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ASIA PACIFIC MAY TAKE TILL 2065 TO ACHIEVE 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TARGETS

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All countries are failing to hit minimum air quality benchmarks

Air pollution, made worse by climate change, contributes to the global burden of disease and is to blame for the death of 40,000 children under the age of five last year.



Rajesh Tiwari
Publisher
rt@iccsr.org

The estimated daily economic cost of air pollution has been figured at US\$8 billion, or 3 to 4 per cent of the gross world product.

No single country met the latest World Health Organisation's (WHO) PM2.5 annual air quality guideline, according to a new report that analysed real-time air quality from thousands of monitoring stations in 117 countries.

Fine particle pollution 2.5 micrometres in size, known as PM2.5, is considered the most harmful, widely monitored air pollutant and has been found to be a major contributing factor to health effects such as asthma, stroke, heart and lung diseases. Found in vehicle exhaust, wildfires from crop burning and power plant emissions, PM2.5 contributes to millions of premature deaths every year.

The estimated daily economic cost of air pollution has been figured at US\$8 billion, or 3 to 4 per cent of the gross world product.

In September 2021, the WHO updated guidelines cutting the recommended level to PM2.5 in half, to 5 micrograms per cubic metre of air. No country hit that standard, according to the report released on Tuesday by IQAIR, a Swiss company that makes air quality monitors and air purification technologies.

"It is a shocking fact that no major city or country is providing safe and healthy air to their citizens according to the latest World Health Organization air quality guidelines," said Frank Hammes, chief executive of IQAIR.

Countries and regions in East Asia, South-east Asia, and South Asia suffered from the highest annual average PM2.5 concentration weighted by population.

Central and South Asia had some of the world's worst air quality in 2021 and is home to 47 of the world's 50 most polluted cities, the report noted.

Bangladesh is ranked as the world's most polluted country in 2021, with PM2.5 concentrations of 79.6 micrograms per cubic metre. New Delhi, India, is the world's most polluted capital city for the second consecutive year followed by Dhaka in Bangladesh.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, 70 per cent of global air quality related deaths occur in this region.

Industrialisation and rapid urbanisation brings added pressure to air pollution, the report noted. Burning biomass for cooking in rural areas also contributes to fine particles in the air. The combustion of fossil fuels is a primary driver of air pollution in Southeast Asia which remains reliant on oil and coal for energy. Open burning adds to poor air quality, exacerbated by deforestation and agriculture which have intensified wildfires and transboundary haze as a result.

Air pollution affects those that are most vulnerable, the report said. It is estimated that in 2021, the deaths of 40,000 children under the age of five were directly linked to PM2.5 air pollution. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers have found that exposure to PM2.5 increases both the risk of contracting the virus and of suffering more severe symptoms when infected, including death.

Climate change was pegged as a key driver for poor air quality, an issue that disproportionately impacts emerging and low-income countries which have struggled to raise the funds to adapt against the inevitable impacts of a warming planet. Dust storms for instance, have become more frequent and extreme in some nations because of drought and rising temperatures due to climate change.

"Solutions to air pollution are also solutions to the climate crisis," said Greenpeace India campaign manager Avinash Chanchal. "Addressing the air pollution crisis requires the development of renewable energy resources and clean-powered, accessible public transport."

There is a huge disparity in the availability of air quality data with blind spots in Africa, Central America and Latin America. The second most polluted country in 2021 is Chad in Central Africa which had previously gone unrecorded. 

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SUD Life ties up with Vakrangee to target unbanked and underbanked Bharat

Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance (SUD Life), a joint venture between two of India's leading public sector banks, Bank of India and Union Bank of India, and Dai-ichi Life Japan has partnered with Vakrangee, a fintech player at the forefront driving financial inclusion and social inclusion initiatives through its network of Kendras to increase the organizations' footprints and provide insurance services till last mile across Bharat.

SUD Life, 13-year-old and one of the fastest growing Life insurance companies in India broke even and posted profit in its 6th year of operation is with top quartile in Claim Settlement track-record 96%-Retail and 98%- Group Credit Life claim settlement has a robust collective network of over 17000 points of sale with 152 offices across India, catering to more than 1.3 crore customers aligned with Vakrangee which is currently having 19230 Kendras, mostly in Tier 5 and 6 towns, spread across 33 States & UTs covering 56 districts and 5,430 postal codes.

New association will help SUD Life to support especially in unserved and underserved areas through its strong and unique product portfolio with adequate and flexible products where customer will benefit from guaranteed maturity benefit, tax benefit, loan facility, life cover as well as guaranteed Income.

"We are committed to providing insurance products that serve customers' unique need across



MD & Group CEO, Vakrangee Ltd. Dinesh Nadanwana exchanging corporate agency agreement with Ganesh Muruga, EVP & Head - Retail Sales of Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance.

various strata of the society and geography. With the help of Nextgen Vakrangee Kendras network SUD life has created an opportunity to increase the organisations' footprints and penetrate its services more into unbanked and underbanked areas and will make India more secured", said Abhay Tewari, MD & CEO -Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance.

Commenting on the Partnership Binu Gopal Krishna, SVP & Head RRB & Broking of Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company Limited said, "this strategic alliance will help Star Union Dai-ichi life to increase their distribution capability through increased Point of Sale and such POS will create add huge advantage in our portfolio".

Commenting on this partnership, Dinesh Nandwana, Managing Director & Group CEO, Vakrangee Ltd. said, "We are happy and honoured to announce this partnership with Star Union Dai-ichi Life

Insurance which enables us to have Life Insurance Products across our platforms. With this partnership, we continue to expand the bouquet of services available at our Vakrangee Kendras and the BharatEasy Super App. These Nextgen outlets have evolved into an exclusive digital convenience store model providing access to multi line of products and services. We further empower our franchisee

family to complement their bouquet of offerings to their customers at Vakrangee Kendras. Our Nextgen Vakrangee Kendra act as a one stop shop for the local customers offering them a bouquet of services as well as Renewal premium collection point and thus provide them the convenience, at the same time aiding them with Financial, Social and Digital inclusion.

"Our franchisees in remote areas of the country can now enhance their services by offering Insurance Products too. We will continue to add more products and services and tie-up with leading business partners to offer our customers a one-stop solution to all their banking, insurance, ATM, financial services, assisted e-Commerce, e-Governance and logistics. Vakrangee provides these partners with the unmatched reach in remote areas where these brands find the cost of operations too high", added Nandwana.

IET India to Lead a Disease Surveillance Project with Centre for Health Research and Innovation (CHRI) as Part of a Funded CSR Project by Siemens Healthineers India

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) India is leading a Disease Surveillance Project in partnership with CHRI (Centre for Health Research and Innovation) that will use publicly available non-personal data to improve India's public health infrastructure's preparedness for disease outbreaks by predicting outbreaks. The project is funded by Siemens Healthineers, India as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Speaking on this initiative Dr. Vikram Venkateswaran, Healthcare Working Group, IET Future Tech Panel, said, "This is a landmark initiative from the IET Future Tech Panel on a challenge of National importance. We want to be able to demonstrate the power of publicly available data for health surveillance and at the end of the project, build a first of its kind, scalable model. With combined strengths of

CHRI, IET and Siemens Healthineers, I am sure we will be able to build a unique solution to scale."

Neeraj Jain, Country Director, PATH India said, "The pandemic shed light on the importance of real-time monitoring of disease to meet the healthcare needs of the country. The government's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme promises to enable tech-enabled monitoring of disease trends, for epidemic prone diseases for early detection and response, thus enabling the prevention of another healthcare crisis. Through this initiative and collaboration, we aim to help bring this mission to fruition."

Shekhar Sanyal, Country Head, IET India added, "These kinds of multi-party, industry-partnerships and synergies are key in establishing important data-led, predictive and intuitive healthcare systems that the country needs today. Tech-driven

projects will be the cornerstone of lasting social impact, especially in healthcare. This project is a direct step towards solving the Healthy Lives societal challenge from the IET's global strategic plan for 2030."

Speaking on the growth of Healthcare IT, Dileep Mangsuli, India Executive Director-Development Centre of Siemens Healthineers said, "The digital health will transform population health in future. Healthcare analytics will become core to healthcare planning and future preparedness. Predictive analytics and forecasting models can be used to prepare for future disease outbreaks. This project is definitely a step in the right direction, and we are happy to be supporting this initiative." Spread over a year, the project aims to feed into the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme.

Dr. Hina Shah of ICECD conferred with NITI Aayog award

Visionary social entrepreneur Dr. Hina Shah, who has touched millions of lives in 50+ countries of the world since 35 years with her institution ICECD has been conferred with NITI Aayog award for her contribution towards Socio-economic upliftment & empowerment of women from rural, urban and tribal regions of India.

Women have consistently been playing a key role in transforming India into a 'Sashakt Aur Samarth Bharat'. In recognition of the remarkable achievements of these women across diverse sectors NITI Aayog instituted Women Transforming India Awards as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to celebrate 75 years of India's independence. Gujarat Based, Dr. Hina Shah, Founder, ICECD is amongst 75 women achievers who were conferred with the WTI Awards this year.

While speaking about the prestigious honour Dr. Hina Shah, Founder, ICECD shares, "Socio-economic

empowerment of women is an integral part of my personal vision. This can be achieved only when women from all strata of society garner a sense of overall well-being through meaningful participation and decision-making at family, community and policy levels." International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Career Development (ICECD) is building an "Entrepreneurial Society", by facilitating access & control of women on productive resources leading to social and economic empowerment since around three decades now. "I perceive a very positive and vibrant future for women entrepreneurs. Thus, Entrepreneurship should be introduced in education in schools, colleges and universities to make our country Atma Nirbhar in real sense. I urge women to become entrepreneurial and to become self-reliant. Become entrepreneurs and thus become socio-economically empowered. In 21st Century, I see women doing Business in a Man's World", she further adds.

Asian Cancer Foundation in collaboration with the Nargis Dutt Foundation flags off Mobile Cancer Detection Van



In an ongoing movement to tackle cancer, Mumbaikars and residents of Maharashtra will not have to visit specialists in a hospital or clinic for cancer detection. Asian Cancer Foundation (ACF), a registered non-profit organization with an 80G certification, in collaboration with the Nargis Dutt Foundation will move forward in its aim of early detection, education, and prevention at community doorsteps using a mobile cancer detection van.

On the occasion of International Women's Day 2022, the van donated by Nargis Dutt Foundation was flagged off by Ms. Priya Dutt, Ex-Member of Parliament and Trustee

of the Nargis Dutt Foundation, in the presence of Dr. Ramakant Deshpande, Executive Chairman of ACI, Dr. Deepak Parikh, Executive Chairman of ACF & Medical Director ACI, Dr. Sanjay Sharma, Director of ACF, Dr. Jagdeesh Kulkarni, Director of ACF, Dr. Rajiv Yadav, COO of ACI, Dr. Arun Shetty, Center Head of ACI Cumballa hill hospital. This will be followed by a free cancer screening camp for women. Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in India. This number is increasing daily because of a lack of early detection programs and awareness about the importance of the same. It is for this purpose that ACF now has a special

mobile screening vehicle that has been equipped with tools for early detection and testing.

Dr. Deepak Parikh, Executive Chairman of Asian Cancer Foundation said, "The new mobile van will keep track of cancer patients by visiting various areas of Mumbai and Maharashtra. This will assist the screening program and will keep a record of the most prevalent types of cancer which will help to analyze the reasons behind it. Along with the camps for early detection and screenings, we will also hold awareness programs and counseling, especially in personal hygiene, tobacco de-addiction. The target is to screen at least 5000 people every year. SOPs have been set up that will act as guidelines to efficiently carry out this program."

Dr. Parikh added, "The van includes a dental chair for oral cancer screening and oral biopsy procedures. The van has an examination bed for breast and cervical examination with a facility for Pap smear tests. Doctors and Medical staff of the Asian Cancer Institute will assist ACF in implementing the programs.

There is a television in the van to display education videos regarding cancer awareness and de-addiction. Asian Cancer Foundation will assist those who need financial support.

Priya Dutt, former MP and Chairman of the Nargis Dutt Foundation said, "It couldn't have been a better partnership with Asian Cancer Foundation because there are all renowned doctors who really know what is needed. Our support can help in every way. Health is very important. We have started raising funds in India as well and started funding patients for their cancer treatment. We realized two things-early detection cuts cost. Cancer can be curable if detected early. No person should lose his/her life due to a lack of funds. I am happy to inaugurate the cancer detection van on International Women's Day."

ASIA PACIFIC MAY TAKE TILL 2065 TO ACHIEVE 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TARGETS

Covid-19 and the continued regression on climate action and resource use have caused the biggest slowdown in pace since the targets were set in 2015. Southeast Asia and the Pacific are particularly lagging, states **Liang Lei**

Dharavi slum area in Mumbai, India.
Image: ElenaOdareeva, CC BY-SA 2.0



better future is now further out of reach for over half the world's population that lives in the Asia Pacific region, according to a United Nations (UN) report.

It's the biggest documented slide since a set of 17 global Sustainable Development Goals were established in 2015, as part of global efforts to eradicate poverty, protect the environment and promote economic growth.

In 2017, UN said the 2030 targets could be achieved by 2052. In 2019, the estimate extended five years to 2057, ahead of the latest extension of eight years. As per reports from past years, none of the 17 goals are on track for 2030.

Indicators on climate action continue to regress. Despite the region having better disaster management strategies, records show that nearly 36,000 people died or went missing from disasters in 2020 – the highest since 2015. Greenhouse gas emissions rose 0.6 per cent between 2015 and 2018.

According to data by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, there has never

been progress on climate action since tracking began in 2016.

The responsible use of resources such as food and fuels is also in the red, due to continued fossil fuel subsidies and the increasing demand for raw materials. Two bright spots are the 150 per cent rise in renewable energy capacity and 9 per cent drop in the amount of hazardous waste produced, against 2015 levels.

The biggest gains were made in infrastructure and industrial innovation, especially in East and North-East Asia, which includes China, Japan and South Korea. However, report coordinator Arman Bidarbakht-Nia said that such gains were “not environmentally sustainable” when placed alongside the other indicators.

Southeast Asia and the Pacific regions fared the worst, with additional regressions in indices such as clean water and sanitation, and inequality.

The Asian Development Bank recently reported that 4.7 million more people in Southeast Asia fell into extreme poverty last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In total, over 23 million Southeast Asians now live on less than US\$1.90 a day.

Covid-19 has further held back development, the report noted.

“In this time of great change and difficult challenges, there is an urgent need to redouble efforts to fully implement the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, especially for those furthest behind,” said Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, under secretary-general of the United Nations.

VULNERABLE SUFFERING MORE

The report warned that vulnerable groups in Asia Pacific could face greater risks due to Covid-19. They include children, women, poor households, the disabled and those

Aftermath of the Bangkok floods
in 2011. Image: ebvImages / Flickr

PUTTING A FLOOR UNDER ASIA'S SINKING CITIES

Rising sea levels will affect many Asian countries, particularly those in Southeast Asia. There needs to be fresh approaches and policies to manage what is termed a 'super wicked problem', says **Dimas Fauzi**

The increasing threat from climate change has made coastal cities more vulnerable to floods, which impacts could be further exacerbated by extreme weather events. In the next three decades, rising sea levels will severely affect low-lying Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. As a result, an estimated 300 million people living in these sinking cities

will be affected by floods in 2050. While developed countries generally have better mitigation and adaptation strategies to deal with the problem, developing countries, such as those in Southeast Asia, are often left out due to the lack of financing, policy frameworks and technological know-how.

There is a relationship between economic growth and the growth of urban areas. In many countries, export-oriented growth corresponds to the expansion of urban areas near coastal ports. These coastal cities are prone to the adverse impact of climate and environmental change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that over the last 100 years, the mean global sea level has risen by an average of 1 to 2 centimetres per year. The IPCC also acknowledged that sea level rise could be influenced by human activities, such as subsidence and coastal development.

The policy responses to the 'sinking cities' problem in South-

east Asia are mostly infrastructural, dating back to the colonial era. Governments often approach the problem by building dikes, seawalls and by reclaiming land. Such infrastructural solutions are more appealing to the public, as they provide a sense of security and protection from floods. In addition, some infrastructural solutions to address floods are financially more attractive than some nature-based solutions that could provide flood protection while addressing climate change. These include the National Capital Integrated Coastal Development in Indonesia and the Manila Bay Integrated Flood Control, Coastal Defence, and Express Way project in the Philippines. However, these infrastructural solutions do not yield a long-term result as they only address the symptoms but not the root causes.

When these infrastructural protections fail, coastal communities often have to abandon their homes or adapt to the changing land-



Pandemic pushes 4.7 million more Southeast Asians into extreme poverty

The number of people living on under US\$1.90 a day has risen for the second year in a row. Inequality could worsen across generations as retrenched workers stagnate and opportunities for the poor continue to slip away, according to By **Liang Lei**



A labourer unloads coal from a supply truck at a yard on the outskirts of the western Indian city of Ahmedabad, August 21, 2013.
Image: REUTERS/ Amit Dave

INDIA'S FIRST SOCIAL PLAN FOR CLOSED COAL HUBS AIMS FOR 'HONOURABLE' LIVES

The government plan, backed by the World Bank, will support new employment and basic services in parts of India where coal mining is on the decline.

India's first plan for a socially fair shift away from coal in areas where mines have been shut will include a survey of local people, alternative jobs for them and efforts to protect basic services from the effects, according to government officials. Work on the plan - for which the government is seeking support from the World Bank - will begin this month, with ground surveys of two mining-hub

districts in eastern India, federal coal ministry officials told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Preliminary reports will be submitted to the government within a year, but the timeline for the "just transition" project is about eight years and it will cost at least \$1 billion, they added.

Bhabani Prasad Pati, joint secretary in the coal ministry, who is overseeing the plan, said it would

cover already closed mines, abandoned mines and mines that are due to be shut within the next few years because their resources have run out. "A lot of people lose their livelihood when mines close. The population around these coal belts is poor," he said. "They should have honourable living conditions even after mine closures. Schools and roads built during mining need to be maintained," he added.

There are more than 290 abandoned or closed coal mines in India, government data shows.

But with few alternative options, most people still depend on the planet-heating fossil fuel for a living



The Amazon rainforest of El Oriente, in Ecuador. Image: Katarina Yee, Flickr

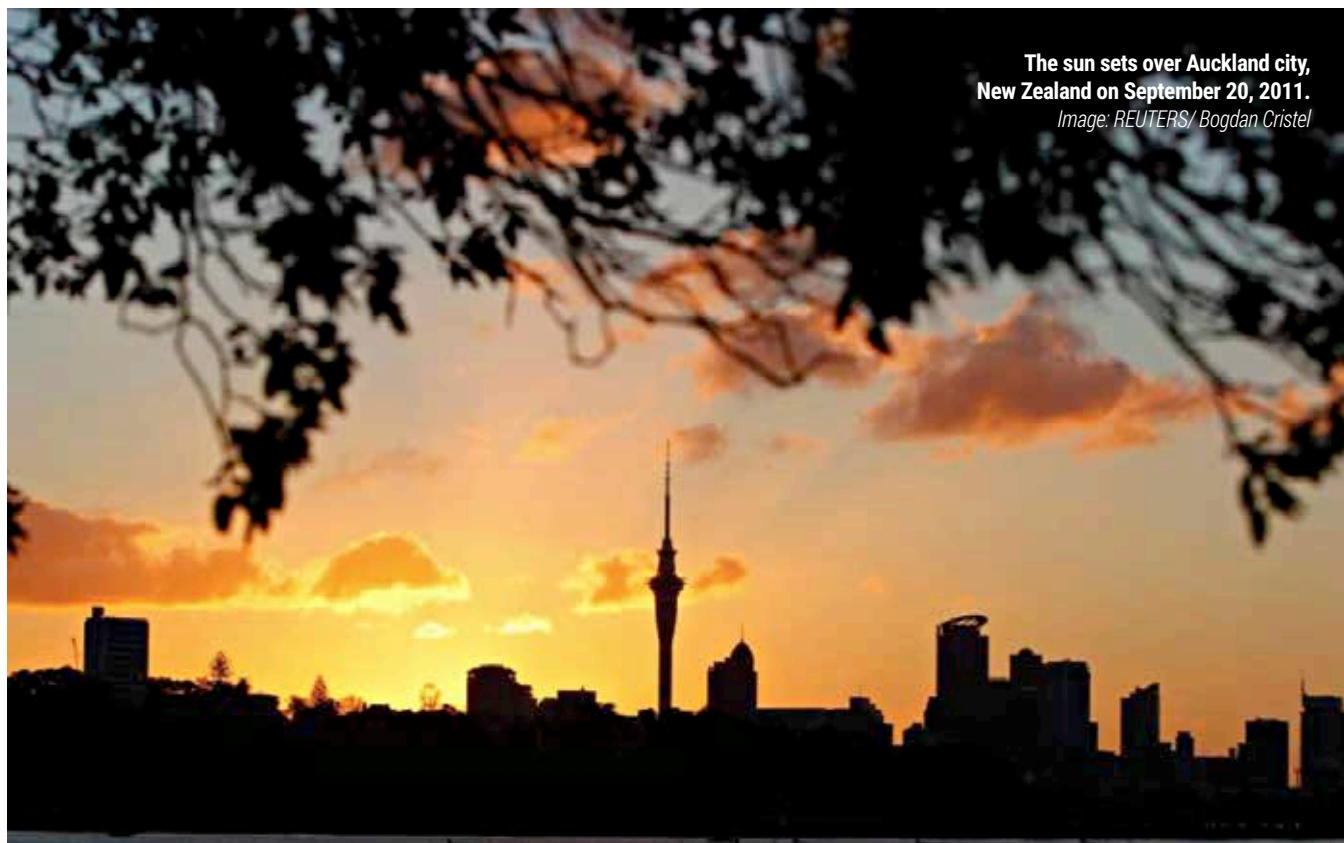
Forests are a vital public health solution, says WWF report

Forests not only act as reservoirs for potentially contagious diseases, but also filter water and air pollution that can otherwise lead to illnesses like cancer and diabetes, found a new WWF study.

By Maxwell Radwin

During the pandemic, as researchers looked to wet markets and the animal trade in search of the source of Covid-19, there was a renewed concern for how the natural world might be impacting public health.

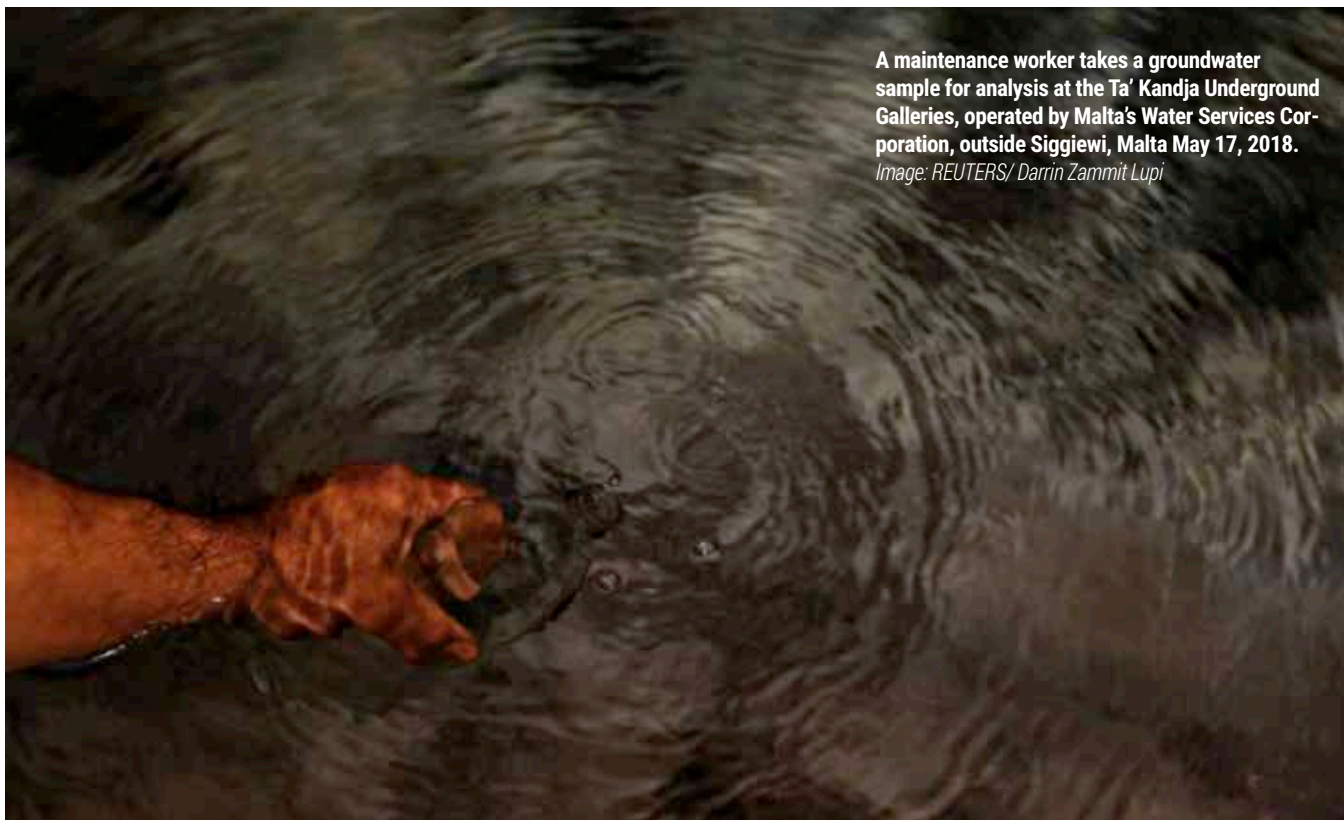
An increasing number of experts and government officials pointed to agriculture, urbanisation and other forms of land use change as raising the likelihood that new diseases might jump from animals to humans. But the impact that nature has on public health goes much deeper than just infectious disease. A new report from WWF attempts to broaden the narrative, laying out the different ways that forest ecosystems can play a role, both positively and negatively, on things like mental health, malnutrition and cancer.



The sun sets over Auckland city,
New Zealand on September 20, 2011.
Image: REUTERS/ Bogdan Cristel

HOW CAN 'SPONGE CITIES' USE NATURE TO TACKLE CLIMATE-FUELLED FLOODS?

A new AI-based study compares cities' trees and lakes to how much concrete they have, to gauge their ability to respond to climate shocks.



A maintenance worker takes a groundwater sample for analysis at the Ta' Kandja Underground Galleries, operated by Malta's Water Services Corporation, outside Siggiewi, Malta May 17, 2018.
Image: REUTERS/ Darrin Zammit Lupi

INVISIBLE SOLUTION TO WATER SHORTAGES LIES BENEATH OUR FEET

With water scarcity set to worsen on a warming planet, a UN report calls for sustainable use of underground supplies, which account for 99 per cent of freshwater.

Water shortages, already affecting billions of people around the world, are expected to worsen in the coming decades - linked to drought, pollution, rising sea levels and poor management - but an "invisible" solution may be hiding underground.

With water usage seen rising by 1 per cent each year over the next

three decades, a UN report predicted on Monday that so-called groundwater will grow in importance as climate change and human exploitation shrink surface supplies like lakes and reservoirs.

Today, groundwater - which accounts for 99 per cent of the planet's freshwater supplies - is poorly understood and consequently undervalued, mismanaged and even abused, according to the UN World Water Development Report 2022.

Globally, 3.6 billion people had inadequate access to water for at least one month of the year in 2018, and this figure is expected to top 5 billion by 2050, researchers say.

"What if the solution to the world's water problems is sitting there right under our feet?" said Richard Connor, editor-in-chief of the new report published by UNESCO. "There is an enormous opportunity if we can manage and exploit all this groundwater sustainably," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

As the global population grows, hiking pressure on water supplies, here's why we should pay more attention to the huge potential of