CSR TODAY

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GLOBAL SOIL MOISTURE IN 'PERMANENT' DECLINE DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

A NEW STUDY WARNS THAT GLOBAL DECLINES IN SOIL MOISTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY COULD MARK A "PERMANENT" SHIFT IN THE WORLD'S WATER CYCLE

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Saving Big Five will go a long way in India

Rajesh Tiwari
Publisher
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India had timely launched the Project Tiger in 1973 and today's increase in tiger number is because of this scheme. However, we still need to go a long way in tiger conservation as we could only provide protection to 50-plus tiger reserves to some extent.

Saving the Big Five would go a long way in India's conservation programme. Roots of India's success in conservation goes much beyond the Project Tiger and Project Elephant. India is a country of 140 crore people with a high population density.

Still we could save the Big Five: Bengal Tigers, Asian Elephants, Asiatic Lions, One-horned Rhinos, Indian Leopards. These flagship species have huge geographical areas. When we speak of saving the Tiger, we are not only saving the tiger but the entire flora and fauna associated with tiger landscapes across the country. Same is with Elephants, Lions, Rhinos and Leopards.

The term Big Five was first coined in the recreational hunting grounds of Africa. It refers to the five most difficult species to hunt on foot and includes the African Elephant, Cape Buffalo, Rhinoceros, African Lion, and African Leopard. India too has a Big Five - and these need to be saved. If you find tigers, you will also find a rich diversity of other mammals and birds.

Of course, there are challenges. The roots of this success lies in Indian culture of 'jivo jivasya jeevanam', meaning, you live and let others also live, which is inculcated by Indian religions. Not only Big Five, but Indian religions have asked the people to protect ants, snakes, trees, water and so on. Indian tribal communities have been worshiping the jungle since ages. Indian mythology is full of examples. Our community based conservation model established in central India in the past two decades has shown that local community and wildlife have no option other than to co-exists in the vast landscapes and corridors, beyond core areas.

India had timely launched the Project Tiger in 1973 and today's increase in tiger number is because of this scheme. However, we still need to go a long way in tiger conservation as we could only provide protection to 50-plus tiger reserves to some extent. Our tiger populations once dispersed outside- in the corridors face the threats of poaching, habitat fragmentation, accidents due to linear infrastructure projects and so on. However similar success could not be seen in case of Elephant conservation in spite of declaring few Elephant reserves. Probably as Elephants are the wide ranging animals and they require vast forest landscapes without fragmentation, their population could not increase. Elephant Reserves also could not attain the similar legal status and administrative mechanism in Wildlife Protection Act Amendments in 2007 compared to Tiger Reserves.

In the next two decades, our Big Five would face the challenge of habitat fragmentation and thereby the human-wildlife conflict. The stakeholders who plan the big infrastructure projects need to understand Wildlife conservation and landscape connectivity conservation . Local communities too need to change their traditional forest dwelling practices and accommodate the changing wildlife populations.

Yes, the village relocation programme has been a great success in India to provide inviolate spaces to tigers. The nature conservancies coming up slowly, have addressed the issue of crop damages and livestock losses and provided a win-win solution. Community based conservation model established in central India in the past two decades has shown that local community and wildlife have no option other than to co-exists in the vast landscapes and corridors, beyond core areas. For example, six villages from the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve have been relocated. Now we have recorded Lesser Floricans in those meadows. This is a great success story.

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Editor: Rajesh Tiwari

← Mr Sony Thomas, Executive Director-CBM India Trust, addresses the guests at the inauguration of CBM India's Early Intervention Hub for Children with Disabilities

CBM India to Inaugurate Early Intervention Hub for Children with Disabilities in Delhi

CBM India Trust, under a CSR initiative by one of its corporate donors, has inaugurated an early intervention hub in Delhi. The center will support children with autism and intellectual disabilities between the ages of 0 and 10 years old, while also catering to children with other types of disabilities, giving them a foundation for lifelong learning, a better quality of life, and full participation.

Early childhood intervention is crucial for children with disabilities, as it can significantly improve learning outcomes and quality of life. Through regular screenings conducted in partnership with local hospitals and Anganwadi centers, the hub will enable early identification of developmental delays and disabilities. Once identified, each child will receive comprehensive assessments to determine their unique needs, followed by the drafting and implementation of individualized intervention plans to help them build skills and reach developmental milestones. These services will be delivered by a team of experienced professionals, including occupational therapists, special educators, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists. Additionally, the hub will focus on empowering parents through counselling and training programs that provide them with essential skills to support their children's development at home.

Sony Thomas, Executive Director, CBM India, remarked, “The early years of a child's life shape their entire future. At CBM India, we're committed to ensuring that children with disabilities receive the assistance they need when it matters most. Our new early intervention hub operates on three core principles: early identification at the community level, professional services delivered by a multidisciplinary team at our center, and parent empowerment programs right at the families’ doorstep. This comprehensive approach’s ultimate objective is to support each child's successful transition into mainstream education and full participation in society.”

T. D. Dhariyal, former State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, and former Deputy Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Government of India, who attended the event, remarked, “Too often, developmental delays and disabilities are discovered at a stage when precious time has already been lost. That is why early identification is crucial. The sooner we recognize a child's needs, the more effectively we can provide the right interventions. Equally important is equipping families with the resources and knowledge to help their child reach their full potential. I commend CBM India Trust for this initiative that addresses these critical needs of children and their families in the community.”

Adani Group Sweeps the Prestigious IAA Olive Crown Awards 2025 with Four Gold Wins

The Adani Group, India's largest and fastest-growing integrated infrastructure conglomerate, shines at the IAA Olive Crown Awards by winning 4 gold awards across different categories. The Group was honored with the award for the Corporate Social Crusader of the Year, the Green Advertiser of the Year and the Pankha film was crowned with two gold awards for being the best film in the categories TV/Cinema (Corporate) and Digital by the Olive Crown Awards, which solely recognizes and celebrates creative excellence in communicating Sustainability.

Established in 1938, the International Advertising Association (IAA) is the only global association that represents Marketers, Advertisers, Advertising agencies, and the Media. It comprises 56 Chapters with members from 76 countries, including the top 10 economies in the world, and is headquartered in New York.

Pranav Adani, Director, Adani Group, said, “Our green initiatives demonstrate our businesses' critical role in safeguarding the planet for future generations. The Corporate Social Crusader of the Year award is a testament to our unwavering commitment. It underscores the positive impact of the Adani Group's dedication to clean energy in enhancing the quality of life for millions of Indians. Our commitment to renewable and sustainable energy is a cornerstone of our broader efforts. We are deeply honored.”

Aman Kumar Singh, President & Head of Strategy and Chairman’s Office & Group Head - Corporate Brand Custodian, said, “Winning these awards is a moment of immense pride for the Adani Group. This recognition is a tribute to the hard work and unwavering spirit of all Adanians. This film goes beyond the scale, size and speed of the Adani Group, highlighting the profound impact the Group is creating in the lives of common people. The film not only celebrates the indomitable spirit of ‘Hum Karke Dikhate Hain’ (#AdaniHKKDH) of today’s India and Indians but also reflects Adani's steadfast commitment to building a bright future for all.”

The award ceremony was held in Mumbai, with the Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly, Rahul Narwekar, as the guest of honour. Ajay Kakar, Head - Corporate Branding, Adani Group, received the award on behalf of the Group celebrating this remarkable milestone.

Bandhan Bank extends CSR support of ₹4 Crore to Ramakrishna Mission

Bandhan Bank, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), has contributed Rs 4 crore to Ramakrishna Mission to support the construction of the Ramakrishna Mission Centre for Human Excellence and Social Sciences (Viveka Tirtha). This initiative aims to promote skill development and education, reinforcing the Bank's commitment to social upliftment. Viveka Tirtha will serve as a hub for education

and skill development, empowering individuals with knowledge and capabilities essential for personal and professional growth.

Shri Partha Pratim Sengupta, MD & CEO, Bandhan Bank, handed over the cheque to Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission at the Belur Math.

Other senior dignitaries from the Math and senior officials from Bandhan Bank were also present at the occasion. Speaking on the occasion, Sengupta said, "Education and skill development are key pillars of nation-building, and it is imperative that we create opportunities for individuals to learn, grow, and contribute meaningfully to society. The Ramakrishna Mission has been at the forefront of imparting value-based education and holistic development of individuals for decades. We are honoured to support this noble initiative."

Ambuja Cements launches training programme to prepare rural youth around Ambujanagar for Armed Forces

- **Ambuja Cements has launched a training initiative in Ambujanagar to prepare rural youth for Armed Forces, Paramilitary, and Gujarat Police entrance exams.**
- **Programme aims to provide structured coaching to aspirants from five villages around the Rampara Mines.**
- **Close to 100 registrations received with the programme having commenced on April 1, 2025.**

Ambuja Cements, the cement and building material company of the diversified Adani Portfolio, has launched a training initiative in Ambujanagar to equip rural youth for careers in the Armed Forces, Paramilitary and Gujarat Police.

The programme, inaugurated by District Superintendent of Police Manoharsinh Jadeja, aims to provide structured coaching to aspirants from five villages around the Rampara Mines, opening new avenues for employment in national services.

With close to 100 registrations received, the programme has commenced since April 1, 2025, in the village itself, offering specialised training and guidance to aspirants. In addition, a women's empowerment event was held in the mining village of Kodidara, attended by 1,000 women from various local self-help groups (SHGs), reinforcing Ambuja Cements' commitment to holistic community development.

By enabling skill-based training and career opportunities, Ambuja Cements, through its CSR arm, continues to empower rural youth, enhance employability, and contribute to nation-building through structured academic and skilling interventions.

ibis India grows greener with a nationwide tree drive across 25 hotels

In a heartfelt celebration of Earth Day 2025, ibis India launched a large-scale tree plantation drive across its 25 hotels nationwide. The initiative—held on April 22—was a reflection of the brand's long-standing commitment to sustainability and community engagement. Over 1,500 saplings were planted by employees, further strengthening the brand's mission to create greener surroundings and inspire collective action for the planet.

The campaign spanned ibis hotels in Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi, Gurugram, Jaipur, Kochi, Coimbatore, Goa, Bangalore and Hyderabad—reinforcing a pan-India vision for environmental responsibility. With over 2000 employees participating, the initiative showcased ibis India's inclusive work culture that empowers team members to become active changemakers.

The purpose of the initiative was clear. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), 2023 was India's second warmest year since 1901, with extreme heatwaves affecting over 23 states. Urban areas continue to face a steady decline in green cover, resulting in rising temperatures, poor air quality, and declining biodiversity. In this scenario, tree plantation is not just symbolic—it is a step toward climate resilience and better living environments.

Employees participated in sapling plantations either within hotel premises or in collaboration with local communities and civic bodies.

Speaking about the initiative, Tejus Jose, Director of Operations at ibis & ibis Styles India, said, "At ibis, sustainability has always been part of our DNA—not just as a value, but as a way of doing business. This Earth Day, we were proud to put that commitment into action with a pan-India tree plantation drive involving all our teams. Through initiatives like these, we aim to contribute positively to the communities we serve, while also creating green, breathable spaces around us. This drive was a celebration of our people, our planet, and our purpose—all deeply connected through our brand's foundation of responsible hospitality."

Driven by a long-term commitment to the planet, ibis India has embedded sustainability into its core ethos. The brand continues to champion environmentally conscious practices including energy and water conservation, waste management, and carbon footprint reduction. Recently ibis India launched a unique initiative called the Green Tourism Pledge to encourage eco-conscious travel among guests and staff spreading awareness to the audience at large. The brand has also led impactful activities such as beach clean-ups and community-driven environmental programs—proving that consistent, everyday actions can lead to meaningful impact.

The Souled Store's 'World for All' Facility Rescues 300+ Stray Animals

The Souled Store has launched an exclusive QR tee - when scanned, the barcode leads to a donation page, where supporters can directly contribute to the care of rescued animals. But more than just donations, the page also offers a glimpse into the lives of the animals being nurtured at the shelter—showcasing their transformation from abandoned strays to cherished companions.

Through our very own World For All facility, we've already rescued and rehomed over 300 dogs and cats — providing medical treatment, nourishment, and most importantly, a second chance at life.

Since 2023, The Souled Store has taken full responsibility for the operations of the World For All Animal Care Facility, ensuring consistent support, resources, and oversight for the ongoing rescue efforts.

"We've always believed that a brand should stand for more than just profits. Supporting World For All and eventually running the shelter ourselves was one of the easiest decisions we've made. It's not charity. It's just the right thing to do," said Vedang Patel, Co-founder of The Souled Store.

The initiative has also received heartwarming support from the entertainment industry. Actors Soha Ali Khan, Kunal Khemu and Nikita Dutta, among others, have proudly worn the T-shirt and voiced their support for the cause. Their involvement has helped draw attention to the importance of adopting and protecting stray animals amplifying the message of compassion and care.

Yet, in a time when social campaigns are often crafted for attention, this initiative stands apart—with no marketing blitz, no PR spin, and no product push. This is not a campaign; it's a calling. It is, at its core, a reflection of The Souled Store's values: giving back to the voiceless, simply because it's the right thing to do. The next time someone wears this T-shirt, they're not just wearing fashion—they're wearing a movement. One that saved lives, gave second chances, and turned empathy into action.

Link: https://www.thesouledstore.com/product/men-oversized-t-shirts-save-the-dog?gte=1

Rustomjee Unveils 35,000 Sq. Ft. Industry-First Labour Housing for 500 Workers

Rustomjee Group—known for its people-first approach to urban development—has introduced a Labour Housing facility at the construction site of Rustomjee Urbania in Thane, marking a first-of-its-kind initiative in the Indian real estate industry. The facility spans 35,000 sq. ft. and is designed to accommodate 500 workers across 84 well-ventilated rooms, each measuring 10 feet by 10 feet and housing up to six individuals.

Rooted in the Rustomjee culture of care and community, this thoughtful initiative reflects not just infrastructure, but intention. What has been created is not just accommodation, but a nurturing ecosystem that underscores the Group's commitment to giving back to those who build homes for all of us - and reinforces its enduring belief in building not just better homes, but better lives.

Commenting on the launch, Boman Rustom Irani, Chairman & Managing Director, Rustomjee Group, said, "At Rustomjee, we believe that the people who build our cities deserve to be at the heart of them. Our newly developed labour accommodation at Urbania is a reflection of that belief - designed not just as housing, but as a dignified and holistic living environment. This initiative reinforces our long-term vision to raise the standard of worker welfare in the real estate industry. We hope this sets a benchmark that can be progressively adopted across our projects and inspires a broader shift towards more inclusive and responsible development."

The labour housing incorporates eco-conscious infrastructure, including a 40 KLD Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) that recycles water for flushing and landscaping, and a 200 KG Organic Waste Composter (OWC) to manage kitchen waste on-site. A comprehensive fire protection network, with 13-yard hydrants, 900 LPM fire pumps, and sprinklers in critical areas like the gas bank and kitchen,

ensures round-the-clock safety.

Efficient Hutments: Workers' accommodation built with PUF panels, offering thermal insulation to maintain cooler indoor temperatures.

Commenting on the launch Anupam Verma, CEO, Kapstone Constructions (a Rustomjee Group Company), said, "Housing for workforce is typically seen as a checkbox requirement. At Rustomjee, we've redefined that. We have engineered this with the same precision and care we apply to our flagship residences. Every detail—from safety systems to sanitation and recreation—has been curated to ensure that our workforce is cared for like any resident of an urban township." From well-designed living spaces to hygiene, clean cooking (gas-enabled), and dining facilities, every element has been planned with care. The facility includes 29 toilets, 9 urinals, and 15 dedicated bathing points, ensuring clean and accessible sanitation. A UV-based water purification system provides safe drinking water, while a fully equipped canteen—powered by 42 double-burner gas stoves—can serve up to 280 workers at a time.

Beyond essentials, the facility also fosters community and recreation—with an open gym, sports zones, a projector room for after-hours leisure, a full-time doctor's clinic, maternity room, barber shop, crèche, retail outlets, and an entertainment room—ensuring every aspect of worker well-being is cared for.

Plans are already underway to implement similar models at other Rustomjee projects, reinforcing the Group's vision of holistic, integrated development—one that includes its workforce at every step.

Union Bank of India empowers specially abled staff to conquer Mt. Everest Expedition 2025

Union Bank of India announced a noble initiative of sponsoring a visually impaired staff for her Mt. Everest Expedition 2025 underscoring its dedication to fostering inclusivity and empowerment.

A. Manimekhalai, Managing Director, and CEO of Union Bank of India lauded Chhonzin Angmo's determination and indomitable spirit, extending heartfelt best wishes for her success in the expedition. Chhonzin is set to become one of the first specially abled mountain climbers to conquer Mt. Everest. A. Manimekhalai also formally presented a sponsorship cheque of Rs. 56 lakhs to Angmo at the bank's Delhi zonal office to support her journey.

Demonstrating remarkable courage, resilience, and determination, Chhonzin Angmo is successfully shortlisted for the Mt. Everest Expedition 2025 after her participation in the Mt. Everest Base Camp Expedition in October 2024.

Angmo has participated in various athletic competitions, including Adventure Beyond Barrier Foundation

NGO's Khardung La Pass Cycling competition, Kanam Peak Expedition in September 2022. She has also courageously navigated and ascended the world's highest battlefield, the Siachen Glacier, reaching the Kumar Post at an altitude of 15,632 feet.

Angmo's remarkable achievements and inspiring story embody the spirit of empowerment and inclusivity that Union Bank of India strives to promote.

National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Signs MoU with New Development Bank to accelerate Infrastructure and Sustainable Development Projects in India

The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), one of India's premier Development Financial Institution (DFI), has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the New Development Bank (NDB) to establish a strategic framework for cooperation in areas of mutual interest, which includes creating a deep and sustainable infrastructure financing market and developing a supportive ecosystem around it. The New Development Bank (NDB) is a multilateral development bank established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) with the purpose of mobilising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs). This collaboration will help bridge the infrastructure financing gap and explore long-term collaboration opportunities, including the exchange of technical expertise.

NaBFID aims to work with NDB on clean energy and transportation projects, such as renewable energy initiatives, sustainable water and sewage management, among others. The MoU also lays the foundation for both organizations to participate in infrastructure projects through thematic-level collaborations within their respective mandates.

Additionally, NaBFID and NDB will partner in research and capacity-building initiatives, including seminars and workshops, to promote knowledge sharing and enhance institutional capabilities.

Rajkiran Rai G., Managing Director, NaBFID, speaking about the partnership, said, "This collaboration with NDB marks a significant step in our commitment to nation-building and sustainable development. This MoU will help NaBFID accelerate infrastructure financing in clean energy and social impact projects, creating long-term value for all stakeholders."

Vladimir Kazbekov, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, NDB, added, "We are delighted to partner with NaBFID to drive India's infrastructure and social sector development. This MoU reflects our shared vision of fostering economic growth while promoting sustainable and inclusive development."

Maharashtra Governor launches Women Empowerment, Cyber Security Initiatives of BOBCARD

Maharashtra Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan launched the BOBCARD's Tech Pragati programme for Women Empowerment and Financial Literacy through Cyber Awareness at Y B Chavan Auditorium in Mumbai .

The programme is being run by BOBCARD as part of its CSR responsibility with the help of Ahaan Foundation. Under the programme, Cyber Awareness and financial literacy will be created among women's self help groups and girl students of Schools and Colleges.

Minister of State for Women & Child Development Meghna Bordikar, MD & CEO of BOBCARD Ravindra Rai, Trustee of Ahaan Foundation Shilpa Chandolkar, Secretary to the Governor Dr Prashant Narnaware, Deputy Secretary S Ramamoorthy, HR and CSR Head of Bobcard Ravi Khanna, principals of schools, members of Self Help group were present.

The Governor handed over computers to the Principals of selected Schools in Thane district for their digital labs.

Acronis 2024 ESG Report Highlights a Year of Commitment to Sustainability Growth, Cybersecurity Leadership, and Social Impact

Focused on long-term objectives, Acronis strengthens its commitment to ESG efforts and support for communities

Acronis, a global leader in cybersecurity and data protection, released its 2024 Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Report. In 2024, Acronis drove environmental efficiency growth and reinforced ESG initiatives to support partners, enhance cybersecurity, and contribute to a better future. As an ESG-responsible organization, Acronis remains committed to sustainable expansion while enhancing cybersecurity while also making a meaningful impact on the environment and global communities. The report details key initiatives, including efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, strengthen cybersecurity measures, and expand social programs that support education, diversity, and workforce development.

Key 2024 ESG highlights include:

Environmental Leadership

- Updated and reviewed the company's greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory.
- Conducted an assessment of the GHG footprint from the use of Acronis solutions.
- Performed a data center risk assessment to evaluate environmental impact.
- Organized 23 environmental events, collecting over 2,700 kg of waste and logging 630+ volunteer hours.

Social Impact & Employee Engagement

- Launched the company-wide "Voice of Employees" program to strengthen workplace culture.
- Expanded the Acronis Cyber Foundation Program Ambassadors campaign, engaging 500+ employees in 76 projects, with nearly 3,000 volunteer hours.
- Hosted 34 #CyberWomen meetups across 10 countries, reaching 700 participants.
- Continued its Women in Tech (WIT) Mentorship program with 36 graduates.
- Supported education through the Acronis Cyber Foundation Program with the construction of six schools and IT classrooms.
- Introduced IT skills programs in Germany and Bulgaria, promoting workforce development.

Strong Governance & Cybersecurity Commitment

- Enhanced supplier reviews and business continuity programs.
- Strengthened cybersecurity by enforcing two-factor authentication for partner tenants.
- Expanded ISO security certification and launched the Acronis Threat Research Unit (TRU).
- Conducted information security training company-wide.

Alignment with the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs)

- Aligned initiatives with seven key U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.
- Focused on reducing inequalities, promoting quality education, fostering gender equality, and supporting industry innovation and infrastructure.

"In 2024, Acronis made significant strides in enhancing our ESG efforts, from improving the data quality used for calculating greenhouse gas emissions to initiating projects aimed at reducing our carbon footprint," said Alona Geckler, Chief of Staff and SVP of Business Operations at Acronis. "As we look ahead, we are committed to building on these efforts, continuously improving our ESG practices, and working closely with our partners to create a more sustainable future. We will remain focused on driving positive change through responsible operations and ensuring that our sustainability goals align with the needs of both our business and the planet."

As a cybersecurity leader, Acronis is distinguished with its natively integrated approach to cyber protection, unifying AI-powered anti-malware, backup, disaster recovery, and extended detection and response (XDR) to simplify security and streamline operations. By consolidating multiple tools into one solution, Acronis reduces complexity, enhances scalability, and helps MSPs protect more customers efficiently while minimizing environmental impact.

Back to the Wild: Two greater one-horned rhinos free-ranged at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve

In a similar operation in November 2024, two rhinos were free-ranged by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department at the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

© Vipin Kapoor Saini/Dudhwa Tiger Reserve/WWF-India

The Uttar Pradesh Forest Department has free-ranged another two greater one-horned rhinos at the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. The rhino translocation exercise aimed at introducing free-ranging rhinos and increasing their population in India's Terai region was conducted on 27 March 2025 with support from government officials, field workers, vets, rhino experts, and mahouts.

The minutely planned and tediously conducted exercise involved translocating two rhinos from a crash of around 46 animals in containment for over four decades inside the 27-sq km fenced rehabilitation area at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

A male and a female rhino aged between 15 to 20 years were identified and tracked with the support of the camp elephants and their trained mahouts. Specialised teams of experts then helped to tranquilise the rhinos, moved them and released them after checking their health parameters.

WWF-India, a technical partner of rhino conservation in Uttar Pradesh, has supported the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department in conducting the historic rhino translocation exercises at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

Anuradha Vemuri, PCCF (WL) & Chief Wildlife Warden, Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, said, "The successful relocation of rhinos at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is a giant leap for rhino conservation. After decades of hard work, the efforts to bring back rhinos to India's Terai landscape have finally begun to bear fruit".

Sunil Chaudhury, PCCF & HoFF, Uttar Pradesh Forest Department added, "The translocation exercises will help re-establish the population of free-ranging rhinos, expand their habitat, and reduce the risk of inbreeding. The exercise exemplifies the commitment of the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department to conserve and protect the greater one-horned rhinos".

Dr H. Rajamohan, Field Director Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, said, "Bringing rhinos back to India's Terai region has been our vision for decades. We have been working to conserve and secure the rhino habitat to reintroduce them in the wild. This exercise to free-range rhinos has set a precedent for similar rhino conservation efforts in India".

Dr Dipankar Ghose, Senior Director of Biodiversity Conservation, WWF-India, said, "A stable population of free-ranging rhinos benefits the larger Terai landscape, which is one of the best production landscapes in the country. Rhinos also spread seeds through their dung which enriches their soil and helps plants flourish. They are indicators of grassland ecosystems".

In a similar operation in November 2024, two rhinos were free-ranged by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department at the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. The Forest Department, with support from WWF-India and other experts, have been monitoring their behaviour and health, and early findings have indicated their suitable adaptation to the area. The learnings from the first translocation and the promising results have been the backbone of the second translocation exercise.

(Source: https://www.wwfindia.org/news_facts/pres/?27662/back-to-the-wild-two-greater-one-horned-rhinos)

CSR INDIA UNITED

SOS Children's Villages India Signs MoU with Govt of Tamil Nadu to Strengthen Foster Care for Vulnerable Children

MoU Signing between Sumanta Kar, CEO, SOS Children's Villages India and Thiru. Johny Tom Varghese, I.A.S., Director, Department of Child Welfare & Special Services, Government of Tamil Nadu

SOS Children's Villages India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department of Child Welfare & Special Services, Government of Tamil Nadu, to implement Foster Care, a Non-Institutional Care Program for children in need of care and protection.

The Foster Care Programme of SOS Children's Villages India provides quality, holistic care to children who cannot live with their biological families. Through a certified foster family model, we ensure that children grow up in a safe, loving, and nurturing environment that supports their holistic development.

The MoU was signed by Johny Tom Varghese, Director, Department of Child Welfare & Special Services, Government of Tamil Nadu, and . Sumanta Kumar Kar, CEO, SOS Children's Villages India, marking a strategic collaboration to strengthen alternative care solutions in the state.

Kar said, "Every child deserves the warmth and security of a family. This collaboration with the Government of Tamil Nadu is a significant step towards promoting non-institutional care programmes. By focusing on foster care, we are not just providing children with homes, but also enabling them to grow in a nurturing family environment with strong emotional and social support. We are proud to partner in this transformative initiative, ensuring that vulnerable children receive the care and opportunities they deserve."

The initiative will initially be rolled out in six districts of Tamil Nadu - Chengalpattu, Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram, Thiruvarur, Nagapattinam, and Mayiladuthurai, providing holistic development to 60 children and empowering their foster caregivers in the first phase. The programme will focus on capacity-building for caregivers, structured mentorship, and adherence to child protection guidelines under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

As part of this partnership, SOS Children's Villages India will provide technical expertise, training, and mentoring support, while the Government of Tamil Nadu will oversee implementation through District Child Protection Units (DCPUs). The collaboration reinforces a shared commitment to ensuring long-term rehabilitation and holistic development for children in need of care and protection.

First One Lakh Biogas Plants and Counting – Sistema.bio Drives Biogas Revolution in India

Sistema.bio India, a social enterprise known for its modern biogas plants, has reached a monumental milestone of delivering 100,000 biogas plants across 24 states, catalyzing a 'Silent Biogas Revolution' in rural India. This achievement brings clean energy solutions to over 600,000 people, helping replace firewood and fossil fuels, reducing emissions, and improving air quality. Beyond clean energy access, Sistema.bio's biodigesters produce organic biofertilizer that promotes regenerative agriculture by enhancing soil health, aiding carbon sequestration, and increasing crop productivity. This impact extends beyond energy access; it's about better livelihoods, healthier homes, and a sustainable future for rural communities.

Since its inception in 2018, Sistema.bio's journey has been powered by strong partnerships with corporates, non-profits, financial institutions, dairy companies, and government bodies. Collaborations with leading organizations such as the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Infosys, Amul, GCMMF, Nestle and Danone demonstrate the potential of biogas as a climate-smart, government-backed solution for India's smallholder farmers.

Through corporate carbon programs, supply chain emission reduction and CSR projects, Sistema.bio has mitigated 692,140 tons of CO2e, treated over 15 million tons of waste, and fertilized more than 1 million hectares of land annually with nutrient-rich organic biofertilizer. These efforts empower women, promote rural development, and support regenerative agriculture.

Emphasizing the significance of the milestone Piyush Sohani, Chief Growth Officer and India Country Director, Sistema.bio, said, "Reaching 100,000 installations in just seven years is a reflection of the dedication of our team and the invaluable support from our partners. With more than 70 million dairy farmers in India, many still relying on traditional fuels, the need for clean energy technologies like biogas is enormous. Our journey doesn't stop here—our vision is to empower 1 million farmers by 2030, further advancing India's energy transition and climate agenda."

While achieving 100,000 installations is a major milestone, the journey has required addressing key challenges. These include overcoming financial barriers for smallholder farmers, building awareness, and providing reliable technical support in remote areas. Notably, Sistema.bio's biogas plants are approved by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), reinforcing the company's efforts to drive wider adoption and scale impact across India's farming communities.

Looking ahead, Sistema.bio is focused on scaling biogas adoption as a vital strategy for climate change mitigation. By tackling methane emissions—one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gases—the company plays a crucial role in supporting India's net-zero targets. At the same time, replacing traditional fuels like firewood and coal with clean biogas solutions reduces indoor air pollution and builds climate resilience among rural households.

Sistema.bio is accelerating progress towards the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development. These include SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

With an aim to reduce 1% global annual greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 2030, Sistema.bio is driving an inclusive, sustainable energy transition for rural India.

Dubai-Based Teen, Kavin Khanna Collaborates with KCS Foundation to Launch Digital Literacy Initiative in Bihar

Kavin Khanna, a 17 year old, Dubai-based student from Jumeirah College, has partnered with KCS Foundation India to launch the Skill Leap Project—a transformative digital literacy initiative that has already empowered over 2,700 underprivileged students in rural Bihar. The project aims to bridge the digital divide and foster digital empowerment by setting up advanced computer labs and delivering a future-ready curriculum.

The first Skill Leap lab was inaugurated in September 2023 at Village Kaina, District Samastipur in Bihar, equipped with 20 state-of-the-art computers and supported by three full-time local teachers. The initiative is run in collaboration with the KCS Foundation, a community-focused non-profit registered under NITI Aayog (DARPAN). The foundation provided ground-level support in identifying the school, staffing, and sustaining the program.

Kavin, who leads the initiative remotely from Dubai, conducts weekly interactive online sessions with students and visited the Bihar center in April 2025 to engage with teachers and students through workshops and motivational sessions. His efforts have been supported by nearly $10,000 in fundraising from global contributors.

What sets Skill Leap apart is its structured, future-focused curriculum, designed by Kavin in consultation with educators and technologists. Students are trained in digital literacy, computer operations, coding, artificial intelligence (AI), and practical financial literacy. The curriculum blends foundational skills with real-world applications—preparing students not only to participate in the digital economy but to thrive in it.

Reflecting on his mission, Kavin Khanna said, “Skill Leap is more than a project—it’s a movement fueled by belief in the power of equal opportunity. Watching over 2,700 students from rural Bihar step into a digital classroom, many for the first time in their lives, has been deeply humbling. We’re not just teaching students how to use technology; we’re showing them they are part of a larger world, full of possibility. If we can spark confidence in just one child to dream bigger and pursue a different future, then every effort has been worth it. This is just the beginning—we’re building a foundation for lifelong change.” The Skill Leap

curriculum covers digital literacy, basic computer operations, coding, artificial intelligence, and financial skills—designed to equip students with the knowledge needed to succeed in today’s tech-driven world.

Pankaj Jha, Founder of KCS Foundation, added,“When a young changemaker like Kavin joins hands with a grassroots organisation like ours, real impact unfolds. His vision, energy, and unwavering commitment have helped us bring digital education to corners of Bihar that are often forgotten. The transformation we’re witnessing is profound; children who had never touched a computer are now learning to code, explore AI, and think critically. This initiative is bridging more than just the digital divide—it’s restoring confidence and hope in these communities. We are proud to be partners in this journey of empowerment.”

With expansion plans underway, the Skill Leap Project aims to replicate its impact in other underserved regions of India. By uniting the energy of youth leadership with grassroots expertise, the project stands as a compelling model for scalable and sustainable change in education.

Sun Pharma and Ambuja Foundation Launch Integrated Water Resources Development and Management Program in Dhari, Gujarat

Sun Pharma, the pharmaceutical company in India, in collaboration with Ambuja Foundation, has launched an Integrated Water Resources Development and Management Program (IWRDMP) in Dhari taluka of Amreli district, Gujarat. This four-year initiative aims to address the critical water and agricultural challenges faced by farmers and their families across 40 water-scarce villages in Dhari. This initiative is part of Sun Pharma's broader climate action efforts under its CSR projects.

The project focuses on increasing surface and groundwater availability through various water harvesting and management interventions, including in-situ water conservation, recharge measures, rainwater harvesting, and the revival of traditional water bodies. The project seeks to work closely with the Government and with the communities to ensure scale and sustainability, respectively.

At the recent launch, Brajesh Choudhary, Senior General Manager (Corp-CSR) at Sun Pharma, shared information about the various development projects initiated by Sun Pharma under its CSR initiative. He encouraged the community to collaborate and actively participate in the project to improve the water and agricultural scenario in the Dhari area.

In his address, Collector Ajay Dahiya emphasized the significant benefits of the project interventions, including the construction and renovation of check dams, borewell recharge, pond deepening, farm outlet construction, drip irrigation systems, horticulture plantation, and awareness and capacity-building activities. He assured government support and encouraged all participants to actively engage in the project to ensure its successful completion. He also praised Sun Pharma for its valuable support in the Dhari area.

Speaking about the project, Pearl Tiwari, CEO, Ambuja Foundation, said, "Ambuja Foundation is committed to empowering communities by promoting efficient water management, sustainable farming practices, and soil conservation. Through our strategic partnership with SunPharma, we aim to support local farmers to improve their economic status and reduce distress migration. We will educate them about the ways to increase their incomes by adopting water management strategies, rainwater harvesting, and the restoration of traditional water bodies. We aim to create a widespread and lasting impact, ensuring sustainability for their future,".

Dabur Revives 16,800 KL Community Pond in Baddi; Moves Closer to Water Positivity

India's leading Natural & Ayurvedic Healthcare Company Dabur India Ltd has successfully revived of an old, neglected community pond in village Narangpur of Baddi (Himachal Pradesh). The restored water body, with a capacity to collect and harvest over 16,800 KL of rainwater, is the 20th water body to be revived by Dabur and marks a significant step forward in Dabur's mission to become a Water Positive Organization by 2030.

The revamped Narangpur pond was handed over to the local community by Dabur India Limited Chairman Mr. Mohit Burman, in the presence of the Dabur Management Committee. This revived pond is set to benefit around 150 families in the village and will now serve as a powerful source for storing rainwater, which will help increase the groundwater level and facilitate the irrigation of nearby agricultural land. This will lead to enhanced crop yield for local farmers and a subsequent increase in farmer income. Additionally, it will be a permanent source of water for villagers engaged in animal husbandry.

As part of the restoration work, Dabur – through its CSR arm Jivanti Welfare and Charitable Trust – undertook deep digging and desilting of the pond, constructed a boundary wall, undertook stone-pitching and plantation to strengthen the banks and created improved water drainage system to filter plastic waste.

"With these enhancements, the pond now has the capacity to store a larger amount of water, ensuring its availability for the local community

throughout the year. This traditional water conservation system can become a lifesaver for rural areas facing water crises. By restoring this local pond, Dabur is not only contributing to water conservation but also enhancing the quality of life for the residents of Narangpur village," Dabur India Limited Chairman Mohit Burman said.

"We are thrilled to see the positive impact that the revival of this pond will have on the community. This initiative is a testament to our commitment to sustainable development and water conservation. Reviving the neglected water bodies and ponds has resulted in a 30% increase in farmer income in the region by way of higher crop yield. By working

together, we are not only addressing the immediate water needs of the village but also contributing to the long-term environmental sustainability of the region. Our goal of becoming water positive by 2030 is ambitious, but projects like this will ensure that we achieve this target ahead of schedule," Mr. Burman added.

About Dabur India Ltd: Dabur India Ltd is one of India's leading FMCG companies. Building on a legacy of quality and experience for 140 years, Dabur is today India's most trusted name and the world's largest Ayurvedic and Natural Health Care Company. Dabur India's FMCG portfolio includes eight Power Brands – Dabur Chyawanprash, Dabur Honey, Dabur Honitus, Dabur Pudin Hara and Dabur Lal Tail in the Healthcare space; Dabur Amla and Dabur Red Paste in the Personal Care space; and Réal in the Foods & Beverages category.

Adani Foundation at ACC Kymore empowers farmers in Kharkhari with water-efficient irrigation techniques

ACC, the cement and building material company of the diversified Adani Portfolio, in collaboration with Adani Foundation, is transforming farming practices in Kharkhari near Katni. With depleting groundwater levels and unpredictable rainfall posing challenges to local farmers, the initiative introduced advanced sprinkler irrigation systems, ensuring water efficiency, reduced electricity consumption, and improved agricultural yields.

For farmers like Ramji Patel, the shift from traditional flood irrigation to a modern sprinkler system has been life changing. Registered through the AF-WCI Project, he secured a Rs. 27,457 sprinkler system, with Rs. 13,728 covered through government and project subsidies, significantly reducing his financial burden. The new system has cut irrigation time from 8-9 hours to just 4 hours, conserving water and lowering electricity expenses – offering not just convenience but a sustainable way forward. Patel's success has inspired many in his village to adopt this efficient irrigation method, marking a shift towards sustainable farming.

ACC and the Adani Foundation, through such initiatives, continue to empower rural communities with innovative solutions, reinforcing their commitment to sustainable development and water conservation.

CSIR-CMERI Unveils E-Tractor and E-Tiller, Driving the Future of Sustainable Agricultural Innovation

In a significant stride towards promoting sustainable and energy-efficient solutions in agriculture, the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research – Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute, Durgapur, West Bengal (CSIR-CMERI), unveiled its E-Tractor and E-Tiller technology at Ludhiana. This initiative marks a crucial milestone in India's clean energy movement, focusing on transforming agriculture through innovation and sustainability.

Prof. Adarsh Pal Vij, Chairman, Punjab Pollution Control Board, graced the event as the Chief Guest, along with Dr. Nachiket Kotwaliwale, Director, ICAR-CIPHET, Ludhiana, and Dr. Manjeet Singh, Dean, College of Agricultural Engineering, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, as the Guests of Honour. Dr. Naresh Chandra Murmu, Director, CSIR-CMERI, hosted the event. Originally flagged off by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, on 28th February 2025 (National Science Day) from Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, the Ludhiana stop via Jammu and Palampur marks a major highlight at the CSIR – CMERI Centre of Excellence for Farm Machinery (CSIR – CMERI CoEFM), reaffirming India's commitment to green energy and sustainable agriculture.

Said Prof Vij: "I am happy to be part of this agricultural revolution that is opening new avenues for farmers to connect with industry and adopt modern, sustainable practices. As we look to the future,

embracing sustainability is essential, and electric vehicles mark a significant step in reducing air pollution and transforming agricultural operations. With technological advancements happening every day, it becomes our collective responsibility to ensure their optimum use. Unscientific disposal of batteries must be avoided, and proper knowledge is crucial for safe waste management. While our scientists are working on effective disposal methods, collaborative action from all stakeholders is equally important to ensure long-term environmental well-being."

At the core of the event, are the E-Tractor, CSIR PRIMA ET11, and E-Tiller, cutting-edge electric farming solutions developed by CSIR-CMERI. Designed for small and marginal farmers, the developed technologies feature low vibration, easy maintenance, women-friendly ergonomics, and zero emissions, delivering long-term economic and environmental benefits.

These innovations are designed to revolutionise traditional agricultural practices by integrating eco-friendly, cost-effective, and high-performance electric vehicle (EV) technology. This aligns with the Government of India's broader vision of achieving self-reliance in green technologies and advancing renewable energy goals.

Other than the technology showcase, the event included:

- Interactive Sessions with CSIR-CMERI scientists, agricultural experts, and government dignitaries
- Live demonstrations of the E-Tractor and E-Tiller, showcasing a green and clean revolution in smart and sustainable agriculture; Field trial by the Farmers; interaction and feedback
- Stakeholder Engagement with MSMEs, manufacturers, and agri-tech companies to promote technology transfer and commercialisation

Dr Murmu said: "The E-Tractor and E-Tiller represent a significant leap towards sustainable agriculture and the broader electrification of conventional farm technologies. These electric machines are not only environmentally friendly but are also engineered to match the capabilities of traditional diesel-powered tractors. Our aim is not just to showcase innovation but to drive a shift toward cleaner, cost-effective, and high-performance solutions that support farmers and promote sustainable agricultural practices across the country."

Dr Kotwaliwale stated: "The technologies developed by CSIR-CMERI hold great promise for transforming Indian agriculture. We encourage feedback from farmers and industry to help our scientists develop innovations that are practical and impactful, as they are committed to supporting and working with you every step of the way."

Dr Singh: "Innovations like electric farm machinery are reshaping the future of agriculture with cleaner, smarter solutions. It is essential that we pair these advancements with awareness and responsibility to ensure their long-term impact and sustainability."

Given Punjab's status as a leading agricultural state in the country, this technology demonstration highlighted the importance of sustainable innovations in enhancing farm productivity while minimising environmental impact. The event generated significant interest among farmers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. CSIR-CMERI invites farmers, manufacturers, policymakers, and stakeholders to actively participate in this transformative journey. With clean energy and innovation at the forefront, India is on the path to creating a more sustainable, efficient, and prosperous agricultural ecosystem.

Anil Agarwal Foundation's flagship Nand Ghar crosses 8,000 mark across 15 states

20,000 more to touch 2 million lives in Rajasthan

Nand Ghar, the flagship initiative of the Anil Agarwal Foundation (AAF), has achieved a significant milestone by transforming 8,044 Anganwadis into modern centres of holistic development for women and children. Spread across 15 states in India, this expansion underscores Vedanta's commitment to rural development, impacting over 3 lakh children and 2 lakh women with early childhood education, nutrition, healthcare, and skill development.

Nand Ghars are modernised anganwadis with provision of state-of-the art facilities. In addition to enhanced infrastructural facilities, Nand Ghar incorporates smart education tools, interactive e-learning modules, BaLA designs, and smart TVs to make learning engaging for children aged 3-6 years. Each center is equipped with child friendly furniture, access to electricity, safe drinking water, and hygienic sanitation facilities, fostering a safe and nurturing environment. Beyond education, Nand Ghars combat malnutrition by facilitating fortified meals to children and essential nutritional support for pregnant and lactating mothers. Integrated healthcare services, including immunization drives and routine check-ups, further strengthen community well-being.

Nand Ghar is also strengthening women empowerment by engaging community women in skill-building activities such as handicrafts, food processing, and retail, enabling them to earn an average monthly income of up to INR 10,000.

As Nand Ghar continues to scale its impact, last year marked significant achievements for the program. To combat malnutrition, Nand Ghar launched a two-phase distribution of protein-rich millet shakes, benefiting children across six states. Patented and FSSAI certified, this millet shake contains 23 essential vitamins and minerals and is crafted from a blend of ragi, bajra, foxtail and kodu millets. With the government's focus on promoting the consumption of millets in daily diet, Nand Ghar's initiative reaffirms its alignment with the national vision of fostering nutritional security through sustainable and locally sourced superfoods.

In March this year, AAF proudly inaugurated Maharashtra's first-ever Nand Ghars, launching 25 new centers in Thane. Expanding its reach further, the Foundation is committed to establishing 20,000 more Nand Ghars across Rajasthan over the next two years, transforming rural communities on a scale.

The initiative is well-aligned with the Government of India's vision for women and child development. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) empowers and supports mothers and their children under six years through various programs ensuring comprehensive childcare support in a secure environment with trained staff, educational resources, nutritional support, and activities for holistic child development. With around 14 lakh Anganwadi centres serving over 7 crore children under six years across the country, Nand Ghar's model contributes significantly to enhancing the existing ecosystem and amplifying the government's efforts in ensuring the well-being of children and women in rural India.

Speaking on the achievement, Priya Agarwal Hebbar, Chairperson, Hindustan Zinc Ltd. and Non-Executive Director, Vedanta Ltd., stated, "The journey of building 8,000 Nand Ghars reflects our deep commitment to transforming lives at the grassroots. These centers are not just reimagined Anganwadis, they are spaces of opportunity where children learn, grow, and thrive, and where women gain the tools to lead empowered, self-reliant lives. It is incredible to witness how Nand Ghar is evolving into a nationwide movement- one that is creating real change. Our partnership with the Government and the Ministry of Women & Child Development continues to strengthen this mission, helping us scale with purpose and bring meaningful change to communities across India."

Adding to this, Shashi Arora, CEO, Nand Ghar, commented, "At Nand Ghar, we are committed to holistic community development, where impact is measured not just in numbers but in the lives we transform. By integrating smart learning, digital tools, and sustainable nutrition programs, we are redefining the Anganwadi ecosystem in India. Over the past year, we have introduced cutting-edge digital learning modules and expanded nutrition programs to ensure that every child receives a balanced meal daily aligned with the Poshan 2.0 guidelines. Flagship initiatives such as Khaana Khaaya Kya?, the millet bar and shake distribution drive, and our digital smart learning model have further reinforced our commitment to child development and women's empowerment. We will continue to deepen our impact within communities, ensuring that early childhood education, nutrition, and women empowerment drive for meaningful and sustainable change."

WCD's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Department is celebrating its 50 years in 2025, and Nand Ghar continues to set benchmarks in early childhood care and women's empowerment. With this milestone, the program is reaffirming its mission to uplift India's rural communities, ensuring that the nation's children and women have access to quality resources for a brighter and healthier future.

GLOBAL SOIL MOISTURE IN ‘PERMANENT’ DECLINE DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

A NEW STUDY WARNS THAT GLOBAL DECLINES IN SOIL MOISTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY COULD MARK A “PERMANENT” SHIFT IN THE WORLD’S WATER CYCLE, WRITES CECILIA KEATING, CARBON BRIEF

Global soil moisture levels have been steadily declining since 2000 due to rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns, with researchers warning that these changes may be irreversible under current climate trends. *Image: Wonderful Vietnam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

Combining data from satellites, sea level measurements and observations of "polar motion", the research shows how soil moisture levels have decreased since the year 2000. The findings, published in Science, suggest the decline is primarily driven by an increasingly thirsty atmosphere as global temperatures rise, as well as shifts in rainfall patterns.

Consequently, the researchers warn the observed changes are likely to be "permanent" if current warming trends continue.

An accompanying perspective article says the study provides "robust evidence" of an "irreversible shift" in terrestrial water sources under climate change.

The drying out of soil "increases the severity and frequency" of major droughts, with consequences for humans, ecosystems and agriculture, explains Dr Benjamin Cook, an interdisciplinary Earth system scientist working at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and Columbia University, who was not involved in the research.

He tells Carbon Brief:

"Droughts are one of the most impactful, expensive natural hazards out there, because they are typically persistent and long lasting. Everything needs water – ecosystems need water, agriculture needs water. People need water. If you don't have enough water – you're in trouble."

DRYING SOIL

Every year, around 6tn tonnes of water cycles through Earth's land surface. When rain falls on land it gets held up in soil, wetlands, groundwater, lakes and reservoirs on its journey back to the oceans.

Soil moisture forms a critical part of the Earth's system, helping to irrigate soil, cycle nutrients and regulate the climate.

The amount of water contained in the soil is sensitive to a range of factors, including changes in rainfall, evaporation, vegetation and climate – as well as human activity, such as intensive agriculture.

The research points to a "gradual decline" in soil moisture levels in the 21st century, kickstarted by a period of "sharp depletion" in the three years over 2000-02.

Specifically, the researchers find the depletion of soil moisture resulted in a total loss of 1,614bn tonnes (gigatonnes, or Gt) of water over 2000-02 and then 1,009Gt between 2002 and 2016.

(For context, ice loss in Greenland resulted in 900Gt of water loss over 2002-06.)

Soil moisture has not recovered as of 2021, according to the research, and is unlikely to pick up under present climate conditions.

Joint-lead author Prof Dongryeol Ryu, professor of hydrology and remote sensing at the University of Melbourne, explains to Carbon Brief:

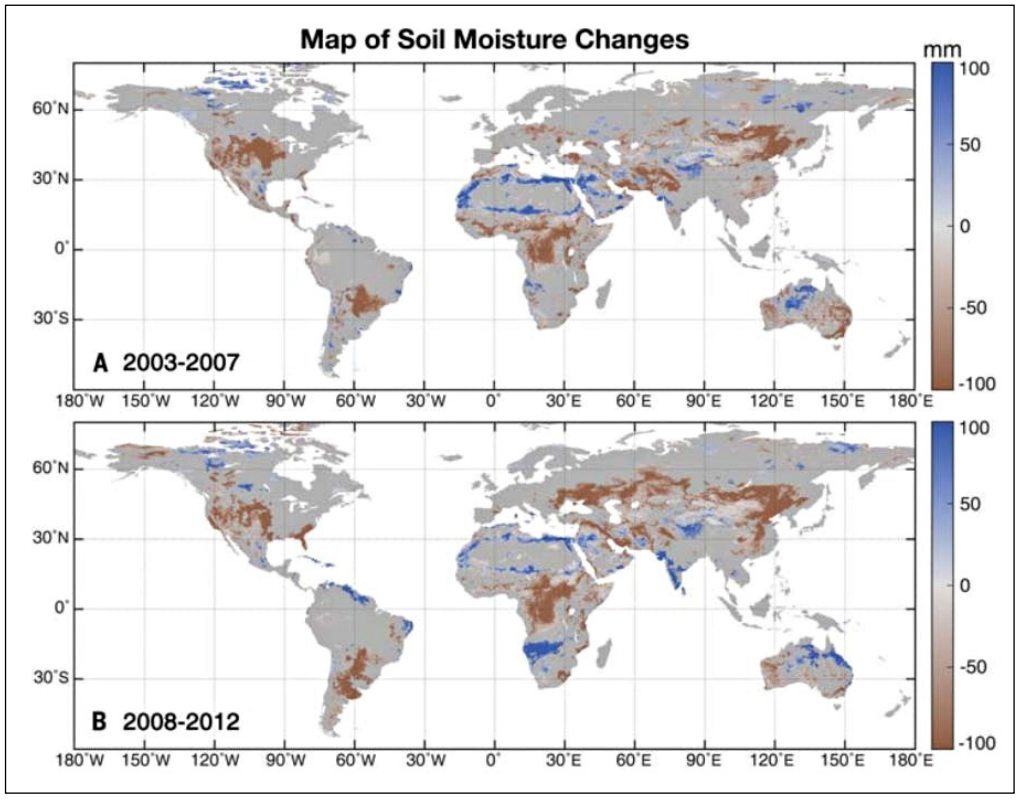
"We observed a stepwise decline [in soil moisture] twice in the past two decades, interspersed within a continuously declining trend in soil moisture. We haven't seen this trend earlier, so that is why this is very concerning." Ryu explains the decision to analyse changes to soil moisture on a global scale meant the researchers could confirm trends difficult to see in smaller geographic datasets:

"The unique thing we found through analysing these larger-scale measures is that – even if we have seen widely fluctuating ups and downs in precipitation and increasing temperature – the total water contained in the soil, as soil moisture and groundwater, has been declining gradually from around the beginning of this century."

The maps below illustrate soil moisture changes in 2003-07 and 2008-12 against a 1995-99 baseline, as estimated by the ERA5-Land reanalysis dataset. The areas marked on the map in brown saw a drop in soil moisture and the areas marked

in blue an increase in soil moisture.

The top map shows soil moisture depletion across large regions in eastern and central Asia, central Africa and North and South America over 2003-07. The lower map shows that "replenishment" in the years that followed occurred in relatively small parts of South America, India, Australia and North America.



Mean soil moisture variations in 2003-07 (map a) and 2008-12 (map b) relative to a 1995-99 baseline. The areas marked in brown saw a drop in soil moisture and the areas marked in blue an increase in soil moisture. Dark grey indicates areas where the change in soil moisture was statistically not significant. Figures estimated by ERA5-Land. *Source: Science.*

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ryu says the researchers "suspect that increasing temperature played an important role" in the decline in terrestrial water storage and soil moisture in the 21st century.

The study points to two factors driving gradual depletion of soil moisture over the last quarter century: fluctuations to rainfall patterns and increasing "evaporative demand". Evaporative demand refers to the atmosphere's "thirst" for water, or how much moisture it can take from the land, vegetation and surface water.

Studies have highlighted how global evaporative demand has been increasing over the last two decades globally, impacting water availability, hurting crops and causing drought. The new study notes that "increasing evaporative demand driven by a warming climate" suggests a "more consistent and widespread trend toward drying as temperatures rise".

Ryu says the "very unusual" drop in water moisture observed over 2000-02 could be attributed to low levels of rainfall globally, which coincided with the "period when evaporative demand started increasing". Another – less pronounced – period of rapid soil moisture decline seen over 2015-16 can be attributed to droughts triggered by the 2014-16 El Niño event, Ryu notes.

Ryu says the study findings indicate that soil moisture can no longer bounce back from a dry year, as it has in the past:

"It used to be that when precipitation goes up again, we recover water in the soil. But because of this increasing evaporative demand, once we have strong El Niño years – which lead to much less rainfall for a year or two – it seems that we are not recovering the water fully because of increasing evaporative demand. Because of that – even if we have a wet year following dry years – the water in the soil doesn't seem to recover."

CROSS-VALIDATION

Measuring changes in global soil moisture has historically presented a challenge to scientists, given the lack of comprehensive and direct observations of water in soil.

The researchers attempt to reduce this uncertainty by corroborating the ERA5-Land reanalysis dataset from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) with three geophysical measurement datasets. ERA5's land surface modelling system uses meteorological and other input data to estimate water within the upper few metres of the soil.

These figures were compared with data collected by the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) mission – a joint satellite mission between NASA and the German Aerospace Center.

Running since 2002, the GRACE mission tracks changes to the Earth's gravity by collecting data on groundwater depletion, ice sheet loss and sea level rise. These observations

have revealed a persistent loss of water from land to the ocean.

The scientists also cross-reference the ERA5 reanalysis data with a century-old dataset that measures fluctuations in the rotation of the Earth as the distribution of mass on the planet changes.

(The redistribution of ice and water, such as melting ice sheets and depleting groundwater, causes the planet to wobble as it spins and its axis to shift slightly. This is known as "polar motion".)

The third set of measurements the scientists use is global mean sea level height, which is collected by satellites. To extract soil moisture changes from this set of data, the researchers subtracted other components of sea level rise from the overall total – including Greenland ice melt, Antarctica ice melt, the impact of increasing sea surface temperature (which expands water volume) and the contribution of groundwater. This process of elimination left researchers with an estimate of the contribution of soil moisture to global sea level rise.

The study notes that both the sea surface height and polar motion observations "support the conclusion that the abrupt change in soil moisture is genuine".

Ryu says using global average sea level rise and "Earth wobble" to track water redistribution on land is the "main innovation" applied in the paper. He adds the value of "reverse engineering" the ERA5 dataset is to understand how to enhance land surface modelling in the future:

"By explaining all the contributing factors to this measurement, you can understand the process. And if you understand the process, you can actually predict what's going to happen in the future if any of these factors change in a certain manner."

NASA's Dr Cook says the "corroborating evidence" supplied by the paper offers a "really strong case that there has been a large-scale decline in soil moisture in recent decades". However, he says the relatively short reference period of the study means that identifying the cause of the decline is less clear cut:

"Whether [the decline] is permanent or not is much more uncertain…On these timescales, internal natural variability can be really, really strong. Attributing this decline to something specific – either climate change or internal variability – is much much more difficult."

SEA LEVEL RISE

A notable finding in the study's sea level rise analysis is that terrestrial water storage may have been the dominant driver of sea level rise in the early 21st century. Specifically, the paper notes that the decline in terrestrial water storage over 2000-02 – when soil moisture plummeted – led to global average sea level rise of almost 2mm annually.

The researchers note this rate of sea level rise is "unprecedented" and "significantly higher" than the rate of sea level rise attributed to Greenland ice mass loss, which they note is approximately 0.8mm a year.

Prof Reed Maxwell, a professor at the High Meadows Environmental Institute at Princeton University, who was also not involved in the study, says the researchers' efforts to compare soil moisture with other global water stores was "novel" and "opens the door to future study of a more holistic global water balance".

'CREEPING DISASTER'

The paper notes that land surface and hydrological models require "substantial improvement" to accurately simulate changes in soil moisture in changing climate.

Current models do not factor the impacts of agricultural intensification, nor the ongoing "greening" of semi-arid regions – both of which "may contribute" to a further decline in soil moisture, it states. Writing in a perspectives article published in Science, Prof Luis Samaniego from the department of computational hydrosystems at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research says that it is "essential" that next-generation models incorporate human-caused influences such as farming, large dams and irrigation systems.

The study posits that the "innovative methods" for estimating changes in global soil moisture presented in the study provide opportunities to "improve the present state of modelling at global and continental scales".

More broadly, advances in scientific understanding of changes to soil moisture can help improve the world's preparedness for drought.

Drought is often described as a "creeping disaster" – because by the time it is identified, it is usually already well under way.

PAPER AUTHOR RYU EXPLAINS:

"Unlike a flood and heatwaves, drought comes very very slowly – and has prolonged and delayed consequences. We better be prepared earlier than later, because once drought comes you can expect a long period of consequences."

Dr Shou Wang, associate professor at the Hydroclimate Extremes Lab and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, who was not involved in the study, says the research findings are "crucial" for advancing understanding of the "potential drivers and dynamics" of "unprecedented hydrological extremes in a warming climate". He tells Carbon Brief:

"This is breakthrough work that uncovers the drivers of hydrological regime changes, which are leading to unprecedented hydrological extremes such as compound and consecutive drought-flood events."

This story was published with permission from Carbon Brief.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/global-soil-moisture-in-permanent-decline-due-to-climate-change/)

Mining_Palawan_Rio TubaTrucks load nickel ore in the open-pit mine of Rio Tuba Nickel Corp in Bataraza, at the southern tip of Palawan, Philippines. The firm has been expanding its operations to meet demand for nickel from countries such as China. *Image: Eco-Business*

IMPACT OF TRUMP 2.0 ON SOUTHEAST ASIA'S ENERGY POLITICS

The Trumpian approach to critical minerals – evident from the United States' interactions with Ukraine – may force Southeast Asia to choose sides. The region needs to look at diversifying its technical partners in the energy sector, according to **Mirza Sadaqat Huda**

The Trump administration's insular and rent-seeking foreign policy will significantly alter the geopolitics of energy transition in Southeast Asia. This will manifest in two ways. First, the potential cessation of United States' involvement in the region's energy sector will heighten fears of China's dominance in energy infrastructure projects – including the Asean Power Grid (APG). Second, Trump's intentions of using critical minerals as a bargaining chip for providing military assistance, if applied to the Asean region, will impact the regional vision for sustainable mineral development.

The shutting down of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), an important player in the energy sector, will intensify existing fears of China's dominance in electricity transmission and generation. As shown in the table below, China provided approximately US$534 million in aid to the region's energy sector in 2022, accounting for more than a quarter of the total share. Comparatively, the US provided only US$23.7 million, or one per cent of total energy-related aid to Southeast Asia. In addition, the China Southern Power Grid Company and State Grid Corporation of China own and operate significant portions of the national grids in Laos and the Philippines, respectively.

China's outsized role in energy has led to national security concerns. These fears are not necessarily a reflection of negative perceptions about China; they relate to a more fundamental prerequisite of managing energy geopolitics – the need for a diverse group of strategic partners. In this context, the USAID and its counterpart agencies — the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) and the US Department of Energy (US DOE) – have provided key technical assistance in politically sensitive projects.

The closing down of USAID and the potential withdrawal of other US agencies is of concern to Southeast Asia. USAID's Southeast Asia Smart Power Program (SPP) has

Donor	Amount	Contribution
China	534 million	26
ADB	368 million	18
Germany	274 million	13
Canada	231 million	11
South Korea	211 million	10
Japan	167 million	8
World Bank	90.0 million	4
EU Institutions	42.3 million	2
France	42.2 million	2
AIIB	34.8 million	2
United States	23.7 million	1

The table is modified from Lowy Institute's (2024) Southeast Asia Aid Map.

China led in energy-related aid (contribution represented in percentage) to Southeast Asia in 2022. *Image: Fulcrum; Source: Lowy Institute*

assisted the development of long-term energy plans for Asean, provided technical training to energy leaders, and enhanced capacity for renewable energy trade. Most importantly, multiple US agencies have provided crucial assistance to the development of the APG. This includes feasibility studies on the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines Power Integration Project and a subsea power cable between Sumatra and peninsular Malaysia. The US-Singapore Feasibility Study on Regional Energy Connectivity is another important initiative that highlighted the benefits of regional sub-sea interconnections.

But even more alarming is Trump's demand that Ukraine hand over its critical minerals in return for US military assistance to Kyiv. At a time when regional countries are looking to engage constructively with the international community to develop Southeast Asia's US$800 billion critical mineral industry, policymakers are confronted with the possibility that their national copper, nickel and rare earth deposits can be used as bargaining chips in return for US defence and strategic guarantees.

In Southeast Asia, there is a growing recognition of the need to revamp the critical mineral industry. Indonesia and the Philippines, which are major exporters of copper and nickel ores, have undertaken trade measures to increase the domestic processing of these minerals. This is to transform their economies from being exporters of raw minerals to producers of value-added products such as batteries and electric vehicles (EVs).

The US-China conflict has been a constant challenge to Southeast Asia's critical mineral ambitions. Trump's Ukraine gambit is the very bottom of a slippery slope of US critical mineral strategies that are aimed at reducing China's dominance of supply chains. In 2022, President Biden initiated the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This provided tax credits to producers of EV batteries with two exceptions: countries that do not have Free Trade Agreements with the US and companies in which 25 per cent or more of the equity stake is owned by China. This policy can have a big impact on the region. China currently controls 75 per cent of the nickel processing capacity in Indonesia alone.

The IRA forces upon Southeast Asia what it does not want – to choose sides. Similarly, the Trumpian approach to critical minerals may leave Southeast Asia without a choice. If Washington demands access to the region's nickel and copper in return for military and defence support (for example, in the South China Sea disputes), where does that put Asean's ambitions of using critical minerals for the region's sustainable development? While this is a hypothetical scenario, when it comes to Trump, everything is on the table.

Asean needs to urgently address these geopolitical challenges. One priority is to increase the number of technical partners in the energy sector while continuing to collaborate with China. This can be done by engaging US stakeholders at the subnational level, as well as deepening interactions with the European Union, South Korea, and other partners. As suggested by some analysts, Southeast Asia can also manoeuvre around US tariffs on Chinese-owned companies in the region to develop a business-case for higher levels of local ownership. This can reduce exposure to tariffs while increasing regional control on energy. In addition, policymakers must see Trump 2.0 as a wake-up call to urgently implement the Asean's Mineral Cooperation Action Plan, particularly the deliverables on data sharing, trade facilitation and capacity building. If anything, Trump's opening moves have pushed Southeast Asian governments to think hard about addressing their transitions to greener options.

Trump's Ukraine gambit is the very bottom of a slippery slope of US critical mineral strategies that are aimed at reducing China's dominance of supply chains.

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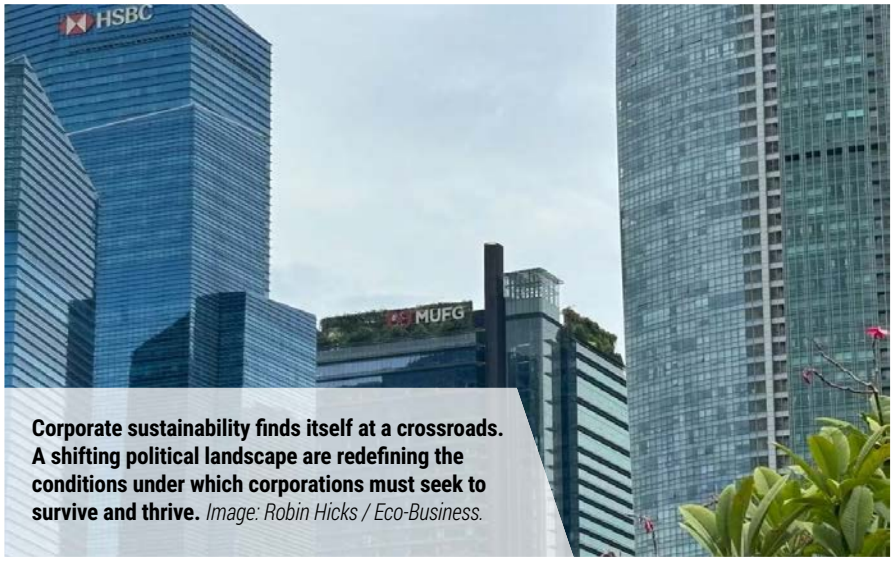
(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/impact-of-trump-20-on-southeast-asias-energy-politics/)



Corporate sustainability finds itself at a crossroads. A shifting political landscape are redefining the conditions under which corporations must seek to survive and thrive. *Image: Robin Hicks / Eco-Business.*

HAS SUSTAINABILITY BECOME UNSUSTAINABLE?

For companies, the challenge is not choosing between idealism and abandonment but forging a pragmatic path that balances resilience, local adaptation, and long-term business priorities, state **Georg Kell, Martin Reeves** and **Helena Carmody Fox**

After much progress in recent years, it is clear that the current circumstances of the corporate sustainability movement are far from ideal. But the field has been in motion, with successive setbacks and breakthroughs since its inception, and there are good reasons to believe that current political headwinds, although substantial, can only be temporary. The ideas and practices of modern corporate sustainability emerged in the 1990s in response to trade and investment liberalisation and accompanying concerns about the social and environmental impact of the expansion of economic activity. With the launch of global initiatives such as Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the UN Global Compact at the close of the last century, corporate sustainability took off and developed around the globe.

Over time, the movement has attracted the engagement of consumers, regulators, and investors. A watershed event occurred in 2004 when the UN Global Compact launched the "Who Cares Wins" initiative which gave rise to the ESG movement. In 2019, roughly 90 per cent of S&P 500 companies had published a corporate social responsibility report – covering sustainability principles – up from just 20 per cent in 2011.

Today, however, corporate sustainability finds itself at a crossroads. A shifting political landscape – intensifying rivalry between nations and social polarisation within countries – are redefining the conditions under which corporations must seek to survive and thrive. Some prominent companies have already begun publicly pulling back on key sustainability initiatives such as decarbonisation and social inclusion.

Others simply believe the business case for investment has not yet been fully realised, favouring short to medium-term gains over long-term bets. Among many examples, some key car manufacturers are scaling back their electric vehicle plans globally, and at least three major energy companies are scrapping long-anticipated green plants due to reduced consumer demand and slow growth. At the same time, five of Canada's largest banks and the six largest US banks have recently left the Net-Zero Banking Alliance – a UN finance initiative. Many more are quietly scaling back sustainability activities and reconsidering their relevance as they search for new strategies to cope with changing business conditions.

This begs the question: Has the corporate sustainability movement become unsustainable?

Politics trumps other considerations

Arguably, the most significant development of recent years is the resurgence of power politics. The post-Cold War "end of history" era

has faded and has been replaced by a world in which strategic rivalry between major powers is, once again, taking center stage. Many are referring to this as the post-globalisation era. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and an escalation of conflict in the Middle East exemplify this shift. Once co-operative allies are increasingly revisiting international endeavours if they feel they are at all at odds with their national agendas, for example, the US announcing its exit from the World Health Organization.

Of course, climate is a driver of geopolitics, too. As of mid-2024, a record 120 million people were forcibly displaced due to violence, conflict, and the impact of climate change. Three-quarters of all forcibly displaced people are hosted in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to future climate-related hazards. Displacement and migration have further exacerbated frictions between nations.

In this new environment, power politics and security considerations trump market priorities. Trade and investment policies are no longer designed solely to foster economic growth and well-being. Instead, they are used to defend and enhance geopolitical aspirations. The directing of billions of dollars to create a domestic microchip manufacturing base in the US through the CHIPS and Science Act is one example of this, although this is currently being opposed in order to meet another national priority – paying down debt. This rise of geopolitical rivalry has led to economic nationalism and a weakening of global norms and practices which have long supported sustainable development goals. Increasingly, nations are moving away from globalisation. This undermines the incentives and mechanisms countries have depended upon to cooperate on global sustainability objectives.

The shift has several immediate negative implications for corporate sustainability. While it does not entirely remove pressure on corporations to improve supply chain performance on environmental and social issues, it does introduce new priorities, such as rearranging supply chains for resilience against geopolitical disturbances. Greater complexity, cost, and uncertainty result in sustainability considerations garnering a lower share of mind.

Second, the rise of power politics and the emergence of new political blocs make global rules and standards for environmental, social, and governance issues much less likely and potent. A fragmentation of regulation and standards and their instrumentalisation for national purposes – as is arguably already the case with regard to human rights – seems more likely. The wider this divide becomes, the further we get from addressing this global imperative in a timely, holistic, and consistent manner.

Third, power politics and militarisation and the deterioration of international cooperation between countries not only diminishes prospects for finding solutions to global sustainability challenges but also reduces the capacity to respond to health crises and other humanitarian emergencies. The tragic consequences of this shift are evident when comparing the relatively effective coordinated international response to the Ebola outbreak of 2013 with the response to Covid-19 a few years later, when vaccines became a tool of power politics.

Fourth, prioritisation of national economic growth is increasingly seen as competition with sustainability ambitions. The British Chancellor saying that economic growth trumps 'other things' when asked about plans for controversial airport expansions at Davos this year exemplifies the shift in mindset.

Fifth, less international cooperation and a deteriorating political climate mean higher risks, greater costs, and less cross-border investment. Realigning supply chains, dealing with sanctions, and in some cases, selectively divesting have already become standard practices to mitigate political risks. Last year, 14 western nations formed a coalition to attract private investment in critical mineral supply in a concerted move to reduce reliance on China. Government affairs and political risk management have taken centre stage in navigating the shifting landscape and various strategies to "localise" operations and ownership to mitigate against political risks are being employed. At the same time, industries deemed to be of national strategic interest are compelled to align even more closely with political agendas. Reduced mutual dependence means having less in common, further fueling divergence between nations.

Turbulance in sustainability regulation

With the new US administration withdrawing again from the Paris Agreement and retreating from in-flight sustainability investments, a rapid de-emphasis of climate and environment seems all but certain in the near term.

At the same time, Europe is facing a backlash against burgeoning sustainability regulation, which is perceived as weakening competitiveness. In response, a rollback of sustainability regulation seems to be a plausible scenario. Former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi said the EU faces an 'existential crisis' if it doesn't address its dwindling global competitiveness because of what many corporations deem to be stifling sustainability regulations.

Combined with the geopolitical considerations mentioned above, it may be tempting for companies to deemphasise sustainability, and indeed many major players have already publicly backpedalled on

sustainability and human development matters.

Planet eventually trumps politics

In the short term, therefore, it seems reasonable to expect a further unravelling of the corporate sustainability agenda. In the longer term, however, there are reasons to believe that several countervailing forces will overturn this short-term reversal and lead to a renewed emphasis on sustainability.

For one, enormous progress has been made on renewable energy technologies and a renewable energy transition, in no small part shaped by China. This has in itself become an object of geopolitical competition.

Secondly, while politics may trump other considerations in the short term, planetary realities ultimately shape politics. A failure to contain carbon emissions and a deteriorating climate situation, revealed through increasingly dramatic events like the Los Angeles fires, must eventually mobilise popular opinion and reshape politics.

Thirdly, the ever-increasing stock of sustainable business model innovations seems set to transform sustainability from an expensive, if necessary, inconvenience to a potentially self-sustaining source of competitive advantage.

Fourth, markets are already responding to physical climate impacts as is evident with rising insurance costs and price increases of agricultural products, and with near certainty there is more to come. Parts of the sustainability agenda have thus transitioned from hopes and moral imperatives to economic self-interest and business common sense.

Looking Ahead

So how should companies react to this complex dynamic whereby pressures to adopt sustainable business models are weakened in the short term but likely reverse in the longer term?

The two strategies which are least likely to be viable are, on the one hand, pressing ahead idealistically as if nothing had changed, and on the other, dropping the sustainability agenda entirely.

In transiting from one sustainability regime to another, one should not expect an orderly or predictable trajectory – but rather, as philosopher Gramsci put it, a "time of monsters".

With so much changing, we can give some rules of thumb for companies to navigate an inevitably messy transition:

- Be guided by the scenario of a rebound of sustainability imperatives and the expectation that this will increasingly be demanded by citizens. This will not only help prepare for the unavoidable situation where society will demand more drastic climate mitigation measures. It will also help build resilience to deal with the physical damage that a warming globe is already extracting.
- Rediscover fundamental values that inform and guide corporate culture to help build bridges between polarised communities and nations. Universally recognised values such as advocated by the UN Global Compact transcend political ideologies and cultural divides and also offer a more stable foundation to build strategies upon.
- Navigating fragmenting policy frameworks and social issues is putting a premium on local adaptation. While this undermines international cooperation on sustainability, there is a silver lining. Encouraging country and community-oriented activities can provide greater resilience and help build trust bottom up.
- Better integrate sustainability imperatives with innovation and technology strategy. Energy and materials efficiency are examples of areas where the economic benefits can be tangible even in the near term.
- Focus on a few core priorities, and prize pragmatic action and impact over comprehensiveness and appearances. Overstretch and politicisation are avoidable if companies focus on the sustainability issues which are core to the long-term interests of their businesses.
- Seize the opportunity to make progress while competitors may be distracted and pursue decisions that emphasise their declared values.

In short, companies can best ensure their own sustainability by looking past the short-term de-emphasis on sustainability and pragmatically navigating towards an inevitable rebound.

In transiting from one sustainability regime to another, one should not expect an orderly or predictable trajectory – but rather, as philosopher Gramsci put it, a "time of monsters".

Georg Kell is founder of UN Global Impact. Helena Carmody Fox is ambassador, Strategy Lab. Martin Reeves is chairman, BCG Henderson Institute

This piece was originally published on BCG Henderson Institute's website.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/has-sustainability-become-unsustainable/)

NEW STUDY WARNS INDIA'S COASTAL 'CLIMATE HEROES' AT RISK

Calls for Urgent Action to Protect Mangroves, Seagrasses & Salt Marshes

A comprehensive scoping study titled Shields of the Shore, released today by SaciWATERs and ClimateRISE Alliance has unveiled alarming threats to India's coastal blue vegetated ecosystems—mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes. These ecosystems, often referred to as "blue carbon ecosystems," are vital for climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and the livelihoods of millions of coastal residents. However, they are under severe threat from disruptions in freshwater inflows, urban encroachment, industrial expansion in upstream and coastal regions, aquaculture intensification, and the escalating impacts of climate change.

The report highlights the critical role these ecosystems play in India's ecological and socio-economic fabric. Mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes not only sequester carbon at rates five times higher than rainforests but also act as natural barriers against storm surges, coastal erosion, and rising sea levels. Despite their immense value, these ecosystems are rapidly deteriorating, with significant implications for India's climate resilience and coastal communities.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Mangroves at Risk:

- India has lost approximately 7.43 km² of mangrove cover since 2021, with states like Gujarat and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands experiencing significant declines
- Over 50% of India's mangrove ecosystems are classified as vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered, with South India's mangroves now labeled "critically endangered" by the IUCN
- Major threats include aquaculture expansion, urbanization, and reduced freshwater flow due to upstream activities like dam construction and water diversion

2. Seagrasses Under Threat:

- Seagrass meadows, which cover approximately 516.59 km² of India's coastline, are shrinking due to pollution, unsustainable fishing practices, and climate change
- These ecosystems, particularly in biodiversity hotspots like Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar, are critical habitats for endangered species such as dugongs and green turtles
- Rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification further threaten their survival

3. Salt Marshes: The Overlooked Ecosystems:

- Salt marshes, covering just 290 km², are among India's most neglected coastal ecosystems, despite their role in carbon sequestration, coastal protection, and biodiversity support
- These ecosystems face threats from overgrazing, agricultural expansion, and invasive species like Prosopis juliflora
- The lack of research and policy attention has left salt marshes vulnerable to degradation, undermining their ability to buffer against climate impacts

Dr. Jayati Chourey, SaciWATERs said, "Our study is a wake-up call. India's mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes are critical ecological treasures—and lifelines for millions. Restoring them demands collaboration across sectors, sound scientific knowledge, integration of traditional knowledge, and policies that prioritize long-term resilience over short-term gains."

Siddharth Rao, Rainmatter Foundation said, "This study, undertaken by ClimateRISE and SaciWATERs,

assesses the current status of India's coastal blue vegetated ecosystems—one of the country's most vital natural assets. Developed in response to a sectoral need for deeper insights, the report compiles key findings on their health, vulnerabilities, and governance. These findings the groundwork for urgent action to combat biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and climate change through informed policy and targeted conservation efforts."

The report outlines a strategic roadmap for the conservation and restoration of India's coastal blue vegetated ecosystems, emphasizing the need for immediate and coordinated action.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Many restoration efforts lack a foundation in scientific principles or integrated ecosystem approaches, resulting in fragmented and ineffective interventions. Strengthening science-policy-community linkages through capacity-building initiatives is essential to advancing evidence-based, sustainable, and inclusive conservation and restoration strategies.

Strengthening Governance Frameworks:

- Integrate blue ecosystem conservation into national and state climate action plans
- Establish multi-tiered governance structures that involve local communities in decision-making processes

It is crucial to integrate blue ecosystem conservation into both national and state climate action plans. This approach ensures that the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems are prioritized in broader climate policies. Additionally, establishing multi-tiered governance structures that actively involve local communities in decision-making processes will enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of conservation efforts.

Promoting Community-Led Conservation:

- Empower coastal communities through capacity-building programs and sustainable livelihood opportunities
- Recognize and integrate traditional ecological knowledge into conservation strategies

It is essential to empower coastal communities through capacity-building programs and the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities. Recognizing and integrating traditional ecological knowledge into modern conservation strategies is vital. This approach not only values the deep understanding local communities have of their ecosystems but also fosters more effective and culturally relevant conservation practices, ensuring a harmonious balance between environmental preservation and community development

Scaling Up Restoration Efforts:

- Prioritize ecosystem-based restoration approaches that consider the interconnectedness of mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes
- Launch large-scale restoration projects with a focus on biodiversity conservation and climate resilience

Key habitats such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes ecosystems play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity and enhancing climate resilience, making their restoration a critical priority. By launching large-scale restoration projects that focus on biodiversity conservation and climate resilience, both will not only restore vital ecosystems but also provide long-term benefits for communities and the environment. By adopting a holistic and comprehensive approach, we can ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of restoration initiatives on a broader scale.

Leveraging Innovative Financing Mechanisms:

- Develop blue carbon credit frameworks to incentivize conservation and attract private sector investment
- Explore blended finance models that combine public, private, and philanthropic funding for ecosystem restoration

To effectively address the challenges of ecosystem conservation and restoration, it is crucial to leverage innovative financing mechanisms. Developing blue carbon credit frameworks can incentivize conservation efforts by monetizing the carbon sequestration potential of coastal and marine ecosystems, thereby attracting private sector investment. Moreover, exploring blended finance models that strategically combine public, private, and philanthropic funding sources can create sustainable financial pathways for large-scale ecosystem restoration projects.

Enhancing Research and Monitoring:

- Establish open-access data repositories to facilitate knowledge-sharing and evidence-based decision-making
- Conduct interdisciplinary research to address emerging threats such as microplastics, invasive species, and climate-induced stressors

By establishing open-access data repositories, they will facilitate knowledge-sharing among stakeholders, enabling evidence-based decision-making and fostering collaboration across sectors. Conducting interdisciplinary research is critical to understanding and mitigating emerging threats, such as microplastics, invasive species, and climate-induced stressors, which require holistic and innovative solutions.

As solar farms proliferate across the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, communities and experts are raising concerns about the indiscriminate use of glyphosate-based herbicides to clear vegetation around the solar panels. *Image: IWMI, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

INDIA'S SOLAR GROWTH BRINGS FEARS OF UNCHECKED HERBICIDE USE

Many solar parks in Tamil Nadu are relying on glyphosate-based herbicides for vegetation control, raising concerns about long-term health effects, groundwater contamination and air pollution, writes **Gowthami Subramaniam**

When a 40-acre solar park came up in Tamil Nadu's Tiruppur district last year, residents of a colony bordering the solar park, were unaware of the potential consequences. Now, they are increasingly troubled by the strong smell and possible health risks of herbicides that the park is using for weed control.

"We smell the herbicide on spraying days and notice it every month. Even last month, the smell lingered. We have seen one of our locals in the village spraying herbicides in the park periodically to control weeds," Vanathi, 45, a resident of Nallamapuram Colony, said, raising concerns about their effects on health and the environment.

"We fear these chemicals will seep into our water. The effects may not be visible now, but we worry about lasting damage they could cause in the future," said Vanathi. Her name has been changed to protect her identity.

Vanathi says the impact may be less severe indoors but the children who play outdoors could come in direct contact with chemicals as the solar park, located in Kuttapalayam village near Kangayam town, is separated from the colony by just a steel-wire fence.

Karthikeya Sivasenapathy, whose Senaapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation shares a border with the solar park, said, "When agricultural or grazing lands are converted into solar parks, glyphosate-based herbicides are often sprayed recklessly to control weeds beneath the panels, with no regulations or limitations in place."

Sivasenapathy, who is also the Secretary of the Environmental Wing of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party, said that the environment wing of DMK has already highlighted the dangers of glyphosate use in solar farms through a letter to the state and central government, in September 2024, urging immediate intervention and safer alternatives.

"The unorganised sectors often rely on herbicides to minimise maintenance costs, given the 25-year lifespan of solar parks," said R. Chellappan, Founder and Managing Director of Swelect Energy System Limited, a solar power company.

He said that Swelect Energy System Limited strongly opposes the use of herbicides or chemicals for clearing vegetation in solar parks due to environmental concerns. "We ensure that vegetation under our solar parks is removed solely through mechanical methods to prevent pollution."

A spinning mill owner in Tiruppur admitted to using herbicides in their solar farm to control vegetation beneath the panels. However, after applying the chemicals, they found that the vegetation dried out completely, causing increased sand and dust accumulation on the panels from the barren land, which reduced panel efficiency and made cleaning more intensive.

Now, they have switched to mechanical clearing, allowing vegetation to grow to a minimal height without shading the panels. "However, some solar farms that we know have found it infeasible to regularly maintain vegetation. As a result, they have opted for automated panel cleaning, ensuring that there is no vegetation below and minimising dust accumulation," they further said, on the condition of anonymity as it can harm their company's reputation.

Mongabay India reached out to the land owner of the solar park in Kuttapalayam village, but there was no response.

> **The volatile components of these herbicides could evaporate into the air, especially with rising temperatures due to climate change. Wind drift can carry these contaminants over long distances, polluting food, water, air and entire ecosystems.**
>
> –AD DILEEP KUMAR
> CEO,
> Pesticide Action Network India

A fear of long-term impact

As Tamil Nadu rapidly expands its solar energy footprint, a silent threat is taking root beneath the panels — one that could jeopardise public health and local ecosystems, experts said. The unchecked use of herbicides for vegetation control in solar parks is raising alarms among communities, who fear that the long-term consequences of the practice may outweigh the benefits of clean energy.

Tamil Nadu has aggressively expanded its solar energy capacity, ranking third in India for installed renewable energy and fourth for solar capacity, as per a state government report. Solar generation surged 53 per cent in three years, from 7,203.11 million units (MU) in 2021–22 to 11,033 MU in 2023–24. However, as solar parks continue to spread across the state, the concerns surrounding their maintenance practices are intensifying.

Sivasenapathy, from the ruling party in the state, pointed out that around 70 houses with at least 300 residents in the Nallapuram Colony live next to the solar park, completely unprotected from the effects of herbicides. He raised concerns about nearby water bodies, "Runoff from the solar park flows into the nearest stream, a lifeline for humans, cattle, and other life forms. How can we undo the damage once it's done?"

A.D. Dileep Kumar, CEO of Pesticide Action Network India, warned, "The volatile components of these herbicides could evaporate into the air, especially with rising temperatures due to climate change. Wind drift can carry these contaminants over long distances, polluting food, water, air, and entire ecosystems."

"Even at low levels, contamination can cause chronic illnesses that are difficult to cure. The toxins gradually accumulate in the body, acting like slow poisoning," Dileep Kumar warned while cautioning that herbicide runoff from solar parks could contaminate dam water, which supplies both local and urban residents, contaminating far-off places.

While weedicides are seen as cost-effective, chemicals like glyphosate—classified as probably carcinogenic to human health—pose long-term health risks that are often overlooked and far outweigh short-term savings. "If you consider the long-term adverse impact, their use is not economical," Dileep Kumar added.

Lack of government intervention

Over 74 per cent of solar farms in India are built on land that affects biodiversity and food security. This includes 67.6 per cent agricultural land, of which 38.6 per cent suitable for seasonal crops and 28.95 per cent for plantations or orchards. Additionally, 6.99 per cent comprises natural habitats, such as evergreen, deciduous, and swamp forests, which hold significant biodiversity value.

Sundar Rajan, an environmental activist and member of Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation in Tamil Nadu, highlighted that while solar energy is seen as a green initiative, it is not currently required to undergo environmental impact assessments (EIA) or follow an environmental management plan. He argued that these projects should be included in the EIA process to ensure compliance with biodiversity and pollution control laws.

Sivasenapathy cautioned that the situation could lead to another endosulfan-like tragedy, similar to what happened in Kerala, where unchecked pesticide use caused severe health issues, including birth defects before it was eventually banned.

Over 74 per cent of solar farms in India are built on land that affects biodiversity and food security. This includes 67.6 per cent agricultural land, of which 38.6 per cent suitable for seasonal crops and 28.95 per cent for plantations or orchards.

Safer alternatives to herbicides

Environmentalists argue that alternative vegetation control methods should be prioritised. "Earlier, they hired around ten of us for weed removal, which provided some income, but now they've switched to a single worker who just sprays chemicals," said Durga (name changed).

Dileep Kumar suggested that while manual removal may be tedious or expensive, using weed-cutting machines could offer a sustainable solution. "By employing these machines, solar parks can manage weeds without chemical contamination," he noted.

One successful alternative is solar grazing, where livestock such as goats control vegetation. Sulochana Cotton Spinning Mills in Palladam, which operates entirely on renewable energy—94 per cent from wind and 6 per cent from solar—has a ground-mounted solar park with a capacity of four MW.

Starting with 40 goats eight years ago, the herd has expanded to 360, replacing their entire need for grass cutters. "We are committed to conserving every bit of energy, even the small amounts consumed by grass cutters," remarked R Sabhari Girish, Head of Sustainability of the Mills.

Chellappan further emphasised that similar to developed countries where solar panels are designed at a height to allow grazing, India should adopt a similar vision and move towards such sustainable practices.

Martin Scherfler, co-founder and executive director, Auroville Consulting, appreciated the approach of solar grazing on the vegetation beneath and around the panels, which creates a mutually beneficial system that naturally controls plant growth while reducing the

need for manual or mechanical vegetation management.

"When implemented sustainably, solar grazing can even help restore degraded lands," he stated. Auroville Consulting is a sustainability organisation in Tamil Nadu specialising in policy advocacy, renewable energy, and ecological planning.

On the other hand, Dileep Kumar noted that barren soil without vegetation absorbs more heat, contributing to the heat island effect. Scherfler explained that vegetation naturally cools the environment through evapotranspiration, helping to lower panel temperatures and enhance efficiency.

"The efficiency of solar panels typically decreases with increasing temperature rather than increasing. By maintaining a cooler microclimate through vegetation, the overall system performance can be improved," he added.

A scientific report published in 2021 indicated that in many countries, it is common practice to clear vegetation and use herbicides to prevent regrowth in solar parks, increasing emissions from land-use change (LUC).

The report further highlights If all vegetation in designated solar park areas in India is permanently removed, the resulting LUC emissions from 2020 to 2050 would account for 2.5–3.5 per cent of the total emissions produced by burning natural gas for electricity generation in the same period.

A growing trend in the renewable energy sector is agrivoltaics—the integration of agriculture with solar energy. "In this system, solar PV panels are typically elevated on stilts, and panel rows are spaced wider apart to allow sufficient sunlight for crops growing beneath them. In some cases, crops are cultivated in the interspaces between solar module rows, optimising land use," explained Scherfler.

Pointing to the example of agrivoltaics in the world's first solar-powered airport, Cochin International Airport, Dileep Kumar noted that the airport still grows vegetables beneath its solar panels.

"This demonstrates how land can be used more effectively, creating additional income for the solar park owner. We should also place more emphasis on rooftop solar installations, reducing our dependence on land-based solar parks whenever possible," said Dileep.

"Beyond operational benefits, vegetation under solar panels enhances soil health by improving soil carbon content and fertility, supporting better stormwater management, and preventing soil erosion," Scherfler noted. Additionally, he stated that it contributes to biodiversity conservation by providing habitats for pollinators and other wildlife, further strengthening the ecological value of solar installations.

As a way forward, Dileep Kumar emphasised that biodiversity management committees at the local government level could intervene in this issue, sensitising both the government and the public. However, government institutions and legislation seem to be silently, or perhaps purposefully, supporting the continued use of these herbicides, he added.

This story was published with permission from Mongabay.com.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/indias-solar-growth-brings-fears-of-unchecked-herbicide-use/)

An aerial view of a mangrove forest in Indonesia. In Indonesia, mangroves protect communities from deadly tidal floods but because ecosystem services don't appear on balance sheets, they are often invisible. *Image: Joel Vodell via Unsplash*

NATURE NEEDS ITS OWN ID

Much like personal identification documents enable citizens to exercise their rights and receive government benefits, a digital nature ID could help establish essential environmental metrics to account for ecosystem services, write **Midori Paxton**

During my 35-year career in environmental conservation, I have come to realise that today's planetary crisis is driven not just by destruction and neglect but also by something more profound: our economic systems' blindness to nature's value.

As governments chase gross domestic product (GDP) growth and companies seek to maximise profits, they fail to account for the vast ecosystems that sustain our economies, societies and personal well-being. We manage what we measure and because ecosystem services don't appear on

balance sheets, they are effectively invisible, even as the implications – exploitation of natural resources, habitat destruction and pollution of our air, land, water and ocean – stare us in the face.

The consequences of remaining on our current path are well-documented. The World Bank warns that the collapse of just a few critical ecosystem services, such as wild pollination and marine fisheries, could shrink global GDP by US$2.7 trillion annually by 2030.

How can we make nature more visible and integral to our decision-making? The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures represents an important first step. By providing financial institutions and corporations with the tools to assess their dependence and impact on natural ecosystems, the initiative encourages and enables them to shift financial flows toward nature-positive investments.

Quantifying these relationships is no easy feat. But digital nature identification documents (IDs) offer a promising solution. Much like personal IDs enable citizens to exercise their rights, receive government benefits, access banking services and take legal action, a digital nature ID could help establish essential environmental metrics to account for the ecosystems supporting human development.

A person without an ID risks invisibility in modern society. The same is true for nature. Assigning secure IDs to natural ecosystems could shield them from unchecked exploitation. For example, a forested watershed could have an ID storing information about its geographical characteristics, biodiversity and ecosystem services, along with the measurable benefits it provides to local communities and even distant populations downstream. By quantifying these benefits, we could make it harder for businesses or individuals to disregard or harm nature. No longer invisible, nature's value would be profiled, legally recognised and far more difficult to exploit.

With digitalisation revolutionising ID systems, our ability to identify, track and measure has reached levels that once seemed unimaginable. Aadhaar – India's biometric, data-driven digital ID system – is a prime example. By enabling instant identity verification, Aadhaar has provided more than one billion people access to a range of public services and social programmes. Likewise, digital public infrastructure for sustainable development already assigns unique identifiers to physical structures like roads and bridges, underscoring their economic value.

A similar approach could be applied to nature. With the rapid development of mobile technologies, a digital nature ID can integrate digital tagging, remote sensing and sensor data for real-time monitoring of natural ecosystems. AI could further enhance these systems, making environmental data more accessible and actionable. Imagine a geo-tagged data parcel, overlaid with key ecological features and environmental health indicators, offering a holistic, living snapshot of a specific ecosystem. An early iteration of this concept is the ability to track supply chains to ensure that your cup of coffee is deforestation-free.

By integrating administrative, environmental and geographic data, digital nature IDs could pave the way for scaling results-based payment schemes, providing fair compensation to those who protect carbon-absorbing rainforests, mangroves and other vital ecosystems. They could also enhance the traceability of raw materials in agricultural supply chains and empower land-rights holders by improving access to biodiversity credits, green bonds and loans tied to sustainable stewardship. Moreover, such a system could bolster legal protections for Indigenous and local communities by incorporating clear, location-specific records.

But the development of a digital nature ID must be a whole-of-society effort, underpinned by the principles of inclusion and collaboration. Its design should reflect the concerns of all stakeholders, so that it serves as a public good that drives nature-positive action at scale. Above all, it must uphold the rights, welfare and value systems of Indigenous peoples and local communities, ensuring that they retain control over data related to their lands, resources and way of life.

To succeed, a digital nature ID system must be integrated with existing digital infrastructure, allowing countries to adapt and refine it to fit their unique socioeconomic and environmental realities. Strong laws and policies promoting data sharing, standardisation and certification would be necessary to promote interoperability and protect against misuse.

At scale, a digital nature ID could become a transformative tool for accounting for the value of our planet's natural resources and contributions to humanity. By recognising and quantifying the ways nature enables our societies and economies to survive and thrive, we can usher in a new era of environmental accountability.

Midori Paxton is Director of the United Nations Development Programme's Nature Hub.

The United Nations Development Programme, with support from The Rockefeller Foundation and other partners, has been developing the concept of digital nature IDs as a digital public infrastructure through research and consultations with indigenous peoples, governments, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders or partners.

www.project-syndicate.org

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/nature-needs-its-own-id/)

Children in Delhi – and across the world – are suffering from severe health impacts due to air pollution, yet governments and businesses continue to prioritize fossil fuels over their well-being.
Image: Shubham Sharma, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.

TOXIC AIR IS KILLING OUR KIDS, PARENTS MUST DEMAND CLEAN ENERGY

Leading a group of mothers, campaigner **Bhavreen Kandhari** tells WHO conference that children need a quicker energy transition.

My twin daughters have been strong, athletic junior basketball players throughout their teens and now in their early 20s. Getting to this level has taken hard work, and close care of their health and bodies.

Yet my daughters are entering adulthood with the lungs of lifetime smokers, through no fault of their own. Persistent coughs, wheezing, sniffles, and respiratory infections are routine for children who breathe polluted air.

Why? Because they grew up in the most polluted capital in the world: Delhi.

More than 1 million children live in Delhi, and they are being poisoned with every breath. This was confirmed when researchers found in 2021 that nearly one in three school children in Delhi has asthma and airflow obstructions.

Essentially, this means every child in Delhi is a smoker from birth – or even before, given that the particulate matter spewed from vehicle exhaust pipes has been found in the lungs, livers, and hearts of foetuses.

Delhi is particularly bad, but the reality is that 90 per cent of children worldwide live with air pollution that exceeds the levels deemed liveable by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Globally, this contributes to the deaths of nearly 2,000 kids under five every single day, and 7 million people per year including 2 million in India.

It's shameful. The solutions are known and available, yet political and business leaders continue to cling to the burning of poisonous fossil fuels.

We, united as concerned parents around the world, must stand up and pressure them to put the health and wellbeing of our children at the core of their decisions. Governments and businesses must stop the burning of coal, oil, and gas, and transition quickly and fairly to clean forms of energy.

To start, children's health should take centre stage at the WHO's conference this week on air pollution in Cartagena, Colombia, which brings together government representatives, health professionals, academics, and mothers – including myself.

We need solutions that will quickly lead to clearer skies, like limiting internal combustion engines from city centres, car idling on residential streets, and wood-burning in homes. In many cities, we can incentivise people to use buses and trains, walk or cycle instead of driving.

Smog clears as soon as the burning stops. We saw this in Delhi in 2020, in the iconic photos of the India Gate against clear blue skies during the COVID-19 lockdown. Imagine if our kids could run and play freely against those bright skies, without stopping to cough, sniffle, catch their breath, or worse.

We are seeing positive steps in cities and countries around the world. India has a goal to reduce particulate matter by 40 per cent by 2026, compared to 2017 levels, with a focus on the cities with the worst pollution and traffic congestion.

A recent study revealed that London's air quality has significantly improved since that city expanded its Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). But there is still a long way to go to bring global air quality in line with the WHO's guidance.

Parents move mountains for the good of their children every day of the week - and they can do it on air pollution too. More and more parents are realising that fossil fuels are harming their children. They are becoming an unstoppable force, demanding clean, renewable energy to protect those they love.

Parents move mountains for the good of their children every day of the week – and they can do it on air pollution too. More and more parents are realising that fossil fuels are harming their children.

This is why I'm in Cartagena, along with other determined mothers from across the Our Kids' Climate network. Parents have also been taking to the streets - in New York, Warsaw, Quito, Cape Town, London, Mexico City, Delhi and elsewhere - to demand clean air and clean energy for our children.

Children can't choose the air they breathe. So it's on us, as parents, to fight for the them.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/toxic-air-is-killing-our-kids-parents-must-demand-clean-energy/)

Beyond its notorious reputation for being the world's most polluted capital, Delhi also grapples with a host of other environmental crises like failing waste management, rampant tree felling, and the ever-polluted Yamuna River. *Image: Asian Development Bank, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

INSIDE A DELHI 'WARRIOR MOM'S' FIGHT FOR CLEAN AIR

Bhavreen Kandhari is the co-founder of a network of Indian mothers demanding clean air for their children, writes **Shalinee Kumari**

The air was thick, almost unbreathable. It smelled of burning fields – acrid and suffocating. On the morning of 16 November 2016, Bhavreen Kandhari stood at her window, watching as the city she called home disappeared into a toxic haze. Delhi's sky was choked with smog so dense it looked apocalyptic.

Her throat burned. Her twin daughters, then 13, woke up coughing. The news confirmed what she already knew. Pollution had reached such dangerous levels that Delhi schools would be closed for the first time in history.

For years, she had been warning that this day would come. But seeing it unfold in real-time – watching her own children struggle to breathe – was the breaking point.

That morning, Kandhari pulled out her phone and sent a message on WhatsApp: "We need to take action. Who is coming?"

Within hours, she, along with other concerned parents, had mobilised 300 people to protest at Jantar Mantar, Delhi's historic site of public demonstrations, receiving widespread coverage. It wasn't her first protest, but this time was different. She was no longer just a protestor or activist. She was a mother fighting for her children's right to breathe.

From concerned citizen to parent activist

Nearly a decade later, Delhi is still gasping for air – and Kandhari has not stopped fighting.

She spends her days moving between courtrooms and community meetings, documenting violations, filing complaints, and pushing authorities to enforce laws that exist on paper but remain ignored in practice.

Each winter, in November, when pollution spikes and Delhi's air turns lethal, the media calls on her for quotes.

"I sound like a broken record," she says, shaking her head. "If you create a montage of my interviews over the last few years, you'll see I've been asking for the same thing again and again. Nothing changes."

But for Kandhari, this is not just a seasonal crisis. Clean air is not a trending topic. It is her life's work.

Long before the 2016 protests, a pivotal moment had already shaped her fight. In 2003, she gave birth to twin daughters. As is common with twin pregnancies, they were born premature, fragile and in need of extra care. Their lungs were underdeveloped – a common occurrence among preterm babies.

She spent sleepless nights watching over them, terrified of infections. That was when she first began researching air pollution, poring over studies that confirmed her worst fears: Delhi's air was especially dangerous for children.

"I've been conscious of this fight for years," she says, "but I still couldn't protect my daughters. They grew up breathing this toxic air. Their lungs are impaired. How many generations will have to suffer before something changes?" asks Kandhari, emphasising that every third child in Delhi has impaired lungs.

Her daughters are 21 now.

Building a citizen-led movement

Although Kandhari now dedicates most of her time to advocating for clean air and environmental justice through campaigns such as #RightToBreathe, she never set out to be an activist. In fact, she rejects the label, seeing herself instead as a "concerned citizen."

In 2020, she co-founded Warrior Moms, a network of mothers across India demanding clean air and climate action for their children.

"It's about mothers coming together," she explains. "That's a strong emotion."

Warrior Moms is a grassroots, citizen-led initiative – not an NGO, not a corporate-funded campaign, but a movement. The goal is simple: to empower communities to hold polluters accountable. The group amplifies local environmental struggles across cities, provides resources on how to file complaints and teaches people how to build movements of their own.

"I don't want people to just be angry," she says. "Complaining is how you hold authorities accountable."

For her, the biggest challenge in environmental activism is mobilising support on the ground. Most people feel helpless in the face of pollution. But small actions matter – filing a complaint about illegal waste burning, documenting construction dust, demanding accountability from local officials.

"The more noise we make, the harder it is for them to ignore us," she says.

From the streets to the courtroom

But noise alone is not enough. Kandhari has also taken the fight to court. Much of her time is spent waiting outside hearing rooms, presenting evidence in environmental cases. One of her ongoing battles is against a proposed waste-to-energy plant in Bawana, north-west Delhi. In another case, she uncovered evidence that over 60,000 trees had been illegally felled in Delhi between 2015 and 2021.

"In the last two years, we've taken a lot of contempt [of court] cases," she says. "Violations keep happening because people know they can get away with it." Fines, she argues, are not a deterrent. "There is a reason people in India wear seat belts," she says. "It's not awareness – it's fear of getting fined or punished. Environmental violations need to have real consequences. Otherwise, nothing will change."

Beyond its notorious reputation for being the world's most polluted capital, Delhi also grapples with a host of other environmental crises like failing waste management, rampant tree felling, and the ever-polluted Yamuna River. Kandhari has been actively involved in leading movements dedicated to these challenges. She says they are all interrelated. "[Clean air] is not a standalone issue. It's linked to waste management, urban planning, energy policies, and governance failures."

Battling the system

But corruption and lack of political will remain the biggest obstacles.

Across India, 49 per cent of sanctioned posts in pollution control boards remain vacant; a systemic failure that makes enforcement nearly impossible. Even when mechanisms to hold polluters accountable exist, they remain underutilised. Kandhari has seen the government's apathy firsthand. She has sat across from officials who dismiss her concerns, walked into male-dominated offices where her presence is barely tolerated.

"They don't like women coming in and saying too many things," she says. "But at least I have some privilege. Women in rural areas face even bigger challenges – threats, intimidation, family pressure." Yet, despite the pushback, Warrior Moms continues to grow, connecting urban and rural activists across the country.

Taking the fight to the global stage

Kandhari has taken the battle for clean air beyond India. At the United Nations climate summits, she has spoken on behalf of parent-led climate groups, urging world leaders to put children's health and futures at the centre of climate action.

At COP27 in Egypt, she stood alongside other mothers from the networks Our Kids' Climate and Parents For Future Global, demanding urgent action. She returned for COP28 in Dubai, amplifying the voices of parents fighting for clean air across the world. "These conferences are important," she says. "But they also come with challenges. Attending them requires funding, and for grassroots activists, that's a struggle."

The fight is exhausting.

"I no longer have a social life," she admits, saying she's even lost friends because of her activism.

She pauses, then adds with a wry smile: "I'm becoming cynical." But cynicism hasn't stopped her.

Every winter, as Delhi's pollution levels rise again, she braces for another cycle of warnings, protests and court battles. Asked about how long she plans to keep protesting, she replies: "As long as it takes."

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(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/inside-a-delhi-warrior-moms-fight-for-clean-air/)

ASUS and Vidya Integrated Development for Youth & Adults (VIDYA) Join Hands to Skill 6000+ Underprivileged Children and Youth in Digital Literacy

ASUS, a Taiwanese technology brand, in collaboration with VIDYA has announced the commencement of its Digital Literacy Program for children and youth in the marginalized regions of Western India. Designed to focus on digital literacy and skilling initiatives, the program will equip over 6000 students from Grade 1 to 10 as well as youth with essential skills and digital expertise through interactive and project-based learning via an age-appropriate curriculum which is mapped to UN's Digital Literacy Framework. The first leg of the partnership will commence in Mumbai, followed by Goa and Gujarat.

Since foraying into India, ASUS has committed to bringing innovative technology to the country. Furthering its commitment, the partnership with VIDYA marks a critical step from ASUS India towards bridging India's digital divide.

The ASUS India and VIDYA partnership will directly benefit 5,480 children and 650 youth from low-income households—many of them first-generation learners—through the setup of digital labs in select schools. Using a weekly curriculum aligned with the UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework, students will

- The program will directly impact 6,130 children and youth
- This initiative will engage 2,000+ community members as indirect beneficiaries, and adopt an ecosystem approach to build a future-ready generation
- The partnership will also equip students from Grade 1 to 10 with critical skills and digital expertise
- The partnership was announced through a press conference in the presence of Mr. Eric Ou - Country Head, ASUS India, Mr Rahul Dayma- HR Head, ASUS, Mr. Dinesh kumar - Advisory Board Member, VIDYA India, Ms. Bella Sharma - Executive Board Member, VIDYA West Zone and Ms. Priyanka Arora - Executive Board Member, VIDYA West Zone

be introduced to computer basics, digital storytelling, poster design, programming (Scratch, Python), and digital ethics, with a strong focus on creativity, collaboration, and self-directed learning

For the youth, the partnership will offer certified digital and IT-enabled training programs through a vast array of recognized partners including NIIT Foundation, NASSCOM FutureSkills Prime, and Skill India Mission. These courses are complemented by career guidance, English communication, job-readiness modules, and ongoing alumni support to ease the transition from education to employment. The program not only builds digital and career skills but also offers practical pathways through internships, job readiness training, and placement support.

Addressing the kick-off, Eric Ou, Country Head, ASUS India said, "At ASUS, our commitment to creating meaningful impact goes beyond delivering technology, it lies in ensuring that innovation reaches those who need it the most. With this program, we are taking a step towards bridging the digital divide by empowering students and youth from underserved communities with limited access to digital education with skills that are critical in today's world. By equipping digital labs and enabling VIDYA's proven curriculum through our devices, we aim to strengthen the Foundation of a future-ready generation."

"Every child deserves the chance to dream, to learn, and to thrive in a digital world. Through our partnership with ASUS, we are opening doors for thousands of young minds—many of whom are first-generation learners from underserved communities. This initiative is not just about digital literacy; it's about hope, opportunity, and empowerment. We are proud to stand with ASUS in shaping futures and nurturing the potential that lies within every student." said, Rashmi Misra, Founder President, VIDYA India.

ASUS is investing in digital access as well as unlocking life-changing opportunities for students and youth in need, laying down pathways for higher education, job readiness, and dignity in tomorrow's workforce. The program underscores ASUS India's growing commitment to social equity and sustainable impact in the communities.

SOCOMEC India and IFCCI continue their CSR initiative with the launch of Project EMPOWERPATH

Socomec India in collaboration with Indo-French Chamber of Commerce & Industry (IFCCI) has launched a game-changing CSR initiative – Project EMPOWERPATH – to uplift unserved communities.

This innovative project will focus on Digital Literacy Training, Technical Skills Development, Health & Management Awareness for High-Risk Groups (FSW/HRG) and After-School Academic Support for Children of HRG & Female Sex Workers (FSW).

Together, Socomec and IFCCI are equipping individuals with essential skills, health awareness, and educational support, bridging critical gaps and preparing them for sustainable careers in an evolving job market.

As part of the three-year collaboration with IFCCI, Socomec has pledged to refurbish and renovate school buildings in Noida and Gurugram. These efforts created physical infrastructures that foster a positive and conducive learning atmosphere.

On its latest CSR initiative, Meenu Singhal, Regional Managing Director of Socomec Greater India, said, "We are happy to collaborate with IFCCI for project EMPOWERPATH - an initiative that aligns with our mission of manufacturing of UPS and energy management solutions while ensuring that our skill development programs create a workforce that meets industry demands. By providing access to these initiatives, we are not just creating job opportunities—we are transforming lives and empowering individuals to take charge of their future. Together with IFCCI, we are helping marginalized communities unlock their potential and thrive in tomorrow's workforce."

This project will empower 120 individuals with essential digital skills and 120 others with industry relevant technical skills to enhance employability and financial independence. EMPOWERPATH will promote well-being through behaviour change sessions, counselling, hygiene education and mental health support to 500 individuals belonging to High-Risk Groups. After school academic support will be given to 80 children of High-Risk Groups and Female Sex Workers, strengthening their educational foundations.

"At Socomec, we are deeply committed to building stronger, more inclusive communities," said Nida Khanam, Head of Human Resources at Socomec Greater India. "Through our partnership with IFCCI, the EMPOWERPATH initiative focuses on equipping individuals with the tools they need to thrive—whether it's through digital literacy, technical skill development, or academic support for children from high-risk groups. We're also prioritizing the health and well-being of High-Risk Groups by addressing mental health, hygiene, and behavior change. With over 800 individuals set to be impacted in Dwarka and Najafgarh, this is a meaningful step towards sustainable, community-led progress—and we look forward to expanding this initiative to other regions in the near future."

Payal S. Kanwar, Director General, Indo-French Chamber of Commerce & Industry (IFCCI), said:"We are delighted to partner with Socomec on the EMPOWERPATH project, supporting education for children of High-Risk Groups, promoting health awareness, and fostering youth skill development with our NGO partner, Indian Society for Applied Research & Development (ISARD). Aligned with key UN SDGs, this initiative empowers underserved communities, creating opportunities for a brighter future."

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