation and look forward to building a strong and meaningful partnership."

Speaking about the progress of the project, Prof. Sisir Kumar Nayak, Associate Dean, IPM, IIT Guwahati, said, "With strong support from our engineering teams and implementation partners, the project has moved steadily from planning to execution. The foundations are ready, material is arriving, and installation is progressing well. We are confident that the project will be completed on schedule. We sincerely appreciate the proactive support and swift coordination from ICICI Foundation, and this collaboration has truly helped us accelerate IIT Guwahati's transition toward a more sustainable and energy-efficient campus."

In addition to direct clean energy generation and carbon dioxide emission reduction, the project will also provide academic and research opportunities to researchers and students by providing real-time data access. The initiative is envisioned to serve as a model for low-carbon campus development in Northeast India.

STUDDS Accessories Ltd. and HDFC Bank Launch 'The Helmet Receipt' Safety Campaign to Educate on Safety and Financial Preparedness

HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector bank and STUDDS Accessories Ltd., the world's largest two-wheeler helmet manufacturer by volume in Calendar Year 2024 (Source: CARE Report) have joined hands along with the local traffic police to launch The Helmet Receipt campaign.

The on ground initiative, aligned with the road safety awareness efforts, was designed to prompt riders to pause and consider the real cost of riding without a helmet. The campaign is being executed across 4 states and 12 cities, with 2812 Helmet Receipts having been distributed till date. The campaign ran throughout January, to mark the National Safety Month across high density urban centres in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka & Tamil Nadu. The cities that are participating in the campaign are Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Trichy, Rajkot, Madurai, Mysuru, Mangalore & Hubli.

Over the month long initiative, participating traffic junctions, gave an opportunity to riders to pause and reflect on their irresponsible traffic behaviour of not wearing helmets. The initiative introduces a receipt style slip being handed out at busy traffic signals. Riders wearing helmets receive a "Paid in Advance" appreciation receipt, acknowledging their responsible choice. Riders without helmets are briefly stopped for one signal cycle and handed a Helmet Receipt, a symbolic bill that highlights the long term consequences of a single unsafe decision. The initiative is driven by a clear behavioral insight. While most riders understand that helmets save lives, many still prioritise convenience over consequence. Traditional penalties are often forgotten, and verbal warnings rarely lead to lasting behaviour change. The Helmet Receipt replaces enforcement with reflection, turning a routine traffic stop into a moment of awareness.

Sidhartha Bhushan Khurana, Managing Director, STUDDS Accessories Ltd, said, "Helmet usage isn't about compliance, it's about protecting lives. With the Helmet Receipt campaign, in partnership with HDFC Bank, we aim to move beyond preaching or penalizing and instead create a moment of reflection right where decisions are made. Just a few seconds at a traffic signal can prompt riders to rethink their choices and understand the long-term impact of a single ride. To put it in perspective, as per MoRT&H** in 2023, 54,568 two wheeler riders who lost their lives were not wearing helmets and over 40 percent of road accident victims in India did not use helmets, showing how a simple safety choice can save lives. That brief pause can influence behavior, foster responsibility, and shift mindsets. Our goal is to make safety personal, relatable, and immediate, protecting not just riders, but the families and futures that depend on them."

Mr. Ravi Santhanam, Chief Marketing Officer and Group Head (Brand, Retail Marketing & Customer Analytics), HDFC Bank, said, "Road accidents have consequences that reach far beyond the immediate impact, affecting lives, families, and financial stability. Through this initiative, we encourage people to focus not only on safety on the road but also on being financially prepared for unforeseen events. By making small, conscious behavioural changes today, such as wearing helmets consistently or driving responsibly, individuals can greatly reduce the risk of accidents and the financial and emotional stress that follows. The goal is to protect lives while securing the futures that depend on them." The receipt also creates a subtle link between road safety and financial preparedness. STUDDS reinforces helmets as the first line of defense before an accident, while HDFC Bank's messaging focusses on what follows, medical expenses, income disruption, and the importance of being financially prepared. The campaign avoids product promotion, pricing, or calls to action, keeping the focus firmly on behavior change.

Executed with the support of traffic police, the activation runs at high-density junctions with minimal setup. Each interaction lasts just five to seven seconds, ensuring smooth traffic flow while delivering a message that stays with riders beyond the signal. Designed for easy scalability, The Helmet Receipt campaign uses a single receipt format with regional language adaptations, making it deployable across cities nationwide.

With The Helmet Receipt campaign, HDFC Bank strengthens its position as a life preparedness partner while STUDDS reinforces its role as a safety-first brand while. Together, they remind riders that while some costs are paid on the road, others can last a lifetime.

India Yamaha Motor Inaugurates Road Safety Project in Collaboration with Sriperumbudur District Administration

The project includes installation of ANPR & CCTV cameras along with barricades and high-mast lights, aiming to improve traffic monitoring, deter unlawful activities, and ensure better visibility for commuters.

As part of its commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), India Yamaha Motor Pvt. Ltd. (IYM) proudly announced the inauguration of a comprehensive Road Safety Project aimed at enhancing traffic management and commuter safety along the state highway near its Chennai Plant.

The initiative, undertaken in collaboration with the Sriperumbudur District Administration, is designed to strengthen road safety infrastructure, improve traffic monitoring,

deter unlawful activities, and ensure better visibility for commuters. This project reflects IYM's dedication to creating safer roads and supporting local communities.

The initiative includes the installation of 12 Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras at four critical locations and CCTV cameras at 60 strategic points across Sriperumbudur and surrounding areas. To further strengthen safety infrastructure, 13 police barricades have been provided to aid traffic regulation and enforcement, along with three high-mast lights installed along the state highway to improve night-time visibility.

The Road Safety inauguration ceremony saw presence of Mr. Atsushi Nagashima, Corporate

Director, India Yamaha Motor Pvt. Ltd. along with other Yamaha officials and seniors officers at Sriperumbudur District Administration on 12th February 2026. The Yamaha Motor Group believes that true Corporate Social Responsibility lies in contributing to the sustainable development of society through our business activities, guided by the company's Corporate Philosophy. The sustainability framework rests on four pillars – Health, Education, Environment, and Road Safety. This initiative stands as a testament to Yamaha's dedication to Road Safety, community welfare and preventive care, reinforcing its role as a trusted partner in initiatives that create lasting social impact.

CREDAI Advances Sustainability & Skilling: Launches Second Phase Reforestation and Felicitates RPL-Certified Workers

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI), the apex body representing India's real estate sector, through its CSR Foundation and member network, is initiating the second phase of its flagship ecological reforestation drive across degraded stretches of the Western Ghats, commencing with 700 acres of land restoration. In tandem, the organisation felicitated skilled construction workers who have successfully completed its Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certification, formally recognising their expertise and contribution to the sector.

CREDAI's reforestation initiative launched last year aims to plantation of nearly 2 million saplings across 25 villages, approximately 9,000 acres of degraded forest land in Maharashtra, commencing from Nashik. The initiative encompassed awareness programmes and the promotion of sustainable development practices. It was implemented in collaboration with the Raah Foundation and district authorities in Maharashtra. The organisation had signed two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the District Collector, Nashik, to align the programme with the Government of Maharashtra's regreening priorities and community-based forest management frameworks.

Given the exceptional ecological sensitivity and strategic importance of the Western Ghats, CREDAI Nashik plays a pivotal role in on-ground execution and community coordination, working closely with the national team to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes across all programme phases. To date, more than 3,500 acres have been restored through native-species plantations, supported by soil preparation, trenching, mulching, moisture conservation, and water-harvesting interventions. Plantations proceed at approximately 200 saplings per acre,

Mr. Shekar Patel, President of CREDAI at CSR Foundation

masonry (general, tiling, plastering), shuttering carpentry, and bar bending & steel fixing. CREDAI plans to significantly scale these efforts, targeting the certification of 50,000 construction workers across the country in the coming years.

To further strengthen the sector's talent pipeline, CREDAI's Junior Engineering Programme equips young civil engineers with practical site knowledge, technical readiness, and enhanced employability to meet the demands of rapid urbanisation. Complementing this, CREDAI has forged strategic partnerships with premier institutions for developer leadership development. In collaboration with IIM Ahmedabad, CREDAI offers the Real Estate Development Leadership (RED-L) Programme, a 6-month executive course designed for developers with 7–10 years of experience, focusing on strategic leadership, governance excellence, and industry transformation. Separately, the IIM Bangalore–CREDAI Business Leadership Programme (BLP), develops visionary leaders equipped with advanced skills in strategic thinking, emerging technologies, operational excellence, and adaptive change management in a rapidly evolving sector.

Shekhar Patel, President, CREDAI, said, "As urbanisation and real estate growth accelerate, industry bodies bear a profound responsibility to invest in long-term environmental outcomes. The Western Ghats, sustaining millions through its biodiversity and water resources, has faced decades of degradation, making large-scale restoration an urgent imperative. Launching the second phase of our flagship reforestation drive, we are advancing science-led native-species revival, community stewardship, and rigorous monitoring to regenerate biodiversity, recharge groundwater, restore soil health, strengthen climate resilience, and create enduring livelihoods for local communities.

with multi-year survival monitoring, third-party audits, and active community participation in plantation, protection, and long-term stewardship. This delivers sustained ecological regeneration, groundwater recharge, improved soil health, and enduring livelihood benefits for local communities.

In a dedicated felicitation ceremony, CREDAI honoured construction workers certified under its RPL initiative, highlighting their vital role as the foundation of India's construction ecosystem. These programmes formally validate years of informal on-site experience, converting it into NSQF-aligned, industry-recognised certification delivered by CSDCI-certified trainers. The 10-day learn-while-you-earn model combines 1 hour of daily classroom theory with 7 hours of supervised on-the-job training, ensuring no wage loss or disruption to active sites. Certifications cover key trades:

From being raised in an SOS Children's Village to becoming India's cultural ambassadors, twin girls from Bengaluru win hearts with their dance

Twin sisters Archana and Chetana, who are established Bharatnatyam dancers now with their own institution, Nrithyarpanam School of Dance. However, that was not always the case. What sounds like a dream to many dancers in India, had a humble beginning and took sacrifices and overcoming bumpy roads along the way for these women to be who they are today.

Archana and Chetana, the 39-year-olds from Bengaluru, faced a life-altering loss at the tender age of three, when they lost their mother. Their father, unable to shoulder the sudden mammoth responsibility of raising two toddlers all by himself, turned to SOS Children's Villages India. The girls soon found a home in SOS Children's Villages Bengaluru and they were brought under the care of an SOS Mother, which eventually became the foundation of the lives they lead and their career today.

Sumanta Kar, CEO, SOS Children's Villages India says, "From an early age, SOS Children's Villages India recognised not only their academic potential but also their artistic inclination. Alongside formal schooling, the twins were enrolled in Bharatanatyam classes, a decision that eventually shaped their life's purpose. We ensured that Archana and Chetana grew up in a secure, nurturing family environment that prioritised education, values, and emotional well-being."

With consistent support from SOS India, both sisters successfully completed their bachelor's degrees in engineering. Soon after graduation,

Archana & Chetana are Doordarshan graded artistes

they entered the corporate sector. However, driven by a deep passion for dance nurtured since childhood, they took the brave decision to follow their hearts and left their corporate careers to pursue Bharatanatyam professionally. Their decision was met with encouragement and

support from SOS Children's Villages India as they helped the twins transition into this next phase of their lives. Archana and Chetana eventually went on to become accomplished Bharatanatyam professionals, nationally and internationally recognised for their artistry.

Their achievements include being Cultural Ambassadors of India, a critically acclaimed Arangetram, debut performance in 2004, empanelment as Indian Council for Cultural Relations artists, and multiple prestigious honours such as the Natya Mayuri Award from Chennai, the US Krishna Rao and Chandra Bhagadevi Endowment Award from Karnataka, the Akka Award from Chicago, USA, and Rotary Nachaley 2017. They are also graded artistes of Doordarshan.

Archana said, "We wanted to give back to the dance community that has done so much for us and helped shape who we are. Our childhood would have been incomplete without dance. It is the art that helped us cope with being away from our father, losing our mother, and leaving our house. We don't know where we would be if we didn't have dance in our lives. We opened Nrithyarpanam School of Dance with this thought in mind. If we can even change one life for the better through dance, our work would be successful. We want

Archana and Chetna empanelment as Indian Council for Cultural Relations artists

to be for today's kids what dance was to us, growing up."

"We will be ever grateful to our SOS Mother who brought dance into our lives and insisted that we give it a shot. She could see how difficult it was for us when we initially came to SOS Bengaluru. As we started taking dance lessons, it would be the highlight of our days and we would eagerly look forward to it," added Chetana.

As the eldest children in their SOS family, Archana and Chetana also grew into natural leaders, sharing responsibilities at home and forming strong bonds with their SOS siblings, values of care, responsibility, and togetherness that continue to guide their lives.

Their journey is a powerful testament to how family-like care, holistic education, and sustained emotional support can transform adversity into achievement. Archana and Chetana's story reflect the enduring impact of SOS Children's Villages India in enabling children to not just survive but truly thrive.

Switch Double-Decker Bus to Support Chennai's Heritage Tourism Initiative

Ashok Leyland, the Indian flagship of the Hinduja Group and the country's leading commercial vehicle manufacturer, along with Switch Mobility and Tamil NRIs based in the United States, today gifted a double-decker bus to the Tamil Nadu Tourism Department.

Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.K. Stalin inaugurated Chennai's new double-decker tourism bus service, which will connect the city's iconic landmarks and heritage sites.

The initiative aims to offer residents and tourists an immersive experience of Chennai's rich cultural and architectural heritage, while promoting sustainable and modern urban mobility solutions.

The initiative underscores Ashok Leyland's continued focus on sustainable mobility and highlights its enduring partnership with Tamil Nadu in driving innovation-led growth in public and tourist transportation.

BC Jindal Foundation Invests Rs 40 Crore to Drive Social Impact in FY26

The BC Jindal Foundation, social arm of India's leading business conglomerate, the BC Jindal Group, has announced that it has planned Rs 40 Crore investment for various Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects across India during FY26. Through this investment, the BC Jindal Foundation plans to focus on improving healthcare, skill development, animal welfare and nutrition by expanding its ongoing initiatives and introducing new projects under its CSR program.

The BC Jindal Group, led by Shyam Sunder Jindal, Promoter BC Jindal Group, through its foundation, will intensify its CSR operations in the states of Delhi, West Bengal, Haryana, and Maharashtra, among others. As a result, over 1.7 lakh people stand to benefit directly from BC Jindal Foundation's initiatives in FY26.

"Sustainability as an ideology plays a central role in all undertakings at the BC Jindal Group. The corporate social responsibility initiatives that we have undertaken so far and plan to further implement in FY26 reflect our commitment towards promoting this philosophy. As a responsible organization, we will continue to expand our projects while complementing to the Government of India's agenda of achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030," said a spokesperson of BC Jindal Foundation.

In line with various SDGs, the BC Jindal Foundation, as part of its ongoing initiatives, has undertaken healthcare projects that focus on affordability, accessibility, and quality service. For skill development, the foundation is offering quality training in 9 high employability skill sectors and achieved approx. 70 percent placement rate for the students. The group's community projects, including the drinking water facility at Delhi and the farmers' livelihood program at Marathwada region of Maharashtra, are also in line with sustainable development goals. In addition, the foundation's nutrition projects that so far offered 20 lakhs meals to people below the poverty line focus on the achieving 'Zero Hunger' of SDG 2.

The BC Jindal Group, which also runs the Meena Devi Jindal Charitable Polyclinic, plans to invest approximately Rs 4 crore to further expand the facility in FY26-27. As part of this growth plan, the foundation targets to benefit over 1 lakh people directly and will invest in dialysis, dental, physiotherapy, pathology, healthcare skilling, and diagnostics. "In FY25-26, we have largely focused on enhancing the capacity of our flagship projects in terms of adding new services at our polyclinics to offer comprehensive healthcare services to unserved community. In addition, we have also commenced the construction of a Polyclinic in the Nalwa and a Skill Centre at Belur, Howrah, this year," the spokesperson added.

To address the key challenges of accessibility and affordability in India's healthcare sector, the BC Jindal Foundation has set up polyclinics in New Delhi, Nalwa in Haryana, Howrah in West Bengal, and Angul in Odisha. Over the years, these facilities, in addition to improving accessibility, have helped communities to economically by reducing their medical expenditures. The group's expansion plans are expected to directly benefit approximately 2.5 lakh people across all 4 polyclinics run by the foundation.

Founded in 1952 by Shri B.C. Jindal, the BC Jindal Group, led by Shyam Sunder Jindal, Promoter, BC Jindal Group, is one of India's leading conglomerates and is engaged in a diverse portfolio of businesses that includes packaging films, energy & steel products.

Mpower Youthopia Sets World Record with Largest Student-Led Mood Parade

Mpower Youthopia, a youth mental health festival organised by Mpower, an initiative of the Aditya Birla Education Trust, has received an Official World Record from the Official World Record Association (OWRA) for hosting the largest student-led Mood Parade at BK Birla College, Kalyan in Thane district near Mumbai.

Held as part of Birlotsav, the college's intercollegiate youth festival, the Mood Parade witnessed the participation of over 900 students aged between 8 and 20 years, who came together to express 12 identified emotions. The parade aimed to normalise emotional expression and spark meaningful conversations around mental health among young people.

The two-day Mpower Youthopia festival saw an overwhelming response, with over 7,000 students from more than 50 colleges across Mumbai and neighbouring regions taking part in a wide range of awareness-driven activities.

In addition to the record-breaking event, Mpower conducted an on-ground survey among students attending the festival to understand their emotional support-seeking behaviour and the challenges influencing it. The findings revealed that 55 percent of students turn to friends when seeking emotional support, while 25 percent rely on family members. Notably, 15 percent reported not seeking support from anyone, and only 5 percent approached psychologists or teachers, highlighting the continued low engagement with formal mental health services.

The survey further identified academic pressure (30 percent) as

Largest Student Mood Parade for Mental Health Awareness at Mpower Youthopia

Mpower Youthopia sets a world record for the Largest Student Mood Parade for Mental Health Awareness

the leading concern among students, followed by personal relationship issues (25 percent). Career-related anxiety (20 percent) and anxiety or overthinking (20 percent) were also prominent, while body image issues and social bullying (5 percent) emerged as additional stressors.

Commenting on the initiative, Neerja Birla, Founder of Mpower and the Aditya Birla Education Trust, said, "Mental health support must reach young people where they are—on college campuses and within their everyday lives. Initiatives like Mpower Youthopia bring together awareness, access and peer engagement, empowering students to seek support without fear and actively contribute to a culture of well-being. This is an investment in the emotional resilience of India's future."

With recent data indicating that over 7 percent of Indian adolescents experience mental health challenges and a significant care gap persists, Mpower is strengthening and expanding its campus-focused initiatives to improve awareness and access to timely mental health support for young people across the country.
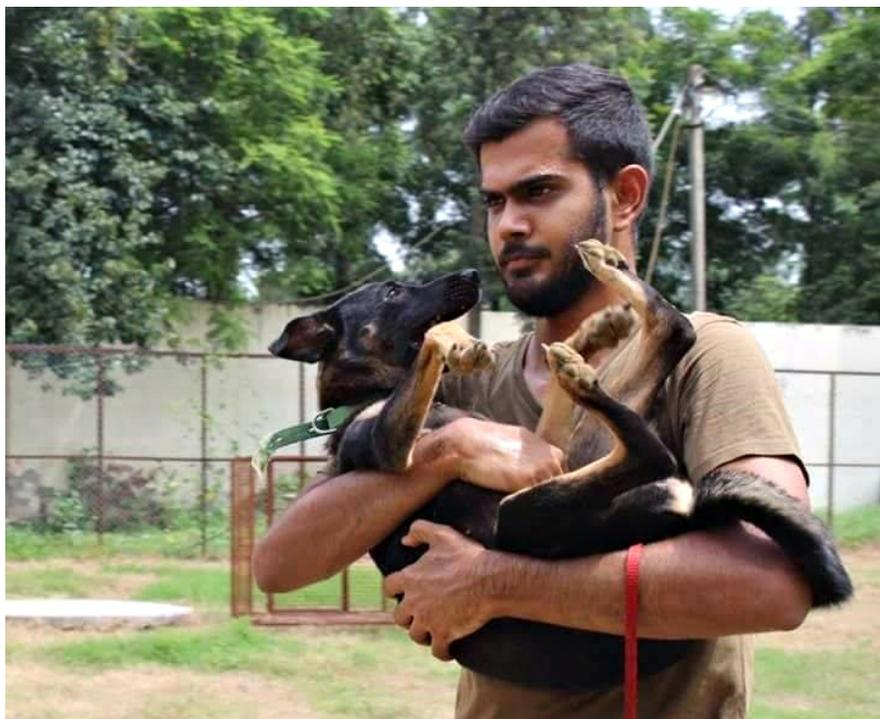
K9 School Launches National Dog Bite Prevention & Reduction Campaign

K9 Healers, in collaboration with K9 School, has launched the National Dog Bite Prevention & Reduction Campaign—a science-led public safety initiative that fully supports animal welfare, rescue, feeding, and ABC/neutering programmes.

India records an estimated 17–18 million animal bite cases annually, with dogs responsible for the vast majority. The World Health Organization estimates that India accounts for approximately 36% of global human rabies deaths, nearly all dog-mediated. While free-ranging dogs account for a higher volume of reported bites, evidence from behavioural science, hospital surveillance, and field assessments shows pet dog bites as a more serious and preventable category they disproportionately occur inside homes, involve children and family members, result in severe injury and trauma, and are preceded by prolonged warning signs that go unaddressed.

Field assessments by K9 School and K9 Healers reveal that over 70% of serious pet dog bite cases exhibited clear warning signals noticed but rationalised, ignored, or suppressed months or years before the incident. Common contributing factors include lack of structured training, delayed intervention, unverified handling environments, and absence of accountability after early warnings. Unethical breeding from unregulated puppy mills and backyard operations exacerbates this, with inbreeding, early maternal separation, and lack of temperament screening producing dogs with reduced stress tolerance, heightening bite risk in inexperienced homes.

"India's dog bite crisis is not a behavioural mystery or a breed issue; it is a systemic failure of early intervention, regulation, and public understanding," said Adnaan Khan, Founder, K9 School and K9 Healers. "Decades of behavioural science and public health data show that most dog bites—particularly pet dog bites—are predictable and

preventable when early warning signals, breeding practices, and handling environments are addressed in time. When these factors are ignored, risk accumulates silently. This campaign aims to move the discourse away from targeting community dogs and towards strengthening responsible pet ownership, ethical breeding, and better pet laws. We are equally focused on prevention in community settings, with proven, welfare-aligned models for community dog bite reduction already being successfully implemented across select RWAs. By shifting from fear-driven reactions to evidence-based prevention, we can protect both citizens and animals while fully supporting welfare efforts. Effective prevention requires mandatory pet owner education, early behavioural screening, breeder regulation, verified handling standards, and clear accountability pathways after warning incidents."

Community dog bites, estimated at 70–80% of reported incidents, are a manageable secondary challenge primarily linked to territorial disruption, reproductive stress, and environmental instability, not inherent aggression. The campaign champions strengthened neutering and vaccination programmes, alongside collaboration with stray feeders, rescue workers, and ABC/neutering staff to reduce hunger-driven conflict and enable behavioural rehabilitation.

The initiative proposes a prevention-first, welfare-aligned six-layer framework:

- Regulation of unethical breeding
- Mandatory pre-acquisition owner education
- Early behavioural screening
- Behaviour-aware handling environments
- Strengthened neutering and vaccination programmes
- National public education on canine communication and warning signals

Rollout will begin with public education and narrative reset, followed by institutional engagement and policy dialogue, aiming to establish dog bite prevention as a recognised public safety category in India. K9 Healers will lead education, advocacy, and policy efforts, with K9 School providing applied behavioural science expertise and prevention outcomes.

World Bank to help skill training

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has approved financing to revamp India's network of skills training institutes to better align with labor market needs and open up more job opportunities for the millions of graduates entering the workforce. Jobs are central to India's growth trajectory, competitiveness, and meeting its ambitions of becoming Viksit Bharat. India's youth account for roughly 72 percent of the unemployed, and there is a persistent skills mismatch—between what young people are trained for and what firms need—which continues to constrain productivity, firm growth, and earnings. While the country's system of Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) play a significant role in skilling youth, the institutes face critical challenges, with many lacking proper facilities, qualified trainers, and the resources necessary to meet industry standards. This has led to a graduate job placement rate of less than 50 percent.

The Supporting Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation Through Upgraded ITIs (PM-SETU) Program ($830 million loan) aims to revamp the network of ITIs to better align skills training with labor market needs, produce more than a million better-skilled workers each year, and bring more young graduates into the workforce. The Program, which has been prepared jointly with the Asian Development Bank, will bring private sector investment into the ITI system by mobilizing at least $680 million in private capital.

"With more than 12 million people entering the labor market every year, job creation is a national priority for India," said Paul Procee, Acting Country Director, World Bank India. "Private sector-led job creation is at the heart of the World Bank Group's new Country Partnership Framework for India. By supporting India's $4 billion investments to upgrade ITIs, this Program will embed industry-driven training across the system so that high placement rates become the norm, not the exception."

Most of the trades offered in ITIs, such as electrician, mechanic, or welder, are traditionally male dominated. Over the next five years, the Program will update curricula and ensure that at least 25 percent of ITI students are women, helping them gain access to better-paid jobs.

"The Program will now help ITIs provide a more balanced mix of training, consultancy, and production functions so that they can generate their own revenues to expand and improve training," said Marguerite Clarke and Toby Linden, the task team leaders of the Program. "Through a hub-and-spoke model with extension centers, the institutes will become specialized and resource-efficient centers of excellence."

The $830 million loan has a final maturity of 19.5 years, including a grace period of four years.

Goa Institute of Management Study Links Sustainable Hiring and Socialisation to Environmental Responsibility

A study conducted by faculty at Goa Institute of Management (GIM) highlights how sustainable hiring, purpose-driven onboarding, and value-based socialisation processes can transform employees into committed advocates of environmental responsibility within organisations. The study emphasises that sustainability efforts are more effective when employees are actively involved rather than being passive recipients of organisational policies.

While conversations about sustainability focus on policies and businesses in the mainstream, this study addresses a more complex, and yet still unexplored, dimension of organisational sustainability by introducing a concept of the 'green citizen'. This refers to an employee whose identity, values and everyday actions comprising a strong and self-directed commitment to sustainability that transcends defined job responsibilities. This conceptualisation of a 'green citizen' is concerned with the voluntary and self-initiated actions employees take in the context of their organisational roles, alongside their self-identity, to sustain the organisational objectives.

Led by Prof. Rahul Sukumaran, Assistant Professor, Department of OB and HR, Goa Institute of Management, in collaboration with Prof. Shaju Meetna, LEAD College of Management, the findings of this study have been published in the prestigious International Journal of Organizational Analysis

On a global scale, sustainability initiatives generally focus on macro-level interventions such as regulatory compliance, corporate strategies, and global standards.

Prof. Rahul Sukumaran, Assistant Professor, GIM

The study conducted by GIM faculty argues that long-term sustainability can only be achieved when employees internalise green values as part of their organisational identity and everyday work practices.

Key findings of the study include –

- Organisations that recruit employees whose values align with sustainability goals lay the foundation for authentic green practices.
- Socialisation processes of new recruits that emphasise sustainability strengthen employees' long-term commitment to environmental responsibility.
- Green citizens go beyond compliance and voluntarily engage in sustainability initiatives.
- Employees who align with their organisation's sustainability initiatives adopt green thinking in everyday decision-making.

Speaking about the findings of the research, Prof. Rahul Sukumaran, Assistant Professor, Department of OB and HR, Goa Institute of Management, said, "Paradoxically,

Prof. Shaju Meetna, LEAD College of Management

green citizenship begins with the individual, and paves way for sustainable management practices that enable organizational growth."

The employee-centric approach taken by the research team makes the study unique in its findings. The research links broad sustainability concepts with daily behaviours in the workplace through the lenses of newcomer socialisation, person–organisation fit, and organisational identification. The insights are practical for leaders, higher-education practitioners, and sustainability practitioners. Embedding sustainability in the recruitment and cultural pillars of an organisation enhances employee engagement, innovation, and job satisfaction, thus advancing environmental goals, alongside organisational performance.

The research encourages organisations to integrate sustainability into their core identity, rather than as an ancillary policy. This allows employees to assume responsibility for sustainable practices and achieve significant and sustained positive impact for the environment.

Tenneco Clean Air India Launches 'Vriksharopan Abhiyan' in Pune with Plantation of 5,000 Saplings

Tenneco Clean Air India, in collaboration with the 15th Battalion of the Jat Regiment and Vaghmi Foundation, launched Vriksharopan Abhiyan, a large-scale tree plantation initiative at the Jat Regiment premises in Lullanagar, Pune. The programme includes the plantation of 5,000 saplings with maintenance for 18 months to ensure long-term sustainability.

The activity was attended by Tenneco leadership, officers and personnel of the 15th Battalion of the Jat Regiment, and representatives from Vaghmi Foundation. The initiative reinforces Tenneco's continued commitment to environmental conservation and community partnership.

Speaking about the initiative, Rishi Verma, President, Tenneco India said, "The Vriksharopan Abhiyan is a meaningful step in Tenneco's larger ambition to contribute to India's environmental priorities. Our focus is on nurturing long-term green cover through structured care, protection and scientific monitoring. Through this collaborative effort, we aim to create healthier, more resilient ecosystems that benefit the community for years to come."

Each sapling planted under the initiative will be tagged and documented to enable systematic monitoring, survival tracking, and quarterly reporting by the Vaghmi Foundation. Employees from Tenneco and the Foundation will continue to stay involved through periodic revisits, reinforcing sustained engagement and responsibility towards the environment. Tenneco Clean Air India Ltd. brings

Col. Bharat Singh Jhala, SM – Commanding Officer, 15th battalion, Jat Regiment, Mr. Rishi Verma, President, Tenneco India along with Tenneco team at the Vriksharopan Abhiyan in Pune

Tenneco Team, along with the members of the Vaghmi Foundation at the tree plantation drive in the Jat Regiment, Pune

advanced engineering, strong manufacturing capability and a nationwide footprint to India's automotive ecosystem. As part of the global Tenneco Group, the company supports OEMs with high-quality clean air, powertrain and suspension systems, while maintaining a strong focus on safety, efficiency and responsible operations.

Myntra Cares launches mobility-led livelihood initiative along with education programs for underserved communities

Through its flagship initiative 'Livelihoods on Wheels' and programs under 'MynVidya', Myntra Cares is bridging the opportunity gap for persons with disabilities, migrant children and aspiring students

Myntra, one of India's leading fashion, beauty and lifestyle platforms, today announced the launch of four initiatives under its CSR and Sustainability arm, Myntra Cares, covering two core focus areas including mobility-enabled livelihoods and education under MynVidya.

One of the initiatives, Livelihoods on Wheels, focuses on enabling employment and independence for persons with disabilities through mobility support; other programs under the MynVidya umbrella are aimed at contributing to Myntra

Cares' commitment towards strengthening education pathways at different stages.

Livelihoods on Wheels in partnership with Alamba Charitable Trust aims for enabling sustainable livelihoods for 20 mobility-impaired individuals. Under the program, each beneficiary will be provided with NeoMotion mobility equipment valued at Rs 1,10,000, enabling independent mobility. Beneficiaries identified and onboarded by the Trust will be recruited, as delivery agents, creating access to stable income opportunities. Through this

support, participants are expected to earn Rs 25,000–30,000 per month.

Speaking about the initiative, Rita Antony, Founder-President, Alamba Charitable Trust, said, "Mobility should never be a barrier to opportunity. With Myntra Cares, we are providing tools, training and sustainable livelihood options to differently-abled individuals, enabling them to earn independently while regaining confidence and dignity. This is a step toward truly inclusive empowerment."

Myntra Cares continues to drive education-focused programs that support learners at different stages of their academic journey.

■ Myntra has partnered with Links Educational and Charitable Trust to provide primary education to 90 children from migrant worker families who have been historically excluded from formal

schooling. The program operates from a dedicated learning centre near Myntra's Bengaluru headquarters and supports students through the National Open School System, covering Levels 1, 2, and 3 (equivalent to Grades 3, 5, and 7).

- Myntra Cares is undertaking a school infrastructure transformation initiative at BKMS School, a government-aided institution near Commercial Street, Bangalore, in partnership with CommuniTree. The phased renovation, scheduled between October 2025 and March 2026, includes classroom upgrades, sanitation facilities, lighting, wiring, and digital learning infrastructure.

- To support access to higher education, Myntra Cares has partnered with Buddy4Study to provide scholarships to 175 students, including 75 from traditional artisan families and 100 from low-income garment worker families. Eligible students will receive ₹20,000 on a reimbursement basis and will be supported for three years of graduation in STEAM disciplines. Speaking on the initiatives,

Govindraj MK, Chief Human Resources Officer, Myntra, said, "Through Myntra Cares, we are addressing distinct needs of the community. We are enabling livelihoods through mobility while continuing to invest in education under MynVidya. Together, these initiatives reflect our commitment to structured, long-term community engagement."

Speaking about the school transformation initiative, Hafiz Khan, Founder, CommuniTree, said, "The BKMS school transformation project is about more than infrastructure; it's about creating a nurturing environment where children from underserved backgrounds can learn, grow, and aspire. We are excited to work with Myntra to give this heritage building a new life and a brighter future for its students."

Speaking on the collaboration, Urvi Jariwala, Founder-Trustee, Links Educational and Charitable Trust, mentioned, "At Links Trust, we believe every child, regardless of where they come from, deserves a fair chance at a brighter future. Children of migrant labourers often bear the weight of displacement and

economic hardship, but with this collaboration with Myntra Cares, we are turning hope into opportunity. Together, we're enabling 90 children to access quality education, giving them not just books and classrooms, but a pathway to dream, learn and grow with dignity."

Speaking on the scholarship initiative, Ashutosh Burnwal, Founder, Buddy4Study Foundation said, "Through our collaboration with Myntra, we're able to reach deserving students from families of artisans and garment workers who often lack access to financial support for higher education. By combining our operational platform with Myntra's strong community networks, we aim to empower the next generation with the education and skills they need to thrive".

These initiatives mark the expansion of Myntra's voluntary CSR efforts, reflecting a holistic approach to community development. By bringing together dedicated partners and focusing on measurable impact, Myntra aims to foster long-term change that creates pathways to education, skills and sustainable livelihoods.

WattPower Brings Clean Energy to Schools, Supporting Infrastructure Growth and Awareness on Solar Power Adoption

Guided by its core purpose, Wired for Good, WattPower, in partnership with Varanasi Round Table 196 and Varanasi Ladies Circle 129, has supported a series of infrastructure and student-focused initiatives at Round Table Abhinav Vidyalay in Mirzamurad, Varanasi, aimed at strengthening the school's learning environment and overall student well-being.

Round Table Abhinav Vidyalay currently educates over 450 students from

rural and underserved communities. As part of the collaboration, four additional classrooms are under construction, enabling the school to accommodate 100+ new students by March. The expansion addresses immediate space constraints and supports more structured, accessible learning for a growing student population.

Together, these efforts reflect a holistic approach to community engagement—one that recognises education as more than physical infrastructure alone

and places equal importance on access, awareness, and health.

Commenting on the initiative, Divya Prakash Chororia, CEO & Co-Founder, WattPower, said: "Wired for Good is personal to me because real impact goes beyond what we install—it's about what we enable. Whether it's expanding access to education, improving daily well-being, or sparking early awareness around sustainability, this belief defines how WattPower shows up in everything we do."

India's First Collaborative Animal Welfare Funding Circle Introduced at the India Animal Welfare Forum

National convening highlights that animal welfare receives just 1.5% of India's CSR funding while calling for policy-aligned, collaborative solutions

With animal welfare accounting for only 1.5% of India's CSR funding, the India Animal Welfare Forum (IAWF) launched the country's first collaborative Animal Welfare Funding Circle, backed by an initial Rs 14 crore from Upadhyaya Foundation, India Animal Fund, Caring Friends, Mela Foundation and Coefficient Giving to address long-standing funding gaps

in the sector. The national convening brought together policymakers, philanthropists, NGOs, researchers, legal experts, sector leaders and conservation leaders to deliberate on critical challenges facing animal welfare in India, including chronic underfunding, policy implementation gaps and the need for coordinated, policy-aligned action to position animal welfare as a development priority.

The Funding Circle will function as a collaborative platform to channel philanthropic capital towards scalable, evidence-based animal welfare initiatives, with a focus on long-term impact, accountability and systemic change across regions and species.

Led by the family philanthropy Upadhyaya Foundation, the Forum facilitated cross-sector collaboration and dialogue, positioning animal welfare not as a peripheral charitable cause but as a critical development and policy priority intrinsically linked to public health, climate resilience, livelihoods and urban resilience.

The agenda reflected the breadth and complexity of the sector, with sessions including

- Funding Animal Welfare: Why India Needs Philanthropic Boldness
- Building India's Animal Welfare Narrative: From Compassion to Development Priority (in partnership with FIAPO)
- From Conflict to Coexistence (with WWF India)
- Policy in Action: The Supreme Court Street Dog Case (with People for Animals Public Policy Foundation)

These discussions examined the intersection of law, on ground research, public safety, and animal welfare, particularly in urban India.

The Forum also marked the launch of a first-of-its-kind Snake Conservation Coalition in the Western Ghats, bringing funders, Researchers, Herpetalogist, Conservation specialists, Venom Experts and NGOs onto a shared platform to advance snake conservation, an often overlooked and underfunded area within the animal welfare and conservation ecosystem.

Additional sessions focused on coalition-led approaches to conservation, the role of collaboration versus independent action in driving impact, the use of technology and AI in animal welfare, and shifting public narratives around farmed animals through advocacy. To enable deeper engagement and potential partnerships, closed-door sessions were organised between NGOs and funders, allowing selected organisations working across community animal welfare, policy and advocacy, wildlife conservation, and habitat protection to present their work and engage in focused discussions.

Speaking about the Forum, Brinda Upadhyaya, Co-founder, Upadhyaya Foundation, said, "The Indian animal welfare forum was an attempt to highlight animal welfare as a key issue in philanthropy and community service. Animals play a vital role in human life and their conservation and well-being is important for public health and environmental sustenance.

Despite this, their needs and rights have been ignored and their suffering, largely unaddressed. At this forum, we tried to provide a coordinated ecosystem to ensure the wellbeing of animals across all spectrums, we aimed at bridging gaps in strategic funding by encouraging philanthropic support for groups working hard towards the cause."

By convening stakeholders who rarely intersect and amplifying underrepresented voices, the India Animal Welfare Forum sought to shift animal welfare from the margins of philanthropy to the mainstream, encouraging informed, intentional, and sustained investment across funding, policy engagement, and public discourse.

"A forum like this is vital because it brings together diverse voices working toward a shared goal: improving the lives of animals," said Sethu Vaidyanathan, a seasoned entrepreneur with leadership experience across more than 20 companies and an animal welfare advocate. "It creates space to share knowledge, align strategies, and build partnerships that can lead to more effective, coordinated action. By learning from one another, the sector can adapt, innovate, and have a greater collective impact."

The Forum concluded with a shared recognition that long-term capital, coordinated action, and policy-aligned approaches are essential to addressing India's growing animal welfare challenges in an increasingly urbanised and climate-sensitive landscape. ©

NIT Rourkela Crosses Milestone with over 100 Granted Patents, Marking a Significant Leap in Research and Innovation Trajectory

The National Institute of Technology Rourkela (NIT Rourkela) has established itself as an innovative educational institution in India by receiving its 101st patent. The Institute has filed 230 patents (218 national and 12 international) and received 97 national and 4 international patents, marking an impressive milestone in national and international research and innovation.

The Institute has witnessed substantial increases over the years for patents filed and granted, and in 2025, the Institute received 23 patents, adding to their steady growth over the years. Given that patents take considerable time to be examined and approved, the 2025 patent filings will show outstanding results in the following years.

Key innovation domains

The granted patents from NIT Rourkela span across diverse domains including but not limited to:

- AI-based vehicular communication systems
- Autonomous drone technologies
- Industrial waste treatment prototypes
- Health-monitoring IoT devices
- Sustainable food packaging technologies
- Advanced materials derived from waste resources

Speaking about the achievement, Prof. K. Umamaheshwar Rao, Director, NIT Rourkela, said, "Surpassing 100 granted patents marks a significant milestone in NIT Rourkela's journey toward building a strong culture of research, innovation, and intellectual property creation. In the last three years, NIT Rourkela has filed over 230 patents, of which 101 have been granted. This growing portfolio of patents is paving the way to sustain strategic focuses on several pivotal domains such as AI-driven technologies, sustainable materials, healthcare and biomedical solutions, semiconductors, and water research. With 91 patent applications filed in 2025 alone, we are increasing our pace to foster an innovation-centric ecosystem and aim to double the number of granted patents in the coming year, contributing meaningfully to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047."

To support its faculty in filing patents to protect and secure their innovations and technologies, NIT Rourkela's Centre for Intellectual

Property Rights (CIPR) serves as a comprehensive platform for intellectual property development. It supports:

- Creating awareness and capacity in IP matters within and beyond the institute
- Reviewing and approving IP proposals from faculty and students
- Assisting in patent filing, prosecution, and grant processes
- Facilitating licensing, technology transfer, and collaborations
- Supporting MoUs and issuing NOCs related to IP matters

Speaking about CIPR at NIT Rourkela, Prof. Sujit Sen, Chairperson, CIPR, said, "Incepted by Prof. K. Umamaheshwar Rao, Director, NIT Rourkela in 2022, CIPR aims to boost institutional academic credentials and rankings, and foster industry collaborations, while rewarding inventors for innovative, novel, and non-obvious solutions. Efforts such as "One scholar, one patent" for the research scholars have shown positive outcomes in gaining this remarkable fleet of 100+ granted patents. In 2026, we aim to file a minimum of 200 patents and envision achieving the goal of "One patent a day" in the coming three years. CIPR notes that the 2026 Budget measures show a policy approach that links IP creation with building capabilities in key sectors, while also improving the environment for generating and commercialising legally protectable IP through scale, wider participation, and continued public investment."

Looking forward, NIT Rourkela aims to strengthen its innovation ecosystem by expanding industry partnerships, increasing international patent filings, and promoting technology transfer for societal and industrial impact.

Patent development at NIT Rourkela contributes directly to national goals such as Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India by promoting indigenous innovation, supporting industrial competitiveness, attracting investments, and fostering sustainable technological development aligned with India's socioeconomic priorities. The Institute remains committed to bringing the research lab to the real world and positioning itself as a global leader in technology-driven innovation. C

Global Lancet Commission, with Goa Institute of Management Participation, Calls for Health System Overhaul in India

A researcher from the Goa Institute of Management (GIM) has collaborated with a global research team on a major national health policy initiative published by The Lancet, one of the world's leading medical journals. The Lancet Commission on a citizen-centred health system for India Report, presents a comprehensive roadmap to build a citizen-centred equitable, and resilient healthcare system for India.

Dr. Kheya. M. Furtado, Associate Professor and Chair of GIM's Centre for Health Systems Design and Management, has partnered with leading experts from public health,

medicine, policy, private industry, management, and civil society across India and internationally, to contribute to this report.

The report highlights the need to transform fragmented health systems and programmes into integrated delivery systems to better meet citizens' needs. It also promotes the importance of universal health coverage, while being responsive to the health system challenges of the future.

The Commission report identifies a once-in-a-generation opportunity for India to build a health system that provides accessible, affordable, and quality services to every citizen. Its recommendations are for reforms

that address issues of quality, governance, accountability, and the coordination of the health system.

Key findings -

Based on the study, the Commission concludes that for a long time, India's health challenges have been attributed to the lack of healthcare infrastructure or the demand for these services. Rather, the current challenges for achieving universal health coverage are:

- Uncoordinated and fragmented pathways in service delivery
- Inefficiencies in health spending
- Weak accountability and governance

- Financial protection that does not sufficiently protect the population from out-of-pocket expenses for health care services
- Inadequate and inequitable distribution of health care services within and between regions

In response, the report outlines six strategic reforms to transform the problem areas within India's health system.

1. Community accountability and participation reinforce placing citizens within the health system.
2. Publicly financed and delivered healthcare systems need to be strengthened to focus on comprehensive high-quality primary care, along with integrated referral systems and reformed institutional structures for governance and provider payments.
3. There needs to be greater alignment of the private sector to the attainment of the universal health coverage goals through the right incentives and regulation to control the rising cost of care and uneven quality.
4. Responsible use of digital and technological advancements should be harnessed to improve systems of coordination, diagnosis, and service delivery.
5. Decentralised governance structures should be more effective through data for evidence-based decision making and greater local accountability and innovation
6. Cross-institutional improvements should be for the purpose of innovation, frequent use of data, and to promote a system of continuous learning.

Speaking about the initiative, Dr. Kheya M. Furtado, Commission Co-author, and Associate Professor, GIM, said, "We recognise that given India's diversity across and within States, we cannot provide a single reform pathway for the country but rather evidence-based ideas for governments to adapt, based on local realities, consultations with local stakeholders,

Prof. Ajit Parulekar, Director, GIM, during the Policy Dialogue event

and through continuous experimentation and evaluation."

Policy Dialogue on the Recommendations of the Lancet Commission on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India

To disseminate the findings and recommendations of the report, GIM hosted a Policy Dialogue on the Recommendations of the Lancet Commission on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India, on 6th February 2026, at its campus.

Aimed at reimagining India's health system towards ViksitBharat@2047, the event was graced by the esteemed presence of Prof. Vikram Patel, Harvard Medical School; Dr. Shaheen K Saiyed, Deputy Director of Health Services, Government of Goa; Prof. Ajit Parulekar, Director, GIM; Dr. Grace Achungura, Team Leader (Health Systems), World Health Organisation, India Country Office, Dr. Prakash S, CEO Health Insurance General Insurance Council and Dr. Nachiket Mor, among other health system experts from the private and public sector.

Speaking during the event, Dr. Shaheen Saiyed, Dy. Director (Medical), Directorate of Health Services, Goa, said, "Goa's

Healthcare system continues to advance with stronger service delivery, improved population health outcomes, wider digital adoption, and enhanced accessibility across health system in alignment with national priorities ensuring essential quality health services from health promotion to palliative care. Goa envisions a future where healthcare is equitable accessible and sustainable."

Speaking during the event, Prof. Vikram Patel, Commission co-Chair and Professor at Harvard Medical School emphasised that the single most important call to action of the Commission's research and analysis is "a high-performing, publicly financed and publicly provided, integrated, citizen-centred healthcare delivery system as the primary vehicle for UHC as only the public sector has historically had the mandate and mission to achieve health equity," while shaping the private sector to leverage its strengths and align with Universal Health Coverage objectives of access, affordability, and quality.

The event hosted multiple panel discussion on topics including:

- Financing, governance and service delivery reforms in the public sector and the role of citizen participation
- Engaging the private sector to align with UHC goals and leveraging digital technologies to reimagine healthcare delivery
- Promoting a learning health system through peer learning, collaboration and transparency

GIM's participation in the Commission underscores the institute's commitment to shaping solutions for complex societal challenges. Through its Healthcare Management program, research initiatives and newly established Centre for Health Systems Design and Management, GIM continues to prepare leaders capable of strengthening healthcare policy, delivery, and management in India. ⊡

CSR INDIA UNITED

PepsiCo India Scales Impact of RevolutioNari Initiative, Enabling Livelihoods for 55,000+ Women with Mrida Heart 'N Soil Foundation

Partnership to expand footprint to 1,000 villages, impacting 120,000 rural women and strengthening women-led livelihoods and resilient communities

Reinforcing its commitment to inclusive growth and community empowerment, PepsiCo India, in partnership with Mrida Heart 'N Soil Foundation, is enabling women-centric skilling and livelihood development across rural India. Anchored in PepsiCo India's Partnership of Progress philosophy, the initiative has reached over 55,000 women across 272 villages in five States and Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, supporting sustainable livelihoods rooted in local contexts.

The initiative is part of PepsiCo India's broader skilling and empowerment ecosystem under RevolutioNari, a nation-building initiative focused on bridging India's skilling gap through community outreach, targeted upskilling, and livelihood creation. Building on current momentum, the program aims to expand to 1,000 villages across more than 15 States/UTs, scaling both reach and impact.

Key Impact and Scale of the Program

- **55,100+ women** reached through community awareness and mobilisation (AwareNaris)
- **4,800+ women** equipped with market-relevant and advanced skills (SkilledNaris & UpskilledNaris)
- **25 women** enabled as micro-entrepreneurs, setting up trade-specific enterprises (EntrepreuNaris)
- **2,000+ sessions** conducted across villages, building trust, enabling knowledge transfer, and supporting women's progression through structured pathways of social and economic empowerment.
- Livelihood opportunities include tailoring, khakhra production, soap and agarbatti making, beauty and wellness services, natural farming, agri and food processing, jewellery making, and mehendi and nail art, among others, aligned with local demand and income sustainability.

Speaking about the initiative, Yashika Singh, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer and Sustainability Head, PepsiCo India and South Asia, said, "At PepsiCo India, we believe inclusive growth begins at the community level, when women are equipped with the skills, confidence, and opportunities to shape their own futures. We started this initiative with a simple vision: to enable rural women to build skills, pursue livelihoods, and emerge as leaders in their communities. The impact across 272 villages inspires us to expand the program to 1,000 villages, reaching even more women and creating pathways for sustainable livelihoods. This is the essence of our 'Partnership of Progress' philosophy, bringing together grassroots expertise and institutional scale to deliver lasting impact. When women lead change in their communities, progress becomes self-sustaining."

Commenting on the program, Arun Nagpal, Mrida Co-Founder & Director, said, "This collaboration with PepsiCo India has enabled us to significantly deepen our reach and impact. By combining community trust with structured skilling

and entrepreneurship support, we are witnessing meaningful change, women making informed financial decisions, leading micro-enterprises, and inspiring others to follow. Women's empowerment is a core pillar of Mrida's rural development strategy. Partnerships like these are critical to building resilient and empowered rural communities, while ensuring development initiatives are both sustainable and scalable."

Sharing her experience, Phool Kumari, a program participant from Village Batra, Block Milak, District Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, said, "This training gave me the skills and confidence to start my own small business and inspire other women in my village. I never imagined I could become a role model in my community."

Beyond scale, the initiative has strengthened local leadership, improved financial decision-making among women, and enabled greater ownership of livelihood initiatives at the village level, contributing to long-term community resilience. The expansion ahead will continue to be driven through collaborations with like-minded organisations, government bodies, and local stakeholders, recognising that partnerships are central to delivering sustainable, large-scale social transformation.

Vedanta Power's Mega Health Camp Benefits 340 Community Members in Punjab

Talwandi Sabo Power Limited (TSPL), Punjab's largest and North India's largest private thermal power plant, organised a Mega Health Camp at Village Raipur, Mansa, under its flagship healthcare initiative Project SEHAT, reaffirming its commitment to community well-being and preventive healthcare.

The initiative witnessed strong community participation, with 338 patients availing free medical consultations and healthcare services. A team of qualified doctors, including a General Physician, Gynaecologist, Dermatologist, and Dentist, provided expert consultations and medical guidance.

As part of the camp, beneficiaries received free diagnostic tests such as Blood Pressure (BP), Hemoglobin (HB), Blood Sugar, Malaria, Dengue, and Blood Group tests, along with free medicines, ensuring timely and accessible healthcare support for all.

The camp was inaugurated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony by Sarpanch of Village Raipur, Sukhraj Singh, along with other Panchayat members (Makhan Singh, Ram Singh, Jagjeet Singh, Sukhwinder Singh, Davinder Singh, Amardeep Singh, and Harpreet Singh), marking the commencement of a comprehensive healthcare outreach

programme for the local community and reflecting strong community engagement. The TSPL team was represented by Yeshmeen Mittal from its CSR team.

Officials from the Health Department who attended the camp included Nirmal Singh, Health Inspector; Ajaib Singh, MPHW (Multi-purpose Health Worker); and Kiran Pal Kaur, ASHA Facilitator, strengthening coordination between TSPL and public health services.

Pankaj Sharma, CEO of TSPL, said that the company's focus on community health under Project SEHAT reflects its belief that strong communities are built on good health. He noted that the initiative strengthens grassroots healthcare through timely medical support, diagnostics, and awareness, while programmes such as the Mega Health Camp held at Raipur contribute to lasting social impact and inclusive rural development.

Continuing its healthcare outreach, TSPL benefitted over 390 community members last week through health camps in Villages Kamalu and Behniwal, an eye care camp in Village Dhingar, and a Dental OPD session at PHC Behniwal.

Through Project SEHAT, TSPL remains focused on preventive healthcare, early diagnosis, and accessible medical services across its operational areas. The initiative aligns with Vedanta Power's ESG vision of 'Transforming for Good', reinforcing its commitment to community health, sustainable development, and inclusive growth.

UNDP India launches its Annual Report: The India-UNDP Partnerships 2025

From SDG localization, acceleration, and financing to digital healthcare solutions, childcare support, crop insurance, and climate action, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India's 'Annual Report 2025: The India–UNDP Partnership' captures progress across these areas in 2025. The report was launched at UN House at the Country Programme Management Board meeting, by Ms. Anu P. Mathai, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and Dr. Angela Lusigi, Resident Representative, UNDP India.

The report captures India's transformative results in improving the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, supported by UNDP India and its partners, under the Government of India-UNDP's Country Programme (2023-27). Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in India, the Country Programme is a five-year framework that guides our work in the country. It was developed through consultations with partners, including central and state governments, the private sector, civil society, development partners, and academia.

Angela Lusigi, Resident Representative, UNDP India, said, "India's development progress in 2025 reflects strong government leadership in delivering at scale through public systems. These systems delivered across health, insurance, care, and climate action, reaching women, children, farmers, waste workers, and low-income households. UNDP is proud to have supported these efforts by strengthening technical expertise, helping public programmes function more effectively and respond faster when support was needed."

UNDP worked with national and state governments to strengthen how the Sustainable Development Goals move from policy to delivery. The SDG Coordination and Acceleration approach is now institutionalized across key ministries, supporting more aligned implementation. At the subnational level, SDG monitoring frameworks are operational in 33 of 36 States and Union Territories, improving how data informs planning and budgeting.

System-level improvements translated into more reliable service delivery on the ground. Government-led digital platforms supported by UNDP, including U-WIN and eVIN, strengthened India's immunization ecosystem. U-WIN helped track immunization services for 32 million pregnant women and 97 million children, while eVIN enabled monitoring of vaccine stocks and cold-chain temperatures across 30,000 cold-chain points, covering over 650 million doses.

Economic security was reinforced through stronger social protection and risk mitigation. India's crop insurance scheme, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), expanded coverage to 42 million farmers. These measures helped farming households recover faster from climate and income shocks.

Inclusive growth was shaped by expanded access to rights and social inclusion. Under Project Utthaan, implemented with the support of civil society, government and private sector partners, over 34,900 waste workers were linked to identity documents, health insurance, and social protection schemes. This reduced long-standing exclusion while strengthening occupational safety, healthcare access, and financial inclusion. The learnings from

the programme are now informing the implementation of the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) Scheme, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), with UNDP providing technical support for the nationwide rollout of the scheme.

Community-based childcare models enabled women in low-income urban areas to take up paid work, while also creating jobs in the care economy. Evidence from research, financing analysis, and crèche pilots informed investment pathways for urban childcare and grounded care policy in on-the-ground realities.

Climate action focused on protecting development gains and livelihoods. In 2025, UNDP supported India in designing its National Adaptation Plan and a gender-responsive Biodiversity Finance Plan. Community-led restoration initiatives supported more than 63,000 people with climate-resilient livelihoods, helping reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks while sustaining incomes.

India's development experience increasingly informed solutions beyond its borders through South–South Cooperation. In partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs and supported by UNDP, systems designed to operate at scale in India were shared with countries facing similar development challenges. India's crop insurance experience was taken to seven countries as a practical model to protect farmers from climate and income shocks. At the same time, India's digital public health systems such as U-WIN and eVIN were shared with Zambia and Lao PDR, to strengthen immunization tracking, vaccine supply chains, and last-mile health delivery.
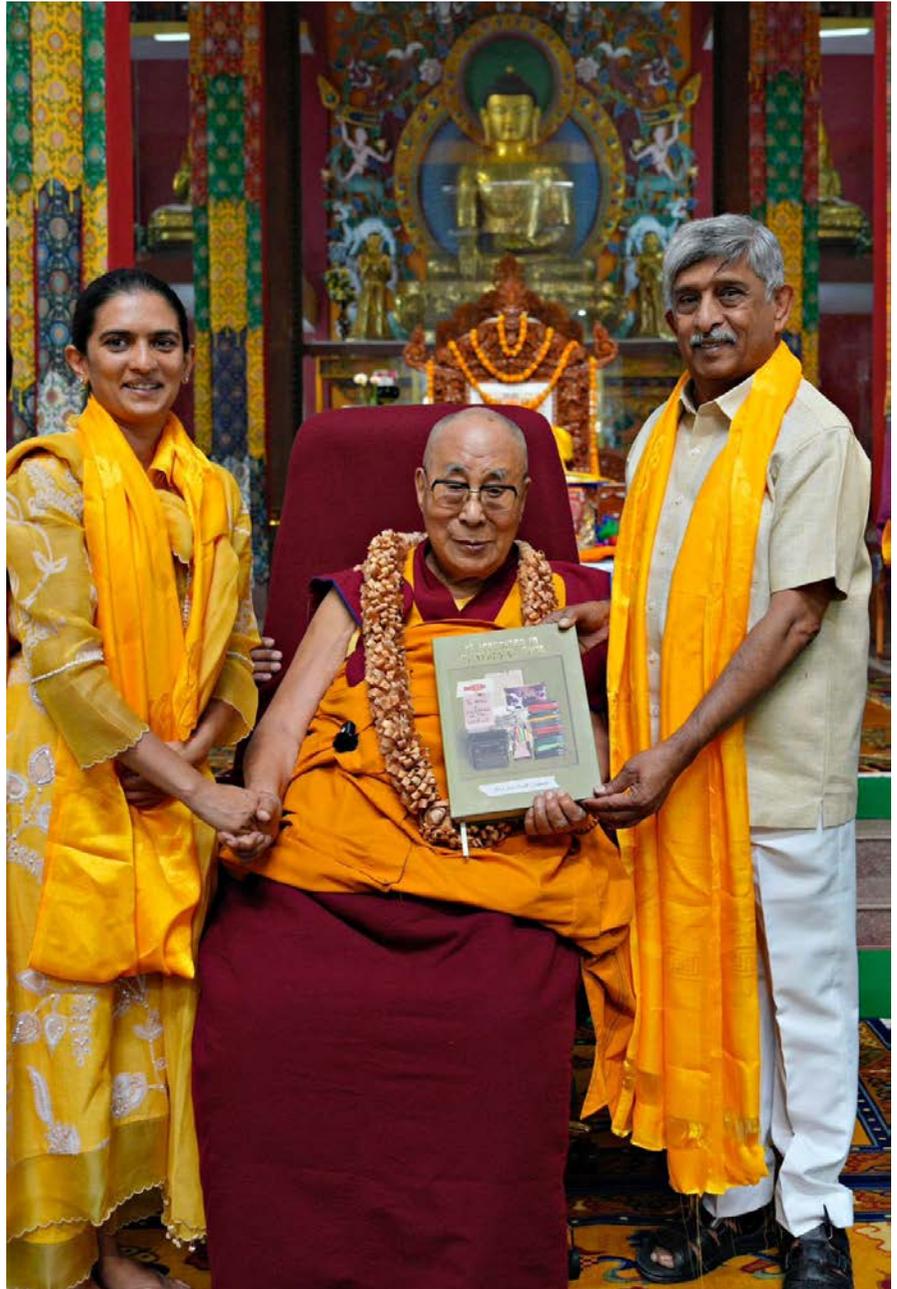
His Holiness The Dalai Lama Launches Ekya School's Book on Inquiry Based Education

At a time when student stress, mental health concerns, and exam-driven schooling are increasingly under the spotlight, His Holiness the Dalai Lama launched '15 Learnings in 15 Years of Ekya: How We Built Schools', alongside Dr. K.C. Ramamurthy, former MP, Rajya Sabha, Chairman, CMR Group of Institutions,Chairman of the Ekya Board of Governors and Dr. Tristha Ramamurthy, Founder, Ekya Schools & Provost, CMR University, a book that reflects on Ekya Schools' fifteen-year journey of reimagining how children learn.

The book traces Ekya's gradual move away from recall-based teaching towards deeper conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and authentic assessment, closely aligned with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Drawing on classroom stories and institutional reflections, it presents school transformation as a journey marked by learning, resistance, and continuous reflection rather than a one-time reform.

Ekya's philosophy is built on the belief that education should engage both the mind and the heart. This approach took form through its ACE Framework; Aware, Compassionate, Engaged which guides curriculum design, teaching practices, assessment, and school culture. Rather than treating values as add-ons, the school integrates awareness, empathy, and responsible action into daily classroom experiences, making it one of the early schools in India to adopt these ideas at a system-wide level.

Founded in 2010, Ekya Schools began with a simple but powerful question: what if schools focused less on marks and memorisation, and more on helping children grow into thoughtful, self-aware, and compassionate individuals? Over the years, this question shaped an evolving school model that places inquiry, well-being, and meaning making at the centre of everyday learning.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama launched 15 Learnings in 15 Years of Ekya alongside Dr. K.C. Ramamurthy and Dr. Tristha Ramamurthy

GLOBAL TREATY TO TRACE
CRITICAL MINERALS
STALLS AMID UNCERTAINTY

Colombia has been pushing for a binding global minerals treaty at several key UN meetings, including at the seventh UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) last December, writes **Aimee Gabay**, Mongabay.com

NGOs and certain states say they will continue pushing for a global treaty on traceability at upcoming conferences, while other mineral frameworks emerge − including those seeking to accelerate investment in critical mineral mining. *Image: Leo Klemm, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr*

The negotiations were intense, says Julia Peña Niño, the Colombia country manager at the Natural Resource Governance Institute. At the seventh UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi last December, behind closed doors, Colombia's joint proposal with Oman was facing resistance from several member states.

The Colombian government wanted a legally binding global treaty on sustainability and tracing the flow of critical minerals around the world, as it has been pushing in several UN meetings. In the end, it left with a simple three-point nonbinding resolution to enhance international dialogue and cooperation on mineral governance as well as resource recovery from mining waste and tailings.

The resolution tried to close the door on further negotiations, but some organisations say the next UN Environment Assembly in December 2027 could be grounds for considering a potential global minerals treaty.

The intensity of the negotiations reflected "both the urgency to act and the political complexity of addressing the various facets of minerals value chains," Peña Niño told Mongabay via email. Some observers remain cynical and say national security concerns and economic development played a hand in pushing down the traceability treaty.

According to analysts, tracking the flow of minerals is complex work — but may be vital in order to prevent and mitigate the socioenvironmental damage caused by surging mineral demand to feed renewable technol-ogy and military industries, such as forest degradation, river contamination and and land-grabs from Indigenous peoples.

Geopolitics, elections, intricate supply chains and governance issues all make it more complex. While broad support has emerged around the need to prevent mining impacts, a traceability system is receiving mixed reactions from UN member states, particularly on whether it should be binding or voluntary.

Colombia itself has extensive reserves of copper, nickel and cobalt that get mixed into the world's supply chains. Other minerals that are considered critical to the global energy transition, including rare earth elements, cassiterite (tin) and wolframite (tungsten), are also concentrated around Colombia's borders with Venezuela and Brazil. According to a recent report by Amazon Underworld, these deposits remain largely unmapped.

The country faces "significant challenges regarding traceability, as there is insufficient on-site control," Bram Ebus, the co-director of Amazon Underworld and a conflict and environment consultant for the International Crisis Group and report author, told Mongabay via WhatsApp. "Customs and law enforcement agencies lack the technological knowledge and equipment to identify minerals that are often falsely declared. Irregularities frequently go undetected at early stages of the supply chain."

Oman, the other state proposing the treaty, also has many natural mineral resources, including copper, nickel, gypsum and chromite. Over time, its high-grade copper deposits, which were exploited over centuries, had been depleted, leaving behind legacy residues. In more recent decades, industrial mining activities have also generated significant volumes of tailings and waste material, which have led to several environmental impacts.

Some of the main impacts include windblown dust, erosion, sediment transportation during intense rainfall, the leaching of metals into surface water or shallow groundwater and other issues, such as land sterilisation, Imran Shaikh, the managing director of Green Tech Mining & Services, which supported Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals and its Environment Authority at December's UNEA-7, told Mongabay via email.

To prevent and mitigate the socio-environmental impacts of mining, Niño told Mongabay that an international agreement that includes traceability and due diligence mechanisms throughout the entire mineral supply chain is critical.

But achieving full traceability across the mineral supply chain is facing several challenges.

How to build out a traceability system

To ensure that mineral supply chains are sustainable, analysts say traceability is critical. Traceability can help authorities prevent and crack down on corruption, money laundering, environmental crime and human rights abuses. However, this did not make it into the final resolution at UNEA-7 and civil society groups continue to push a tracking mechanism in the treaty.

A robust global traceability system would need to track various types of information about a mineral. This includes its geographical route from the mine, through processing to the final product. It also includes its chain of custody, which refers to the various entities that have held the product throughout the supply chain, as well as its physical evolution, including processing and transformation.

But once materials are mixed together in the global market, traceability becomes more challenging, Tommi Kauppila, a research professor for the Geological Survey of Finland, which provided Finland's Ministry of the Environment with expert support on the minerals resolution at UNEA-7, told Mongabay.

"One company that needs raw materials buys it from here and from there on the international raw materials market," Kauppila explained. "There is this tendency for the

streams to mix, and then it becomes more difficult to follow. It's not a single-source material anymore."

According to John Lindberg, the head of policy and government affairs at the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), many of the minerals and metals in circulation today contain no origin data, having been mined decades or centuries ago. Therefore, recycling adds "another layer of complexity."

To make traceability binding, the treaty faces a money question. Lind-

> **Minerals and metals are unevenly distributed, and for many resource-rich countries they are central to economic development. Governments in these contexts tend to resist anything that could be seen as limiting their sovereign right to decide how, or whether, to develop their natural resources.**
>
> **JOHN LINDBERG**
> **Head of Policy and Government Affairs, International Council on Mining and Metals**

berg told Mongabay via email that there is still no strong commercial incentive for full traceability.

He explained that full traceability is expensive and complicated to implement, and there is not yet enough price premium or consistent customer demand to justify the investment. The Colombian and Omani governments did not yet share how the plan would be financed by the time of publication, though some sources suggested it could be carried out within the regular UNEP budget.

The EU's deforestation-free products regulation (EUDR), a legislative tool that aims to curb commodities supply chain-related deforestation at the international level, is an exam-

ple of a multilateral initiative that has also faced significant pushback and challenges. In December, the EU Parliament voted to delay the regulation for a second year in a row, pushing it to December 2026.

This was in response to mounting pressure from several member states, global business partners and the industry, which complained about the lack of preparedness to comply with the strict requirements, which include full source traceability. In response to their concerns, the EU Parliament has also voted to simplify traceability requirements within the EU

"As a result, full traceability across the entire system is unrealistic," Lindberg said. "What is achievable is greater traceability going forward, alongside clear limits on what can and cannot be known because of legacy materials."

Along with traceability in the supply chain, the treaty needs to also have a due diligence component, says Erica Westenberg, the director of governance programs at Natural Resource Governance Institute. She told Mongabay over a video call that there has to be "a really strong set of norms and best practices that you are evaluating and ensuring to meet high standards at every step in that chain across all of those actors."

In some cases, Lindberg said, actors benefit from opacity and actively resist greater transparency. This includes corporations but also armed groups, which control extraction and trade and are responsible for human rights abuses and environmental destruction.

Westenberg told Mongabay that because minerals travel across borders, "You need mechanisms that actors and jurisdictions across the globe are willing to participate in and adhere to," but the mood during

the negotiations is currently making that unlikely.

Political calculation

Colombia and Oman's original proposal was rejected by a broad group of states, including Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iran, Chile and Uganda.

What the two states pushed for and got instead was a nonbinding resolution to enhance international dialogue and cooperation on mineral governance as well as resource recovery from mining waste and tailings. Traceability did not make it into the final resolution at UNEA-7. Other member states, such as the EU, welcomed this final outcome.

"We think that minerals and metals mining should be part of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the United Nations Environment Programme," Kauppila said. "The European Union, for instance, and anyone else in the world, is not self-sufficient when it comes to mineral raw materials. This is why these kinds of global discussions are so important."

Mongabay reached out to the countries that rejected the original proposal to seek their position but did not receive a response by the time of publication. Observers at UNEA-7 told Mongabay that the concerns raised at the meeting were mixed, but many resource-rich nations are wary about any decisions that might restrict economic development and infringe on their rights to resources within their countries.

"Minerals and metals are unevenly distributed, and for many resource-rich countries they are central to economic development," Lindberg said. "Governments in these contexts tend to resist anything that could be seen as limiting their sovereign right to decide how, or whether, to develop their natural resources."

In January 2026, the US government withdrew from dozens of international organisations, conventions and treaties it said were contrary to the country's interests. This decision affected 31 UN agencies, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and four out of the five UN regional commissions that are considered key platforms for multilateral cooperation. It also stepped back from negotiations on all UNEA resolutions, decisions and the ministerial declaration.

The US criticised UNEA for its focus on "contentious and irrelevant issues" and "pushing an agenda of soft global governance via the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting vague redistributions of wealth, or purporting to direct international financial institutions in ways that undermine both their independence as separate international organisations and our sovereignty."

According to Lindberg, multilateralism is under strain, and initiatives like the global treaty on critical minerals can fall through the cracks.

"Minerals — particularly those labelled 'critical' — are increasingly framed through national and economic security lenses. That makes consensus-based negotiations extremely difficult," he said.

Other frameworks on critical minerals are seeking to move towards accelerating investment rather than sustainability. Ahead of a critical minerals summit on February 4, 2026, the US State Department is encouraging partners and mineral-rich states to sign a Framework Agreement on Cooperation on Critical Minerals Sourcing and Processing. This non-binding framework lays out a coordinated policy to hasten investment, reduce reliance on Chinese supply chains and provide a roadmap for capital and policy support.

Westenberg described the current global political environment as "really challenging," but she said there are still signs of progress towards sustainability. Around the world, more than 100 voluntary mining standards have been developed, such as the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance and the ICMM.

"That is probably the reality in this current environment," she added. "Over time, hopefully, ideally, things converge around a single norm or a single standard. But the reality of what we're in right now is a patchwork of approaches, and we need to push each one of them to be as good as possible."

Since 2023, four large associations, which include the Copper Mark, ICMM, the Mining Association of Canada (MAC) and the World Gold Council (WGC), have worked together to consolidate their well-established standards into one voluntary global standard, known as the Consolidated Mining Standard Initiative.

"It reduces complexity and clarifies responsible practices for mining companies of all sizes, across all locations and commodities," Lindberg said. "Broad adoption would give the Standard the widest coverage of any voluntary mining standard to date."

However, some sources say the general mood in the negotiation room was that there are perhaps too many instruments regarding sustainable and environmental mining — many of which are voluntary and include existing resolutions in the UNEA. This nonbinding treaty — if it doesn't include a traceability component — would be very similar to existing sustainability measures.

Meanwhile, Shaikh said Oman remains confident that "through continued engagement with UNEP and member states, the dialogue can evolve into clearer guidance, shared principles, and eventually stronger international norms, grounded in real-world implementation rather than abstract commitments." C

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EAST AND SOUTH ASIA MAINTAIN SOLID GROWTH PROSPECTS DESPITE HEIGHTENED UNCERTAINTY: UN REPORT

Economic prospects in East and South Asian economies are expected to remain solid despite elevated policy uncertainty, rising trade barriers, and lingering debt vulnerabilities. Growth in East Asia is projected to moderate from 4.9 per cent in 2025 to 4.4 per cent in both 2026 and 2027.

South Asia's GDP is expected to expand by 5.6 per cent in 2026 and 5.9 per cent in 2027, following estimated growth of 5.9 per cent in 2025,

according to the World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2026, released by the United Nations today.

Global output is forecast to grow by 2.7 per cent in 2026, slightly below the 2.8 per cent estimated for 2025 and well below the pre-pandemic average of 3.2 per cent. During 2025, unexpected resilience to sharp increases in US tariffs, supported by solid consumer spending and easing inflation, helped sustain growth. However, underlying weaknesses

persist. Subdued investment and limited fiscal space are weighing on economic activity, raising the prospect that the world economy could settle into a persistently slower growth path than in the pre-pandemic era.

"A combination of economic, geopolitical and technological tensions is reshaping the global landscape, generating new economic uncertainty and social vulnerabilities," said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. "Many developing

economies continue to struggle and, as a result, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals remains distant for much of the world."

Growth prospects in East Asia

East Asia's growth is expected to moderate in the near term. During the first three quarters of 2025, front-loading of shipments ahead of US tariffs boosted exports, while private consumption was supported by steady labour markets and ongoing disinflation. Looking ahead, the temporary boost from front-loading will fade, but domestic demand is expected to remain resilient, underpinned by supportive monetary and fiscal measures. Regional headline inflation is projected at 1.1 per cent in 2026, edging up from an estimated 0.5 per cent in 2025.

China's economy is projected to expand by 4.6 per cent in 2026 and 4.5 per cent in 2027, following estimated growth of 4.9 per cent in 2025. A temporary easing of trade tensions with the United States— including targeted tariff reductions and a one-year trade truce—has helped stabilise business confidence. Meanwhile, supportive monetary and fiscal policies are expected to sustain domestic demand and cushion external headwinds.

Growth prospects in South Asia

South Asia's economic outlook remains robust, largely due to strong private consumption and public investment. Inflation across the region declined markedly in 2025, with rates in most economies at or below central bank targets and long-term averages. Average consumer price inflation is projected to edge up from an estimated 8.3 per cent in 2025 to 8.7 per cent in 2026, ranging from 3.2 per cent in Nepal and 4.1 per cent in India to 35.4 per cent in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In India, growth is projected to moderate from an estimated 7.4 per cent in 2025 to 6.6 per cent in 2026. Resilient household spending, strong public investment, and lower interest rates are expected to underpin economic activity. While higher United States tariffs may weigh on select product categories, key export segments are likely to remain largely unaffected. Moreover, strong demand from other major markets is expected to partially offset the impact.

Downside risks cloud the outlook

Risks to the outlook for East and South Asia remain tilted to the downside. Trade policy uncertainty is a key near-term risk, even though recent US tariff increases on Asian economies were smaller than initially anticipated and some trade agreements have been reached. A slowdown in major economies—including China, the European Union, and the United States—could further weigh on regional merchandise trade, investment flows, and tourism activity.

Another important downside risk relates to fragile fiscal positions in several economies, where high public debt limits policy space. In South Asia, in particular, elevated government debt constrains the ability to provide countercyclical support and respond effectively to external shocks.

Policies to mitigate risks and support growth

Most central banks across East and South Asia eased monetary policy in 2025 as inflation declined and the US Federal Reserve lowered interest rates. Monetary easing is expected to continue in 2026, though the pace and extent will vary across countries.

Fiscal policy trajectories diverge between the two regions. In East Asia, many governments adopted a more expansionary stance in 2025, rolling out measures to support household consumption, protect vulnerable groups, and accelerate infrastructure investment. In contrast, South Asian economies remain focused on fiscal

consolidation and structural reforms aimed at strengthening public finances and safeguarding macroeconomic stability.

Against a backdrop of trade policy uncertainty, Asian economies are pursuing regional integration through initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a free trade agreement between 15 countries. At the national level, Governments are prioritising infrastructure upgrades, advancing digitalisation, and modernizing manufacturing to enhance competitiveness and resilience.

Call for renewed multilateral action

The report underscores that navigating an era of trade realignments, persistent price pressures, and climate-related shocks will demand deeper global coordination and decisive collective action at a time when geopolitical tensions are rising, policies are becoming more inward-looking, and impetus towards multilateral solutions is weakening. Sustained progress will depend on rebuilding trust, strengthening predictability, and renewing the commitment to an open, rules-based multilateral trading system.

The Sevilla Commitment, the outcome document of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, offers a forward-looking blueprint to strengthen multilateral cooperation, reform the international financial architecture, and scale up development finance.

Delivering on its key priorities— including clearer debt workout modalities and expanded concessional and climate finance—is essential to reducing systemic risks and fostering a more stable and equitable global economy. C

SEVENTH UN ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY COMMITS TO MULTILATERAL SOLUTIONS FOR A MORE RESILIENT PLANET

The seventh session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) concluded with Member States delivering 11 resolutions, three decisions and a Ministerial Declaration aiming to advance solutions for a more resilient planet.

More than 6,000 people – representing 186 countries – registered for the week-long Assembly held at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, focused on advancing solutions to tackle the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature, biodiversity loss and land degradation, and pollution and waste.

The UNEA-7 resolutions move forward the work of Member States on safeguarding coral reefs, on the sound management of the minerals and metals essential to the energy transition, on the sound manage-

ment of chemicals and waste, on the sustainable use of Artificial Intelligence, and on finding sustainable solutions through sport. Other resolutions adopted focus on international cooperation to combat wildfires, strengthening work on the environmental dimension of antimicrobial resistance, protecting glaciers, and addressing sargassum seaweed blooms and more.

"What has been achieved here proves that this bridge is indeed capable of carrying the world's ambitions towards a better future," said H.E. Abdullah bin Ali Al-Amri, President of Oman's Environment Authority and President of UNEA-7.

"The conclusion of this session doesn't mean the end of our mission. The measure of our success will not be limited to what we've adopted on paper, no matter how important and strategic, but by what we will see on the ground in terms of cleaner air, cleaner water, restored ecosystems, sustainable ecosystems, green job opportunities and more resilient societies capable of facing the challenges of the future," he added.

The UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration commits to bold actions that drive sustainable solutions, to implementing obligations under multilateral environmental agreements and frameworks, and to advancing equitable and inclusive participation in all efforts.

The Assembly also approved UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for the next four years, and the associated Programme of Work for the next two years.

In her UNEA-7 closing remarks, Inger Andersen, UNEP's Executive Director, called on Member States to make their full contributions so that UNEP can deliver results and impact.

"You will now return to the world outside the negotiation halls. A world in which – let us not forget amid our euphoria – people are dying, homes and livelihoods are

being destroyed, economies are being damaged, and inequity is growing because action on environmental challenges has not been fast or strong enough," Ms. Andersen said. "Yes, you have brightened the beacon and better lit the path forward. But we must now, together, hurry down this path to make good on our collective promise to deliver real solutions for a resilient planet and resilient people."

UNEA-7 held the second Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) Day, dedicated to the international agreements addressing the most pressing environmental issues of global or regional concern, which are critical instruments of international environmental governance and international environmental law.

The seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook was also released at UNEA-7; the report is the most comprehensive assessment of the global environment ever undertaken. The assessment found that investing in a stable climate, healthy nature and land, and a pollution-free planet can deliver trillions in additional global GDP, avoid millions of deaths and lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and hunger.

The Assembly was preceded by a Youth Environment Assembly – bringing together more than 1,000 young delegates to advocate for the inclusion, empowerment, and meaningful participation of young people in global environmental governance – and by a Cities and Regions Summit that highlighted the critical role of local and regional governments in delivering integrated solutions and driving transformative environmental change from the ground up.

At the 21st Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, members of civil society exchanged perspectives on addressing significant environmental issues among themselves, with representatives from Member States, and with UNEP.

The 2025 UN Champions of the Earth, this year awarded to five individuals for their exceptional work on climate change, and the latest UN World Restoration Flagships, were both celebrated at a Gala of Hope.

A host of UNEP's Goodwill Ambassadors joined UNEA-7 to reinforce messages on solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues – UNEP's Patron of the Oceans and endurance swimmer Lewis Pugh climbed Mount Kenya, which holds one of the last three glacier sites in Africa – and is expected to lose all of its ice within the next five years, while Tanzanian hip hop artist Frida Amani, UNEP's Advocate for Ecosystem Restoration – performed a new song, Resilience, at the High-Level Segment alongside the Kenya Boys Choir.

UNEA-7 also elected a new President to preside over UNEA-8: H.E. Matthew Samuda, Minister of Water, Environment and Climate Change.

"Our voices carry the weight of communities on the frontlines of climate impacts—communities that cannot afford delay and do not have the luxury of indifference," H.E. Samuda said. "As President, I pledge to foster an Assembly marked by inclusivity, transparency, and practical action. We must work to strengthen the science-policy interface, scale up financing for adaptation and resilience, and accelerate the transition to sustainable production and consumption systems. And, we must do so while ensuring that no state—large or small—feels excluded from the solutions we craft."

Member states set the date for the next UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-8) as 6-10 December 2027 at the UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi. ☐

A warning sign on a Yakushima beach urges visitors to keep out, reminding them that sea turtle eggs are buried in the sand and need protection.
Image: Ministry of the Environment of Japan

AI-EDITED WILDLIFE PHOTO IN JAPAN REIGNITES DEBATE OVER TECHNOLOGY'S EXPANDING ROLE IN CONSERVATION

The boom in AI-driven biodiversity tracking is attracting NGOs, tech firms and investors, yet governance remains patchy, with experts warning that the race to automate conservation is outpacing rules designed to keep it honest, writes **Taejun Kang**

A Japanese news agency's decision to withdraw a wildlife photo enhanced by artificial intelligence (AI) has reignited debate over the technology's fast-spreading role in conservation, a field now worth billions as AI reshapes how the natural world is documented and protected.

Kyodo News said it pulled the image, released on 20 October, after discovering that a collaborator for a local nonprofit had used a genera-tive AI tool to "enhance" footage of a raccoon dog, locally known as tanuki, carrying a baby sea turtle on Yakushima Island in southern Japan.

Yakushima Island's beaches are among the most critical in the North Pacific for the endangered Logger-

head sea turtle and Green sea turtle with between 30 and 40 per cent of all loggerheads nesting in Japan doing so on Nagata Beach alone.

The edit, meant to clarify the image, altered the animal's posture and the hatchling's position, prompting the agency to call it "inappropriate for reportage".

"It was deemed inappropriate as a news photograph that should accurately convey the facts," said Kyodo News in a correction.

While Japan's Ministry of the Environment confirmed that tanuki predation of turtle hatchlings does occur on the island, the manipulation has renewed scrutiny of how AI tools can distort evidence in scientific and journalistic work.

Rise in AI use

Market research firm Allied Market Research estimates that the global AI-in-wildlife-conservation market was valued at US$1.8 billion in 2023 and could surge to US $16.5 billion by 2032, showing the rush by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), tech firms and governments to automate biodiversity tracking.

Projects such as Wildlife Insights, a global database backed by Google and Conservation International, for instance, now rely on AI trained on over 35 million labelled camera-trap images across nearly 1,300 species.

The system can sort millions of photos in minutes, a task that once took humans months, helping conservationists monitor animal populations at scale.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) says similar tools are being used to predict deforestation and detect illegal logging, while start-ups in Africa and Asia deploy acoustic AI to identify gunshots or chainsaws in protected areas. Private companies are also capitalising on the boom, offering AI-powered image-recognition platforms and data-analysis services to NGOs and government agencies, which could reduce labour costs,

(Top) Image of a raccoon dog captured by a surveillance camera; (Bottom) image of the raccoon dog processed using generative AI. Image: Yakushima Umigame-kan

improve accuracy and create new commercial ecosystems around conservation data, according to analysts.

However, critics warn that the same technologies transforming conservation could also undermine it.

According to a 2025 study published in Conservation Biology, AI-generated wildlife images and videos may blur the line between reality and fabrication, threatening public trust in conservation media.

"On social media, AI-generated, realistic yet misleading portrayals of wildlife are reshaping public attitudes toward biodiversity," the authors of the study said. "Generative AI allows for effortless creation of entirely fictitious species, behaviours, and ecological interactions, further distancing the public from real-world conservation challenges."

Another analysis published in Trends in Ecology & Evolution in February described emerging risks of what researchers call "AI colonialism" – the growing dependence of conservation projects in the Global South on artificial intelligence systems developed in wealthier nations.

The authors warned that many of these machine-learning tools are trained on datasets, priorities and definitions designed in the Global North, yet deployed in biodiversity-rich regions such as Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America with little local oversight or capacity-building. This imbalance, they said, can reinforce existing power dynamics in global conservation, shaping which species are monitored, how data are interpreted and who controls access to environmental information.

Fragmented regulations

Efforts to regulate the use of AI in conservation remain fragmented and slow. While governments and international bodies such as the European Union and the United Nations have begun crafting broad AI governance frameworks, none specifically address environmental or wildlife applications.

Most conservation projects now operate in a legal grey zone, relying on internal ethics policies rather than enforceable standards. Researchers writing in Conservation Letters say this gap leaves major blind spots around data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential misuse of AI-generated imagery in public communications.

In developing countries, where much biodiversity research takes place, regulation is even further behind. A Nigerian legal review on AI and wildlife protection noted that deploying machine-learning tools without oversight could "reinforce existing compliance gaps" in forest and species protection.

Similar warnings have been raised in Asia and Africa, where imported AI systems often lack local consent mechanisms or clear accountability structures. ■

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/ai-edited-wildlife-photo-in-japan-reignites-debate-over-technologys-expanding-role-in-conservation/)

US$52.8 MILLION IN NEW GEF SUPPORT TO BOOST UNEP-LED ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES WORLDWIDE

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has announced USD 52.8 million for four new UN Environment Programme (UNEP)–led projects during its 70th Council meeting. The funding will support practical solutions to some of today's most urgent environmental challenges, including restoring critical ecosystems, expanding clean mobility and strengthening global climate transparency.

This announcement comes a week after the seventh session of the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA-7) that brought together over 6,000 delegates from over 180 United Nations Member States.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen welcomed the announcement, saying: "These new investments demonstrate what multilateral environmental cooperation can deliver when we combine ambition with action. Coming just one week after UNEA-7, where Member States rallied around advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet, this support from the GEF helps translate that global resolve into concrete results. From wetlands and oceans to clean transport and climate transparency, these projects will support countries protect their natural capital, reduce emissions and pollution, and strengthen resilience

for communities on the frontlines of environmental change."

GEF CEO and Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodríguez emphasised the importance of continued ambition, stating: "The GEF and UNEP have a long track record of helping countries reverse environmental decline and build resilience. These new projects are exactly the kind of integrated, high-impact initiatives we need—linking climate, nature and pollution and ensuring benefits for people and ecosystems alike. We look forward to deepening this collaboration and scaling solutions that deliver real change on the ground."

The new GEF-funded initiatives include:

Establishing Sustainable Wetland Management Cornerstones in Madagascar – USD 7.2 million

This project will safeguard and restore Madagascar's fragile wetlands to protect biodiversity, build climate resilience and support sustainable livelihoods. It will enhance sustainable management across over 655,000 hectares of wetlands and marine ecosystems, restore 24,000 hectares of mangroves, benefit 60,000 people and mitigate more than an estimated 41 million greenhouse gas emissions. The initiative provides robust climate action, protects nature at scale and helps curb ecosystem pollution and degradation.

Upscaling Integrated Electric Mobility Systems – Addendum 2 – USD 2 million

This investment will help Madagascar accelerate its transition to zero-emission electric mobility. By strengthening policies, institutions and technical capacities, the programme drives climate action through transport decarbonisation, reduces vehicle-related pollution and promotes sustainable mobility systems that lessen pressure on natural ecosystems.

Enhancing Policy Coherence for a Sustainable Blue Economy in Indonesia – USD 9 million

This initiative will harmonise governance across Indonesia's marine and coastal sectors to support a sustainable blue economy. It will strengthen sustainable management of 1.42 million hectares of marine habitat, restore 50,000 hectares of mangroves and seagrass and mitigate a potential 2.19 million greenhouse gas emissions over 20 years. With 200,000 direct beneficiaries, the project combines nature action, blue-carbon-driven climate action and reduced land–sea pollution through coherent planning.

Preparation of Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs) and Combined NC/BTRs to the UNFCCC – USD 34.6 million

This global initiative will enhance climate transparency in 25 countries, supporting the preparation and submission of 50 national climate reports under the Paris Agreement. By strengthening institutional capacity and long-term climate governance, the project boosts national climate action, improves reporting related to nature and pollution and supports sustained engagement in global transparency processes.

These new investments build on three decades of collaboration between UNEP and the GEF, a partnership that has delivered transformative environmental impact across more than 160 countries.

Together, the two institutions have implemented over 1,000 projects, supported by more than USD 3.3 billion in donor contributions, improving the lives of nearly 33 million people. In the last eight years alone, the UNEP–GEF partnership has helped countries prevent 77 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, restore more than 6.5 million hectares of land, rehabilitated 1.1 million hectares of marine ecosystems and

> **In the last eight years alone, the UNEP–GEF partnership has helped countries prevent 77 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, restore more than 6.5 million hectares of land, rehabilitated 1.1 million hectares of marine ecosystems and strengthen chemicals and waste management policies in 70 countries.**

strengthen chemicals and waste management policies in 70 countries.

As we look ahead, the upcoming GEF-9 replenishment in 2026 represents a pivotal opportunity to scale what works. With proven models linking climate, nature and pollution action, UNEP stands ready to deploy new resources into transformative global programmes that can accelerate progress toward a healthier, more resilient planet for all. ■

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/press-releases/us528-million-in-new-gef-support-to-boost-unep-led-environmental-initiatives-worldwide/)

From mangrove restoration to climate-proof schools and microinsurance, local adaptation efforts worldwide are helping vulnerable communities cope with intensifying climate risks.
Image: USAID Urban, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.

FIVE CLIMATE ADAPTATION IDEAS TO WATCH IN 2026

Local adaptation models are being used to redesign community responses to climate change, according to **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

From adding finance to making sure loss and damage funds reach vulnerable populations, climate adaptation is an increasingly crucial topic as extreme weather events disrupt daily life.

Around the world, local adaptation models are redesigning how communities respond to a harsher climate, such as coastal cities turning to mangrove restoration and resilient agriculture. From the Philippines to Ethiopia, here are some examples of local strategies helping frontline communities adapt to climate change:

Nature-based solutions
In the Philippines and Indonesia — among the most disaster-prone

countries in the world — mangroves that serve as coastal protection and carbon storage are helping protect communities from deadly waves and storm surges.

Mangroves are natural carbon sinks, acting as buffers from typhoons, rising seas and soil erosion. In the Philippines, after decades of mangrove loss, local leaders are creating 100-metre-wide "coastal greenbelts," or strips of mangroves, beach forest and wetland vegetation as natural coastal buffer zones.

More than 1,000 hectares of mangroves and related ecosystems have been established or protected since 2022, and the greenbelt initiative is considered a model for coastal areas nationwide.

In Indonesia, islanders, particularly women, are leading mangrove planting efforts in response to rising seas and worsening tidal floods.

They filed a climate lawsuit against Holcim, a large cement company, accusing it of contributing to global carbon emissions responsible for sea-level rise that is harming their island.

Climate-proofing schools

Global warming is taking a toll on children's learning around the world.

According to an analysis by the United Nations Children's Fund, at least 242 million students in 85 countries had their schooling disrupted by extreme climate events in 2024, including heat waves, tropical cyclones, storms, floods and droughts.

Solutions like air conditioning are a costly response that also worsens climate change.

In Burkina Faso, Kenya and India, architects are using passive-cooling designs such as clay or earthenware walls, cross-ventilation and elevated roofs to keep classrooms cooler, tapping into local materials and renewable energy like solar power.

Climate-smart schools could be a model for low-cost and low-carbon infrastructure to address the threat of extreme heat to education.

Ecotourism and community-based efforts

In regions where deforestation, illegal logging and habitat destruction are rampant, residents have found community-based solutions to conserve forest and coastal resources.

In a national park in Indonesia's West Java, a women-led initiative of ecoprinting, which is transferring natural pigments of local rainforest plants onto fabric, provides income to communities without relying on destructive practices such as logging and deforestation.

Ecoprinting jobs help families survive in a region where logging or mining are the usual sources of income.

Ecotourism, which promotes responsible travel in nature-rich areas, also aims to conserve the environment and support the livelihoods of local communities.

Since 2014, the local government of Del Carmen in Siargao, Philippines, has retrained illegal fishers and mangrove cutters to become ecotourism operators and plant mangroves.

Instead of engaging in destructive sources of income like mangrove cutting, residents now offer guided tours around the mangrove reserve to support its conservation.

Climate insurance and labour adaptation

Insurance is considered an underused tool in building climate resilience among low-income or informal workers, and labour adaptation can help workers facing climate risks.

Nicaragua introduced so-called climate-risk microinsurance in 2021 to support farmers and small-business owners exposed to extreme weather.

Guatemala's government initiated a similar programme, called Catastrophic Parametric Insurance, to protect the livelihoods of family farmers against severe climate risks.

The programme fully funds the costs of the insurance for farmers, who are paid in the event of a triggering event or after heavy rainfall.

In Bangladesh, workers in the global garment industry are increasingly exposed to climate hazards such as heat stress and flooding.

Improving conditions in garment-making factories, such as adding ventilation and insulated roofing, is encouraged to reduce workers' heat stress and vulnerability to extreme weather.

Boosting food security

Extreme weather events like typhoons, floods and droughts destroy farmlands and fisheries, significantly disrupting food systems.

A global temperature increase of 2°C would push an additional 189 million people into hunger, and 1.8 billion more people would be added if there were an increase of 4°C, according to the UN World Food Programme.

Climate-smart technology is a tool for African farmers who are vulnerable to such extreme events.

Tech solutions such as solar-powered irrigation and using AI to detect pests are helping strengthen food security amid climate change and rapid population growth.

Countries like Ethiopia are expanding use of heat-tolerant wheat crops to boost domestic production and reduce dependence on imports, while others use regenerative farming, a sustainable method that rehabilitates degraded land, to improve soil health and capture carbon. C

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/ news/five-climate-adaptation-ideas-to-watch-in-2026/)

A view of Luang Prabang, Laos, in 2011.
Image: Swapnil kulkarni on Unsplash

LAOS ENFORCES NATIONWIDE BURN BAN AS AIR POLLUTION WORSENS IN DRY SEASON

Data from a monitoring group shows the capital Vientiane and other cities hit by high PM2.5 levels as government rolls out dry-season fire controls and aligns measures with Asean guidelines, writes **Taejun Kang**

Laos has tightened controls on outdoor burning as air pollution continued to affect major cities on Tuesday, with the government warning that forest fires and agricultural burning remain the main drivers of seasonal haze and health risks.

Air quality in the capital, Vientiane, stood at an air quality index (AQI+) reading of 127 as of 10:45am local time, according to monitoring group IQAir, while the tourist town of Vangviang recorded a reading of 80. An AQI above 100 is generally considered unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Conditions worsened late last week, when Vientiane briefly entered what international guidelines classify as "very unhealthy" to "hazardous" territory. IQAir reported an AQI reading of 203 on Friday morning. Other cities also saw elevated levels, with Luang Prabang at 152 and Pakse at 126.

In response, the Lao government announced stricter measures to curb PM2.5 pollution during the January–April dry season, warning that uncontrolled burning for land clearing and farming remains the primary cause of forest fires and

poor air quality, Vientiane-based Laotian Times reported on Monday.

Authorities said fires linked to upland agriculture, plantations and rice fields, as well as burning grass for livestock, hunting-related fires, and the failure to create firebreaks, continue to release large amounts of fine particulate matter that pose risks to public health.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Environment has issued new instructions for the 2025–26 dry season, calling for tighter controls on burning, faster fire detection and stronger coordination between central and local authorities.

Government agencies have been directed to expand the use of hotspot monitoring systems to identify outbreaks earlier and improve response times. Provincial agriculture, forestry and environment departments must submit regular reports on fire impacts and develop fire-risk maps to support prevention planning and budget allocation.

A nationwide ban on all outdoor burning from January to April has been ordered, covering agricultural land, forests, residential areas, peatlands and waste disposal sites. Local authorities are responsible for enforcing the ban and taking legal

action against violators. In line with Asean guidelines, the government said it would promote sustainable farming practices to reduce reliance on burning, including farmer training, technical support and improved market access for non-burning methods.

Asean's framework encourages alternatives to slash-and-burn farming, including the use of agricultural waste for composting or bioenergy, and calls for improved data-sharing and joint response mechanisms when pollution spreads across national borders.

The World Health Organization has described Laos' air pollution as a complex, seasonal problem, with fine-particle pollution typically peaking during the March–April burning season and building from December as the dry season begins.

The United Nations research has also noted that the landlocked country can be affected by transboundary haze in addition to domestic burning, complicating efforts to curb PM2.5 during the dry months. C

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/ news/laos-enforces-nationwide-burn-ban-as-air-pollution-worsens-in-dry-season/)

COP30 delivered gains on climate finance and forests but stalled on fossil fuel phaseout – exposing both the limits of consensus talks and the growing role of action outside negotiations. *Image: UNclimatechange, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

THIS YEAR'S CLIMATE TALKS SAW REAL PROGRESS – JUST NOT ON FOSSIL FUELS

COP30 delivered gains on climate finance and forests but stalled on fossil fuel phaseout – exposing both the limits of consensus talks and the growing role of action outside negotiations, says **Jacqueline Peel**

It wasn't a comfortable process for the tens of thousands of delegates trying to hash out progress on climate change on the edge of the Amazon in Belém, Brazil. I experienced the challenges of the United Nations COP30 climate talks firsthand. Delegates were hot and sweaty. Tech and aircon didn't always work. Both flood and fire disrupted negotiations over the fortnight of negotiations. It drove home how climate change feels. But despite the discomfort, some progress was made.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva dubbed it the "COP of Truth". Delegates did not shy away from the urgency of the moment as climate change intensifies and emissions continue to climb.

Ahead of the talks, many feared global political headwinds and the United States' departure from the Paris Agreement would undermine this year's talks. The fact that nearly

So what did COP30 deliver?

At one stage it looked like COP30 might crack the hardest nut in climate policy – reaching agreement on phasing out fossil fuels. Nations agreed two years ago that it was necessary to move away from fossil fuels. But no plan had yet been devised to get there.

Brazil had a plan: build support for a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels, championed by President Lula and pushed strongly by Environment Minister Marina Silva. It drew support from more than 80 countries, including major fossil fuel exporters such as Norway and Australia. Anticipating pushback, Brazil worked to boost support outside the main talks before bringing the plan in.

It didn't work. By the end of COP30, all mention of a fossil fuel roadmap had been scrubbed from the text of the final out-

leaders of next year's COP31 talks, Turkey and Australia.

President Lula vowed to continue advocating for a fossil fuel roadmap at the G20. Colombia and the Netherlands will hold a conference on fossil fuel phaseout in April 2026. The COP30 decision text also makes reference to a "high-level event in 2026" which could take place in the Pacific. Without blockers of consensus at these meetings, a coalition of willing countries could make real progress in setting timelines and exchanging policy ideas for fossil fuel phase-out.

The decision to develop a just transition mechanism was welcomed as a win for workers and communities. The new mechanism's purpose will be to increase international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing as countries shift towards a low-carbon global economy. Efforts

> **Indigenous peoples and civil society to lead calls for sticking to the science, ramping up urgency and accelerating the rollout of solutions. An estimated 70,000 people marched in the streets of Belém, staging a mock funeral for fossil fuels. It was an important affirmation of widespread public support for climate action.**

60,000 delegates attended these talks – the second highest ever – shows this isn't the case.

Progress was made on funding climate finance and adaptation to the changes already emerging. But efforts on ending reliance on fossil fuels faltered in the face of strong resistance by fossil fuel powers. Much progress in Belém happened outside the main talks.

comes, following fierce pushback from countries such as Russia, Saudi Arabia and India and many emerging economies.

Instead, countries agreed to launch "the Global Implementation Accelerator [...] to keep 1.5°C within reach" and "taking into account" previous COP decisions. This initiative will be shepherded by the Brazilian COP30 Presidency and the

to boost financing for climate adaptation bogged down, reflecting the trade-offs over fossil fuels.

These funds are meant to help nations most exposed to severe climate damage, usually poorer and with low emissions. These nations led the charge for a tripling of climate finance by 2030 from the US$40 billion (A$62 billion) agreed at COP26 four years ago. But the

agreed text merely "calls for efforts to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035," which pushes out the timeframe and has no funding baseline.

Funding for tropical forests

One of Brazil's own initiatives, the Tropical Forest Facility, achieved greater success, securing US$9.5 billion (A$14.7 billion) in funding pledges – a COP record.

The trust fund for rainforests is designed to provide resources to arrest global deforestation and protect Indigenous lands, including in the Amazon's vital carbon sink.

Support for a roadmap towards ending deforestation secured 92 backers. The success of these deforestation initiatives points to the effectiveness of the COP's Action Agenda, aimed at spurring on climate action outside formal negotiations and including commitments from business, investors and civil society. As formal negotiations bog down, these bypasses may end up replacing negotiations in driving progress.

American absence

Ahead of COP30, analysts feared the ongoing attacks on climate action by the Trump administration would undermine the international negotiations. COP30 was the first climate summit without a US government delegation. At first, the absence came as a relief. But by summit's end, the disappearance of the world's biggest historical emitter and largest economy from negotiations had taken its toll.

Developing countries from the African group of negotiators argued better metrics and plans would be meaningless without funding to implement them. Traditionally, the US has been a major funder. No longer.

The US decision to turn its back on climate action created a subdued atmosphere. New finance pledges were broadly underwhelming, likely due to the dampening effect of the US retreat.

Early on, many hoped renewables and clean tech giant China might fill the leadership void. China's clean tech exports last year were enough to cut overseas emissions by 1 per cent. The huge industrial power produces almost 32 per cent of the world's carbon emissions. These emissions have plateaued, in turn suggesting global emissions may now have peaked.

But China showed reluctance to take up the mantle, preferring to remain focused on its own domestic energy transition. Chinese negotiators spent most of their energy pushing back against new European trade measures targeting emissions-intensive production.

It was left to some of the smallest nations, Indigenous peoples and civil society to lead calls for sticking to

the science, ramping up urgency and accelerating the rollout of solutions. An estimated 70,000 people marched in the streets of Belém, staging a mock funeral for fossil fuels. It was an important affirmation of widespread public support for climate action.

What legacy?

As the UN's climate executive secretary Simon Stiell said midway through COP30, nations had to "give a little to get a lot".

Many countries will be reflecting they gave a lot but got very little. The biggest winners were, yet again, the world's petrostates who successfully

frustrated attempts to address fossil fuels. Questions will inevitably be asked over whether these consensus-based talks are fit for purpose, given they can be gamed by blockers.

For many, COP30 will be regarded as a failure on fossil fuels and addressing major gaps between national pledges to cut emissions and what's needed to hold warming to 1.5°C. This is true. But another view would be that these talks made real progress on important areas despite considerable challenges.

Negotiators from 194 countries showed up and continued to talk and work together to tackle the worsening crisis. Nearly half of those countries have shown they're ready to begin weaning themselves off fossil fuels through their support for the phase-out roadmap. They

don't have to wait for a UN consensus to act. Fossil fuel exporters only have power while other nations buy and rely on their products.

The world's climate talks are now clearly moving away from arcane negotiations to the pressing real-world challenges of doing the work. In a rapidly warming world, all issues are becoming climate issues. ©

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