

# CSR TODAY

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### CSR INTERVIEW

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### CSR NOTES

The 7 scariest climate stories of 2020

### CSR INITIATIVE

IIT Guwahati students' start-up develops AgSpeak







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# In 2021, sustainability trends have to shape up



**Rajesh Tiwari**  
Publisher  
[rt@iccsr.org](mailto:rt@iccsr.org)

**FROM COST-EFFICIENCY TO SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT METHODS, HEALTHCARE IS INCREASINGLY LEADING THE WAY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY. THIS IS THE KIND OF MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION TO ADDRESS GLOBAL PROBLEMS THAT WILL GO VIRAL IN 2021 AND BEYOND**

**T**he year 2020 will always be remembered as the Covid-19 pandemic year. The world has changed during the Coronavirus crisis and it is going to stay for some time.

As more countries gear up for mass vaccination exercises, what will 2021 bring? Which impacts of Covid-19 will be enduring, and which will be fleeting?

Money-lenders will be walking away from fossil fuel. Covid-19 has raised fears that oil demand could soon be in terminal decline, leading to cuts in long-term price forecasts. Meanwhile, mounting evidence of the tremendous amounts of climate-wrecking methane emitted by the gas industry has been a wake-up call for financial markets.

But waning demand for fossil fuels in recent years and the crushing blow of the pandemic are some of the sweeping changes that have been ushering out the age of Big Oil, and heralding the Big Tech era. "With the dominance of big tech players like Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple, and rise of China-based tech companies, the privacy side of security will be put into focus in the coming year," said Thomas Milburn, director of United Kingdom-based sustainability consultancy Corporate Citizenship.

The post-Covid era will see green collar jobs. Although many governments fell short of using stimulus dollars for a green recovery from Covid-19, there have been signs of a transition to green jobs.

Once the pandemic is under control, China is expected to revive its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure project spreading across


nearly 70 countries from Asia to Europe. Following recent warnings that the initiative could lead to 3 degrees Celsius of warming, the greening of projects launched under the scheme will be a key theme in 2021.

Work-from-home is here to stay. The Coronavirus pandemic forced many firms to adopt flexible and remote working arrangements earlier this year. Having invested in remote work tools, many companies in insurance, financial services, technology, and media may not return to the old way of working anytime soon, even when a vaccine makes sending employees back to offices less risky.

The healthcare sector is showing signs of greater eco-consciousness.

"From cost-efficiency to sustainable procurement methods, healthcare is increasingly leading the way towards sustainability. This is the kind of meaningful participation to address global problems that will go viral in 2021 and beyond," said Paeng Lopez of Health Care Without Harm, a group which works to reduce the environmental footprint of healthcare worldwide.

Covid-19 has upended travel and tourism this year, costing the industry more than 120 million jobs, according to some estimates. The silver lining is that it has given popular destinations a much-needed breather.

As countries seek to restart travel in 2021, tourism operators must heed lessons from the crisis and promote environmental and business resilience, as well as biodiversity conservation. The concept of regenerative tourism is growing. 

# Contents



## 34 | Cover Story

**What will 2021 bring in the world of conservation?**

### CSR INTERVIEW

**38** How to ensure sustainability remains a priority for businesses after the pandemic

### CSR SUSTAINABILITY

**40** G20 stimulus plans favouring fossil fuels

### CSR PEOPLE

**42** People who changed our world in 2020

### CSR NOTES

**44** The 7 scariest climate stories of 2020

### CSR IDEA

**47** IIT Guwahati researchers

develop an efficient method to harvest drinking water from air

### CSR INITIATIVE

**48** IIT Guwahati students' start-up develops AgSpeak

### CSR INITIATIVE

**50** IIT Guwahati students' start-up develops AgSpeak

### REGULARS:

**03** Publisher's note

**05** CSR News

**26** CSR India United

**32** News You Can Use

## CSR TODAY

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# CSR NEWS

## RBL Bank Raises Rs. 5.12 crores for Girl Child Education through its CSR Initiative UMEED 1000 Cyclothon

**U**MEED 1000 Cyclothon, the flagship CSR initiative of RBL Bank, a social endeavor to contribute and raise funds in support of girl child education concluded successfully, raising Rs. 5.12 crores. The proceeds of the initiative will be donated to Udbhav RBL School, in Fatehnagar, Hyderabad, a school adopted by the Bank in 2019 catering to underprivileged children.

The event this year was conducted in phases, starting off the first leg of the initiative, on October 2, 2020 with a charity challenge, 'Donate Miles to Educate-Support Girl Child'. The challenge saw employees of RBL Bank and their families walk, run and cycle to donate miles, which were monetized into funds. A collective distance of 1,61,036 Kms was contributed through this challenge. The miles donated was tracked through an App and the Bank matched the donation raised 1:1.

The Cyclothon was flagged off from the Lower Parel Branch of the Bank on November 27, 2020 and over a span of 14 days, 127 cyclists, including 52 RBL Bank employees, collectively contributed a distance of 1,10,091 Kms (as captured on the App).

Commenting on the occasion, Rajeev Ahuja, Executive Director, RBL Bank said, "The spirit of our employees, our partners, the 127 cyclists and the numerous participants who donated miles to educate



**The initiative has garnered funds over Rs. 16. 12 crores in the past seven years**

**2,71,127 kms were covered collectively by all the participants of the Cyclothon and Donate Miles to Educate, Charity Challenge**

the girl child, have been the driving force in making this initiative a big success. We are grateful for the efforts and the commitment shown by

everyone associated with the cause and for coming together to make it count for the girl child, even amidst these challenging times."

Shanta Vallury Gandhi, Head – HR, CSR and Internal Branding at RBL Bank added, "While we changed the model of our initiative this year to comply with the safety norms, what did not change was the devotion, grit and passion of our cyclists, employees and our partners, whose support and belief in the cause of girl child education made it possible for us to implement the 7th edition, seamlessly. We are proud of the tenacity showcased by the 127 cyclists and the employees, to contribute to a larger cause, which will brighten the lives of countless girl children by giving them the opportunity of education and a better future."

# Shree Cement's initiative – “NAMAN” to provide free cement to the families of Armed forces Martyrs to build houses

**L**t Gen Alok Kler, PVSM, VSM, GOC-in-C, Southern Western Command, Indian Army, formally released the “Project Naman” - a National initiative of Shree Cement to provide free cement to the families of Armed Forces Personnel martyred in the past twenty years. The release of Naman Project comes as a run up to the Vijay Diwas which is observed each year on 16 December to mark India's victory in 1971 Bangladesh War and remember the sacrifices of Indian soldiers.

Under the Naman scheme, the family or the next of kin (NOK) of a Martyr who died in battle between 1st January 1999 to 1st January 2019 (20 Years), would be provided free cement to build a house on a plot size area of up to 4000 sq ft. The family of a Martyr may procure the cement in person from any of Shree Cement's manufacturing facilities spread across India.

Addressing the house on the launch of ‘Naman’ initiative, Lt Gen Kler, PVSM, said, “It is a wonderful gesture by Shree Cement to extend



Lt Gen Alok Singh Kler, PVSM, VSM, GOC-in-C, Southern Western Command, Indian Army, at 'Naman' function with Shri Arvind Khicha (left) and Sanjay Mehta of Shree Cement Limited in Jaipur. Project Naman is a national initiative of Shree Cement to provide free cement to the families of Armed Forces Personnel martyred in the past twenty years.

their support and solidarity for our veterans, martyrs who have given their lives for the country. This kind of recognition is rare and unique. This initiative in true sense has cemented a place for the company in the annals of the army history for the welfare for our martyrs and I sincerely hope that other large industries take a page out of this book and look towards the army and especially the people who have laid down their lives for the human service while forgetting their families.”

He further said that there is a lot more that needs to be done for the army and our soldiers who have laid down their lives in their line of duty and other corporates should also come forward for the welfare cause in the same lines.

“Since cement is the most vital input for building a house, we felt that the Naman scheme would be extremely helpful towards meeting the housing needs of the families

of Martyrs. It is a great honour for us to make a humble contribution to the families of our soldiers who rose above the call of service and laid their lives for the motherland. We salute the Martyrs of our nation. I take this opportunity to thank Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Ji for his guidance and support in implementing the scheme,” said Prashant Bangur, Joint Managing Director, Shree Cement Ltd.

The scheme would be implemented in association with Kendriya Sainik Board and executed by the Rajya Sainik Boards (RSBs) and Zilla Sainik Boards (ZSBs), Ministry of Defence, Government of India. Smt



Smt Sudesh, one of the first beneficiaries of Naman receiving Naman cement release order from Lt Gen Alok Singh Kler, PVSM, VSM, GOC-in-C, Southern Western Command, Indian Army



Smt Sunita Devi, one of the first beneficiaries of Naman receiving Naman cement release order from Lt Gen Alok Singh Kler, PVSM, VSM, GOC-in-C, Southern Western Command, Indian Army

Sunita Devi and Smt Sudesh, family members of martyrs, were among the first beneficiaries of Naman to be handed over Naman cement release order by the GOC-in-C in the presence of Mr Sanjay Mehta, President (Commercial) & Chief Happiness Officer and Mr Arvind Khicha, Jt President (Commercial), of Shree Cement Ltd.

# CSR INDIA UNITED

## Supplynote organizes 'Hunger 3.0' campaign to feed over 550 lesser-privileged



*The startup shares the idea of 'responsible contributions'*

**S**upplynote – a food and beverage supply-chain automation platform, organized 'Hunger 3.0', a two-day campaign to share the idea of routing quality food to the lesser privileged. In the current times when COVID 19 has struck everyone and caused misery across

the globe, the brand aims to motivate people to make maximum use of necessary resources like food. Under the campaign, the start-up has resonated its core objective of 'managing better for quality outcome', only this time it is about collecting and routing quality food from its partner restaurants and distributing it to the lesser-privileged children in the society. The idea is to contribute to health and survival of people in the times when lesser-privileged suffer the most and might be pushed

towards inferior options worsening the situation. The startup organized the campaign in association with JanMan Foundation, an NGO, to execute the entire idea maintaining the necessary safety measures at every level. The event was organized at multiple locations including- Rang Mahal Basti, Pitampura, Mansarovar Park Metro Station, Bhopra Zila Ghaziabad etc. The campaign witnessed food donations from some of the best brands of Delhi NCR including -Biryani By Kilo, Cake Desire, Wat-a-burger, Nazeer's Food, Biryani Viryani and others.

"At Supplynote we are always propagating the idea of 'managing and routing better'. We are connected with reputed restaurant outlets which are our clients, and our solution enables them to manage inventory, avoid wastage and save money while maintaining the quality standards. This further gave us the idea to send a message wherein people who are contributing should also maintain the health and hygiene standards. Hence, we decided to route the quality resources to the ones who would benefit from it in the current difficult times. People donate a lot but then a lot of times it lacks quality check. In a situation when the county's health resources are already burdened, we need to contribute in a responsible manner," said Kushang- CEO, Supplynote.

The campaign was led by the Supplynote team, which shared the agenda with the popular partner restaurants and invited the contributions. The food was gathered at one place by SupplyNote team and was further handed over to the NGO team for distribution. Further, the distribution was managed by NGO JanMan foundation, who were also responsible for setting up the camps at select locations. The campaign was organized keeping all the safety measures in place. The organizers maintained social distancing and proper sanitization.



# What will **2021** Bring in the world of conservation?

A team of scientists and researchers from around the world come up with 15 trends with potentially large impacts on biodiversity conservation, and release their findings in scientific journal 'Trends in Ecology & Evolution'

A DETAILED REPORT  
BY MARY HOFF, ENSIA.COM





If it did nothing else, the emergence of Covid-19 a year ago underscored for all of us the importance of anticipating and preparing for — and, as appropriate, steering the course of — things that might happen in the future.

That is, in a nutshell, the goal of the 2021 Horizon Scan of Emerging Global Biological Conservation Issues, recently published in the scientific journal *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* by Cambridge University conservation biologist William Sutherland and a team of 24 other conservation practitioners and researchers from around the world.

The team started by identifying 97 trends with potentially large impacts on conservation and biodiversity, then trimmed the list down to the top 15 that they agreed “society may urgently need to address.”

“Recent global assessments of biological diversity and climate change indicate negative trends and a rapidly narrowing window for action to reverse these trends,” the researchers wrote. “We believe that identification of novel or emerging issues for global biological conservation should inform policy making in the context of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and encourage research, discussion, and allocation of funds for continued tracking, in addition to informing management and policy change.”

The 2021 horizon scan is the latest in a series that stretches back more than a decade (read summaries of the most recent five here). In addition to making their predictions for the year ahead, the team members reviewed selections from the first horizon scan, published in 2009. They found that one-third of the issues identified in that scan

issues or caused considerable environmental impacts.”

Here are the issues that bubbled to the top in this year’s scan:

## Suffocating reefs

Coral reefs have come under siege from many threats in recent decades, from invasive species to warming waters to harmful fishing practices. Increasingly worrisome is hypoxia-associated coral mortality — suffocation from a lack of oxygen due to an influx of nutrients from land or aquaculture facilities into ocean waters. Because warm water holds less oxygen than cold water, scientists fear that climate change will only make this problem worse.

Deoxygenation of ocean waters already has harmed corals in relatively small spaces such as bays and lagoons. Although we know relatively little about how resilient corals might be to low oxygen, there is concern that in some cases it could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back for these valuable and beleaguered ecosystems.

## Iron-fortified coasts

Ocean coastlines are abundant sources of plant and animal life — and those in polar zones are becoming increasingly so due to climate-change-induced melting of glacial and floating ice that contains relatively large amounts of iron. Plants need iron to photosynthesize, so melting ice stimulates plant growth.

This increases coastal ecosystems’ ability to soak up planet-warming carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and potentially harmful nutrients running off land and boosts the food supply for other living things in the area. But as the trend continues, it also is likely to alter biodiversity and ecosystem structure and complexity along polar coastlines in unknown ways, even as it enhances biological communities’ ability to mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration.

## Waves of change

Heads up, ocean ecosystems: Global energy trends are about to bring major waves of change. Numerous offshore oil and gas rigs as well as first-generation offshore wind turbines are slated for decommissioning in the near future. A variety of strategies might be deployed for doing so, from removing all or part of an installation, to converting it to an artificial reef, to simply abandoning it. At the same time, new ocean-based wind energy installations and natural gas wells will be coming on line.

These upcoming changes in ocean-sited infrastructure could have big impacts on habitat in the vicinity — for better, for worse, or for both, depending on the loca-

“  
Recent global assessments of biological diversity and climate change indicate negative trends and a rapidly narrowing window for action to reverse these trends.

2021 Horizon Scan of Emerging Global Biological Conservation Issues.

# How to ensure sustainability remains a priority for businesses after the pandemic

Take a closer look at the job descriptions of corporate bosses, and know what motivates them, says **Stephen Langton** of management consulting firm Russell Reynolds Associates.

Sustainability is now linked to attracting talent and connecting with customers and stakeholders.

*Image: Kai Gradert on Unsplash*

**S**ustainability is fast becoming a boardroom priority but there is still a “rhetoric gap” between what corporate leaders say, and the actions that they take.

To ensure sustainability isn’t forgotten as businesses emerge from Covid-19’s economic fallout, it is important to bridge this gap, said Stephen Langton, management consulting firm Russell Reynolds Associates’ board consultant, Asia Pacific leader and chief executive of its Advisory Partners team.

One way to do this, is to set sustainability key performance indicators for corporate leaders to meet, he said.

A recent study of corporate bosses by Russell Reynolds found that just under half of them are taking action



**Stephen Langton**

*Image: Russell Reynolds Associates*

to integrate sustainability into their businesses, although nearly double the proportion believe it is critical to their success and survival. Consisting of interviews conducted this year with 55 chief executives and board members who have a track record of integrating sustainability into business strategies, the study was part of Russell Reynolds’

work with the United Nations (UN) Global Compact. The latter is an initiative for businesses to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies.

In an interview with global communications firm APCO Worldwide, Langton sheds light on why companies are becoming more sustainable, and what motivates sustainability leaders in Asia.

## How has Covid-19 affected companies’ goals?

It would be easy to presume that in the Covid-19 era, sustainability goals would take a backseat. We have found the opposite to be true.

With more understanding from stakeholders on Covid-19’s impact on profitability and revenue, we have found companies starting to bring in other



Oil refinery in northern China.

Image: AdamCohn, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



# G20 stimulus plans favouring fossil fuels

A 'remarkable departure' from long-term rises in energy-related emissions is being undermined by government responses to the pandemic, a new assessment has found, writes **Catherine Early**, China Dialogue

**L**ast year was the first in which climate policies, rather than shocks like the 2007-09 financial crisis, caused energy-related CO2 emissions to fall in G20 countries. Emissions fell by 0.1 per cent,

compared with a 1.9 per cent growth in 2018 and the longer-term annual average growth rate of 1.4 per cent between 2005 and 2017.

However, governments' Covid-19 recovery responses risk reversing, instead of locking in, these posi-

tive trends. At least 19 of the G20 countries have provided financial support to their domestic fossil fuel sectors, 14 countries bailed out their national airlines without attaching climate conditions, while seven provided unconditional support to the automobile industry.

These were the key findings of this year's Climate Transparency report, an assessment of G20 countries' performance on tackling climate change by a collaboration of think-tanks and campaign organisations.

Previously known as the Brown to Green Report, the annual review is compiled by analysis of the latest data sets such as those by the OECD

# People who changed our world in 2020

From world leaders who fought the coronavirus without abandoning climate targets, to frontline workers who bore greater risk for the rest of society, here are the people who made an impact in this year of upheaval.

**W**hen Covid-19 began spreading around the world early this year, even the most far-sighted experts could not have predicted the range of impacts the virus would have. Amid the cloud of uncertainty and imperfect information, the human spirit shone through.

We saw it in the world leaders who took decisive action to contain the pandemic while keeping their eyes on the bigger challenge of climate change.

We saw it in frontline workers who continued to show up for work despite fear and the risk of infection. They displayed commitment to other members of their community, but also exposed the inequality and extent of exploitation in many societies. We also saw the spirit of innovation in entrepreneurs who gave us new ways of communicating in the face of movement lockdowns worldwide.

Here are the people who changed our world in 2020.

## Dr Li Wenliang and fellow healthcare workers

Dr Li, an eye specialist in Wuhan, China warned others about an illness that resembled the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome on 30



**Dr Li Wenliang.** Image: PetrVod via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

December 2019. The message, sent to fellow doctors on a WeChat group, led to awareness and discussion of the Covid-19 virus. But Li was summoned to a local police station on 3 January this year and given a reprimand letter for disturbing public order.

He later contracted the virus and died on 7 February at the age of 34. Before he died, he told The New York Times that officials could have been more open, and that a better situation could have resulted from earlier disclosure of the epidemic.

The public hailed Li for doing the right thing, and the Chinese authorities launched an investigation fol-

lowing his death and later honoured him for fighting Covid-19.

Healthcare workers around the world have made a huge impact in 2020. Despite shortages in protective equipment, stress, burnout and the fear of transmitting the virus to their family members, they have soldiered on to help as many patients as they can.

## Jacinda Ardern

Ardern, New Zealand's prime minister, moved swiftly to curb the spread of the coronavirus and was able to declare in June that the country was free of Covid-19. Cases have surfaced since, but numbers remain small and New Zealand is widely recognised as one of a handful of countries that have responded well.

The Kiwi leader hasn't stopped there. She won a landslide victory in the country's general election in October, appointed New Zealand's first Indigenous female foreign minister, and this month declared a climate emergency. The country



**A packed year for New Zealand premier Jacinda Ardern as she led the country's coronavirus response, won a landslide victory in the country's general election, and declared a climate emergency.** Image: Nevada Halbert via Flickr, CC BY 2.0



Burned forest in New South Wales, Australia. Bushfires raging in many parts of the country in 2019 and 2020 laid west to an area more than 250 times the size of Singapore.

Image: Tatiana Gerus, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Flickr

# THE 7 SCARIEST CLIMATE STORIES OF 2020

From record-smashing storms and wildfires to the impending disappearance of polar bears and changes already spun out of human control, here are the most chilling climate stories of this year.

**N**early a year after it was declared a global health emergency, Covid-19 has shattered economies, upended countless lives, and killed almost two million people. But as devastating as these disruptions are, the impacts of climate change are set to be deadlier.

And yet, the climate crisis has not generated a global response as radical as that to the pandemic, raising a critical question: If the world has managed to come together to battle a virus, can it inject similar urgency into the fight against the creeping, civilisation-ending threat of global heating?

As coronavirus infection rates continue to climb, so do carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, which hit a

record high in 2020. Despite progress made since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the world is now hurtling towards an average temperature rise of 3 degrees Celsius this century.

Here are the scariest climate stories that you might have missed amid this year's unprecedented news frenzy.

**1 Wildfires ravaged Australia and the American West**  
The beginning of 2020 found Australia in the midst of its worst bushfire season on record, an event now known among Australians as the "black summer".

Fuelled by searing heat and drought made 30 per cent more likely by climate change, the disastrous blazes ripped through forests and communities,



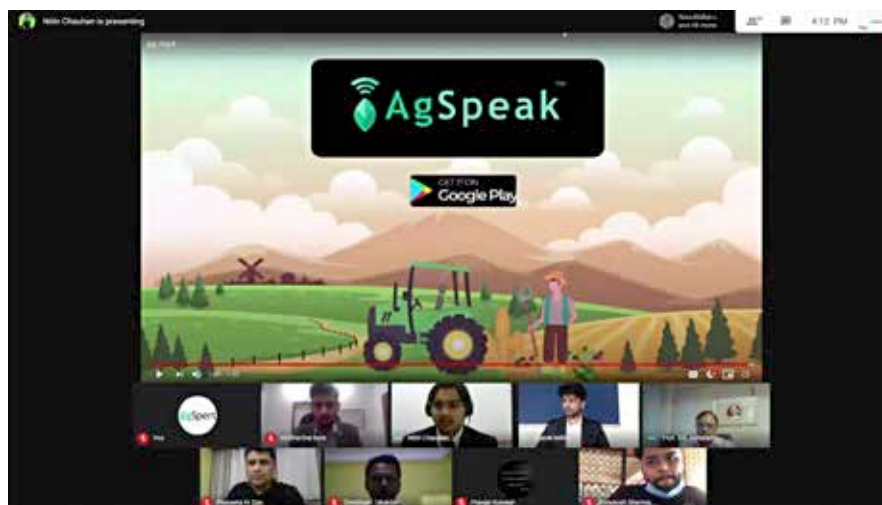
# IIT Guwahati students' start-up develops AgSpeak

A multi-lingual Smartphone AI-based Application for farmers to smartly manage their crops and farms

The start-up is co-founded by the students of IIT Guwahati and alumni of NIT Silchar and Dibrugarh University, Assam

**A**gSpert, an agri-tech startup, co-founded by the students of IIT Guwahati, and alumni of NIT Silchar and Dibrugarh University, Assam, has developed AgSpeak, a multi-lingual smartphone application for farmers to smartly manage their farms and remotely monitor distress activities. Developed with a goal of optimising the in-farm productivity through Artificial Intelligence (AI), this application will help the farmers in making decisions and managing farm activities by the click of a single button on their smartphone or computer. AgSpeak was launched by Prof. T. G. Sitharam, Director, IIT Guwahati on 13/12/2020 at Guwahati.

Co-founded by Mr. Siddhartha Bora (NIT Silchar alumnus), CEO, Mr. Manik Mittal (IIT Guwahati student), COO, Mr. Akash Sharma (IIT Guwahati student), SDE, Mr. Nitin Chauhan (IIT Guwahati student), Cloud Systems Architect, Mr. Dhritiman Talukdar (NIT Silchar alumnus), SDE and Mr. Kookil Pran Goswami (Dibrugarh University alumnus), Hardware Developer, AgSpert is leading this initiative in the North-Eastern India which has



Online launch of AgSpeak by Prof Sitharam

untapped potential, with diverse ecosystems having agriculture as the major economic activity. The developed application is multi-lingual and has an option of Assamese as well. This feature is a first among all the agri-tech applications available in the market.

Driven by hyper local crop data coming from satellite and smart IoT devices, AgSpeak considers up to 20 local crop parameters which are key indicators of their health like temperature, rainfall, sunlight hours, soil health status, among others, to alert farmers about probable crop threats in advance and suggest best practices to tackle the incoming threat, hence optimising the resources used and maximising productivity.

The app along with the IOT hardware has been tested for the past 3 months with 500 farmers and 2 tea estates. Some of the major breakthroughs by the algorithm were precise prediction of BLIGHT IN POTATO

and TEA MOSQUITO BUG, along with WATER STRESS in winter crops. These are major reasons of woes to farmers and small tea growers of Assam and cause lakhs in crop damages if not controlled in time.

Major commercial users of the product include commercial plantation farms (tea, lemon orchards, grape vineyards). The New Farm Bill 2020 is likely to boost formation of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)/ Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) among general crop growers to work as a business as well, which is likely to increase adaptation of paid services that comes with the mobile app.

Nearly 250 farmers have already been provided hands on training in utilizing the full potential of the app. However, the user friendliness and multilingual features of the app make it extremely easy for farmers to use and seldom require training. The mobile app is completely free