CSR TODAY

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World Food Forum 2024 closes with motto of "Good Food for All –Today and Tomorrow"

Rajesh Tiwari
Publisher
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Over 8,000 attendees gathered at FAO headquarters in Rome, sparking impactful collaboration to transform agrifood systems

The fourth annual World Food Forum (WFF) 2024 concluded in Rome, marking the end of an impactful week at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) dedicated to transforming global agrifood systems.

The event brought together thousands of participants from around the world who engaged in dynamic discussions and collaborative action across a range of critical issues, including investment, science and innovation, youth engagement, family farming, indigenous food systems, and water management. Participants – youth, farmers, policymakers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and indigenous communities – were all committed to addressing the urgent challenges of hunger, climate change and inequality, among others.

This year's Forum, themed "Good Food for All, for Today and Tomorrow," was a resounding success, with over 200 events, 8,000 in-person attendees, and a digital reach of 1.7 billion through social media campaigns. The event highlighted the power of collaborative efforts in driving agrifood systems transformation and ensuring access to safe, nutritious, and sustainable food for all.

"As we look to the future, this week has reaffirmed the vital role of youth, women, and diverse stakeholders in shaping the future of our agrifood systems," said FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu, at the closing ceremony.

"It has shown us the exponential power of intergenerational collaboration across policy, science, innovation, education, culture, and investment," he added. Qu further emphasized the importance of the WFF as a platform for action, saying that "the WFF is where agrifood systems transformation can truly take shape through concrete actions, partnerships, alliances, and crucial financing. Let us continue to support our young leaders, who are already mobilizing at the local level… Their commitment is a beacon of hope and progress."

The closing ceremony also had the participation of high-level guests, who underscored the importance of the forum.

FAO Director-General QU Dongyu, FAO Nutrition Ambassador King Letsie III of Lesotho, Pope Francis, and the UN Secretary-General, among other global leaders, lent their voices to this urgent cause during a high-level ceremony. The event drew over 1,000 attendees in Rome and resonated worldwide, with over 150 events around the world.

The World Food Forum 2024 concluded with a renewed sense of urgency and commitment to action.

The next World Food Forum will take place from 13 to 17 October 2025.

''I look forward to continuing this journey with all of you and seeing the ongoing impact of our collective efforts. Thank you for your participation, your energy, and your dedication. Only together can we ensure a "Good food for all, for today and tomorrow,'' FAO Director-General said, closing the event.

This forum showcased groundbreaking advancements in biotechnologies, digital technologies, and community-led initiatives. It emphasized the importance of closing the science, technology, and innovation gap in low- and middle-income countries, ensuring that everyone benefits from progress.

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CSR NEWS

Socomec India launches transformative School Adoption Project under its CSR initiatives in collaboration with IFCCI

Socomec India, in collaboration with the Indo-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IFCCI), has launched one of its most transformative Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives—the School Adoption Project. This ambitious project aims to make a lasting impact on educational facilities and community development in underprivileged regions across India. By addressing critical gaps in educational infrastructure, the initiative ensures students in these areas have access to quality education within a supportive and nurturing environment.

In the first phase of this three-year initiative, Socomec has committed to refurbishing and renovating school buildings in Noida and Gurugram. The goal is to create physical infrastructures that not only meet functional requirements but also foster a positive and conducive learning atmosphere.

Meenu Singhal, Regional Managing Director of Socomec Greater India, said, "At Socomec, we believe that education is the cornerstone of progress and innovation. By partnering with IFCCI on this meaningful initiative, we aim to contribute to a brighter future for students. Through this project, we are not only enhancing the physical infrastructure of schools but also nurturing young minds with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed in an evolving world."

Nida Khanam, Head of Human Resources at Socomec India, added, "Our partnership with IFCCI reflects our shared commitment to making a lasting difference in the lives of students and their communities. This initiative is part of our continued efforts towards this commitment. As we move forward, we are not only addressing the immediate needs of these schools but also preparing them for the future by ensuring sustainable infrastructure. In future projects with IFCCI, we aim to focus on creating opportunities to enhance employability and build entrepreneurial skills among the students."

Sustainability is a key focus of the project. Central to the initiative is the installation of solar panels in schools, providing a renewable energy source that reduces the carbon footprint while serving as an educational tool. This initiative will teach students the importance of renewable energy and environmental stewardship.

The project's scope extends beyond physical renovations, aiming to enhance the overall quality of education and student welfare. Integral components include the introduction of modern teaching aids, improved access to learning resources, and addressing critical issues such as health, hygiene, and nutrition. Furthermore, the initiative seeks to engage parents, local authorities, and other stakeholders to create a supportive and inclusive environment for students.

As the project progresses, future phases will include teacher training, student scholarships, and the integration of new technologies in classrooms, further enriching the learning experience.

This collaboration between Socomec and IFCCI exemplifies the transformative power of corporate social responsibility in driving meaningful change. Together, they are laying the foundation for a brighter future for children in underprivileged communities, ensuring they have the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary to succeed.

BharatPe and Nasscom Foundation Collaborate to Enable Business Formalization for 1,500 Women Entrepreneurs in Maharashtra

BharatPe Group, one of India's leading names in the fintech industry, has partnered with Nasscom Foundation to empower women entrepreneurs across multiple districts in Maharashtra.

Under the 'Formal Registration and Digital Market Linkage Program for Women Entrepreneurs', 1,500 rural women from six districts of Ahmednagar, Beed, Buldhana, Latur, Sindhudurg, and Kolhapur have been provided with the tools to formalize and scale their businesses, facilitating their integration into the formal economy. Additionally, 250 women out of the 1,500 were also provided with market linkages thereby increasing their business opportunities and financial stability. This initiative is poised to make a significant impact on the lives of rural women entrepreneurs by enhancing financial inclusion and enabling the growth of their businesses.

The initiative, launched under the aegis of 'BharatPe Cares', a corporate social responsibility initiative by BharatPe Group, is in sync with the brand's purpose to empower lives through inclusive, innovative and reliable fintech solutions. The initiative rests under the CSR program of PAYBACK, a BharatPe company. The program is designed to support the formalization of MSME documentation and establish connections with the digital market for rural women entrepreneur-led enterprises. As a part of the program, individual women entrepreneurs from the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission (MSRLM) ecosystem were identified. Local Resource Persons (LRPs) were trained on various government schemes as well as relevant formalization and market linkage solutions. The LRPs further conducted training sessions for rural women entrepreneurs and are expected to provide continuous support to enable their business growth. The participants got an understanding of FSSAI licenses, Udyam registration, and Shop Act registration, as well as gained market access through platforms like MSME Global Mart, GEM, UMEED Mart and ONDC.

Speaking on the partnership, Nalin Negi, CEO, BharatPe, said "We are delighted to partner with nasscom foundation to advance rural women entrepreneurship in Maharashtra. At BharatPe, we are dedicated to promoting financial inclusion and unlocking opportunities for women entrepreneurs across the country. Over the past few years, we have partnered with Women Entrepreneurship Platform to enable women entrepreneurs across India in their journeys of self-reliance and business growth. With this initiative, we have been able to reach out to the rural women entrepreneurs and empower them with the right solutions to formalize their business and expand it to newer markets, enabling their business growth. This partnership marks a pivotal step in BharatPe's mission to drive inclusive financial empowerment across India. By partnering with nasscom foundation, we continue to contribute positively in further empowering women entrepreneurs, including the rural women, to reach their full potential and contribute to India's growth story."

Rostow Ravanan, Chairperson, Nasscom Foundation, added, "We

are thrilled to partner with BharatPe to empower rural women entrepreneurs across Maharashtra by equipping them with the skills and resources needed to thrive in business. This initiative aligns perfectly with our commitment to create sustainable livelihoods and drive economic independence for women in rural areas. By providing essential training, digital market linkages, and access to government schemes, we have not only supported these women transition into formal businesses but also enabled them to unlock their full potential and build self-reliance.

Coca-Cola India's artistic tribute to women farmers in celebration of Mahila Kisan Diwas

Digital campaign spotlights the vital role of women farmers in driving sustainability and community empowerment.

To celebrate Mahila Kisan Diwas, Coca-Cola India has collaborated with renowned illustrator PS Rathour to pay tribute to the remarkable contributions of women farmers and their journeys toward sustainable agriculture. The artist's canvas highlights five women farmers —Regina, Rani, Suvarna, Preethi, and Basanti—from diverse Indian states brought to life through captivating illustration.

At the heart of this initiative are inspiring stories of resilience and transformation. In Kodagu, Rani revitalized barren land into a flourishing coffee plantation, turning her personal loss into a thriving enterprise while earning a steady income. Her dedication and leadership earned her a position as a board director for the Madikeri Highlands Farmers Producers Company. Meanwhile, in Kolhapur, Suvarna's journey from smallholder farmer to successful entrepreneur showcases the power of sustainable practices. Her innovative use of vermicomposting enhanced soil fertility, significantly boosting her sugarcane and vegetable yields and ensuring economic stability for her family.

These women are not only leaders in sustainable farming; they are vital agents of change in their communities. By adopting good agricultural practices (GAPs), they enhance food security, improve the well-being of their families, create jobs, and drive local entrepreneurship, illustrating the profound impact women have in agriculture.

Reflecting on the project,Rathour said: "Creating these sketches was more than an artistic challenge; it was a chance to capture the courage and innovation these women embody. I hope my work reflects their strength and the vital role they play in shaping a sustainable future for Indian agriculture."

Rajesh Ayapilla, Senior Director-CSR and Sustainability, Coca-Cola India & Southwest Asia (INSWA), stated, "Women farmers play a crucial role in our communities, and we're proud to support their vital contributions to agriculture. Through our work over the last decade with Anandana, The Coca-Cola India Foundation we have witnessed firsthand how empowered these women are in fostering innovation and resilience in farming practices. Their dedication not only sustains families but also paves the way for a brighter future for the community in their ecosystem."

Coca-Cola India's #SheTheDifference campaign, in partnership with Anandana, The Coca-Cola India Foundation, reflects and shares stories of our long-standing commitment to empowering women farmers through initiatives like Project Unnati. This program has been instrumental in supporting farmers, providing them with the resources and training needed to thrive.

Bayer, GenZero, Shell, and Mitsubishi aim to positively impact rice farmers in India through The Good Rice Alliance

The Good Rice Alliance (TGRA), formerly known as the Sustainable Rice Carbon Programme, which is focused on advancing sustainable rice farming practices in India, has thus far enrolled more than 10,000 farmers in the program, covering over 25,000 hectares of farmland. It will reduce approximately 100,000+ tCO2e of methane emissions from rice cultivation, annually.

TGRA now aims to expand the program by adding nearly 8,500 hectares, streamlining the scientific measurement of GHG emissions from rice paddies and strengthening the farmer handholding and support system. The program will explore scale-up based on the experiences of the first two years of implementation. Currently, TGRA covers major rice-producing states in the country, like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

Through TGRA, Bayer, a global enterprise with core competencies in the life science fields of agriculture and healthcare, in collaboration with GenZero, a Temasek-owned investment platform company dedicated to accelerating decarbonization globally, Shell Energy India Private Limited, a subsidiary of Shell Plc and investor in nature-based solutions and Mitsubishi Corporation, a global integrated business enterprise that develops and operates businesses which span numerous industrial sectors, are committed to reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions through sustainable agricultural practices in rice cultivation.

The program has also managed to reduce cost of cultivation of the majority of the enrolled farmers. In the first year, a scientific GHG measurement study was carried out in six different locations in the country.

Projections indicate that demand will continue to rise, reaching between 330 million and 1.5 billion tCO2e by 2030.[1] The carbon offset platform industry in India is projected to grow at an impressive rate of 28% annually, reaching a market value of US$ 68.5 million by 2033[2].

Simon Wiebusch, President, Bayer South Asia said, “At Bayer, our mission is to increase agricultural productivity with fewer resources while restoring ecological balance. At The Good Rice Alliance (TGRA) we emphasize that quality is the cornerstone of our mission, which aims to revolutionize rice cultivation practices. With most of the farmers experiencing tangible benefits from adopting regenerative practices, we are hopeful that our collaborative efforts will lead to the widespread adoption of environmentally friendly agricultural practices, fostering thriving communities of smallholder farmers nationwide.”

TGRA is armed with a Quality Management System, a farmer training, support and hand holding mechanism and a Monitoring, Report and Verification (MRV) mechanism which are in place to help maintain program integrity.

Through use of Total Quality Management (TQM) tools all plots are monitored at least thrice a month, to ensure real reduction in emissions is achieved. The alliance prioritizes high-quality implementation to deliver credibility benefits to farmers and is committed to incentivizing farmers financially while safeguarding the environment and improving farmer livelihoods. The program undergoes regular systemic checks, internal audits, and independent verification to ensure genuine emissions reduction.

Suhas Joshi, India Carbon Initiative lead at Bayer said "Increased scrutiny of voluntary carbon markets has highlighted the need for robust, high-quality projects. Achieving excellence requires more than inspiration. It demands perspiration, hard work, attention to detail, and a willingness to tackle the unglamorous tasks. At TGRA, we're doubling down on the fundamentals of Total Quality Management."

Paddy rice cultivation is responsible for approximately 11% of global methane emissions[3], a potent greenhouse gas with a global warming potential over 27 times that of carbon dioxide. Rice farms occupy 15% of global farm area, equivalent to more than 150 million hectares worldwide[4]. With a keen focus on sustainability, the alliance is closely aligned with UN's Sustainable Development Goals and plans to work together with smallholder farmers from the grassroots to drive maximum co-benefits and mitigate climate change.

Airtel Africa Foundation unveils 'Airtel Africa Fellowship Program' to empower students at IIT Madras Zanzibar

The Airtel Africa Foundation announced the launch of the prestigious 'Airtel Africa Fellowship Program' for the undergraduate students at IIT Madras Zanzibar, the first-ever foreign campus established by an IIT. The Fellowship aims to support deserving students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM) in Zanzibar. Starting with an outlay of US$500,000, this program will benefit 10 undergraduate students, for their entire course duration of 4 years.

Founded in 2024 with a vision to foster a prosperous Africa, the Airtel Africa Foundation is dedicated to advancing digital and financial inclusion across the continent along with key focus on education and environmental protection. This Fellowship is the maiden initiative undertaken to enhance educational opportunities for meritorious students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, enrolled at IIT M Zanzibar. It is designed to support students from 14 African countries, which are namely Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC, Niger, Chad, Congo B, Gabon, Madagascar and Seychelles.

Recipients of this scholarship will be known as 'Airtel Africa Fellows'. They will receive 100% of their college fees i.e. US$12,000 as per the course fee structure of the Institute for a 4-year program. Additionally, to cover the living expense cost, US$500 will be given to all eligible students. This initiative will aspire to transform, shape lives and nurture future leaders who will contribute to technological innovation and economic growth of Africa.

Commenting on the fellowship scheme, Zanzibar's Minister of Education and Vocational Training, H.E. Ms Lela Mohamed Mussa said, "IITM Zanzibar is charting a wonderful path in technical education in the region. Providing access to this high quality education to students from Tanzania and the rest of the continent, who are topping the IITM Zanzibar screening and test processes, through financial assistance, is an important priority for us. We are thankful to this support from Airtel Africa Foundation, which will enhance our own efforts in this direction." The Chairman of the Airtel Africa Foundation, Dr. Olusegun Ogunsanya said, "We are pleased to partner with IIT Madras Zanzibar to provide opportunities for young Africans to access quality education. This initiative aims to contribute towards creating a prosperous and sustainable continent. We look forward to creating even more opportunities not just in education, but also in financial and digital inclusion, and environmental protection".

The Director of IIT Madras, Prof. V. Kamakoti said, "IIT Madras is committed to establishing a world class campus in Zanzibar. We are delighted that Airtel Africa Foundation is joining hands with us in this effort. We look forward to welcoming the second cohort of bright young students to the IITM Zanzibar campus this year. We are immensely grateful to Airtel Africa Foundation for providing financial assistance for these future global leaders."

Nitin Gadkari flags off NueGo's historic Kashmir to Kanyakumari (E-K2K) Electric Bus expedition from Nagpur

NueGo, India's leading electric bus brand from GreenCell Mobilty, has embarked on historic Kashmir to Kanyakumari (E-K2K) Electric bus expedition. This epic journey marks a significant leap in promoting sustainable mass mobility in India. With this expedition, NueGo is set to become the first EV bus brand in the world to accomplish such a record feat. NueGo aims to cover 4,000+ kms from 3,500 feet above sea level to the coastline.

As the bus passes through over 200 cities and towns, it will serve as a symbol of India's rich cultural heritage, while also spreading the message of sustainability. The E-K2K bus will be making a positive impact throughout its journey by engaging in various meaningful activities, such as student workshops, tree plantation drives, clean-up initiatives, safety-themed Nukkad Natak and many more impactful events along the way—truly embodying the spirit of "the E-bus that does good." The western leg of NueGo's E-K2K electric bus was flagged from Nagpur by Hon'ble Minister of Road Transport and Highways Government of India, Sh. Nitin Gadkari

Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said: "I am delighted that NueGo has embarked on this historic electric bus journey from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, covering over 4,000 kms, to raise awareness about electric mass mobility & also conducting various impactful activities with students & communities, as it passes through more than 200 towns and cities. Electric buses are vital for a healthier, more sustainable future for generations to come and Government of India has also strongly supported electric vehicle (EV) adoption. NueGo's E-K2K journey is a testament to the significant improvements in the country's charging infrastructure and the feasibility of electric buses for long-distance travel. This initiative also exemplifies India's commitment to innovation and green technology"

Devndra Chawla, CEO and MD of GreenCell Mobility also emphasized the need for green mass mobility solutions in India. " NueGo's ambitious E-K2K journey will see us travel over 4,000 Kms from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, demonstrating the resilience of electric buses across diverse terrains. This expedition is more than just a record-breaking feat; it symbolizes India's rich cultural heritage. By passing through 200+ cities and towns, the journey aims to raise awareness about cleaner modes of travel and inspire a transition to EV buses. Engaging in various impactful activities, the E-K2K bus truly embodies the spirit of -the E-bus that does good."

The journey was kicked off from Jammu on 4th Oct. From picturesque valleys to bustling cities, the expedition is designed to showcase the rich cultural diversity of India while demonstrating the practicality of electric buses across varying terrains. As the journey progresses, NueGo's electric buses will continue to inspire communities across India, spreading awareness about the benefits of electric mobility and the importance of adopting cleaner transportation solutions for people and planet. The NueGo electric buses are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for safety & comfort, providing guests with a premium travel experience, all while maintaining a low environmental impact.

Maruti Suzuki scales up its road safety CSR initiative in Uttar Pradesh to automate 12 additional driving test tracks

Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) entered into an agreement with the Transport Department of Uttar Pradesh to automate 12 additional driving license test tracks across the state. As part of the Memorandum of Agreement, which was signed in December 2023, five test tracks have already been automated in the state.

The 12 additional driving test tracks. located in Aligarh, Azamgarh (2 nos), Basti, Bareilly, Gonda, Jhansi, Meerut, Mirzapur, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, and Pratapgarh will be automated for Two-wheeler, LMV and HMV driving license testing.

Appreciating the efforts of Maruti Suzuki, Dayashankar Singh, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge)- Transport, Uttar Pradesh said, "After the successful automation of five driving test tracks in Uttar Pradesh by Maruti Suzuki, we are delighted to extend our partnership for 12 additional test tracks. Automation makes the issuance of driving licenses more scientific, transparent, and efficient and will help in achieving our goal to enhance road safety and reduce accidents. Maruti Suzuki completed the automation of test tracks at DTTIs at Ayodhya, Gorakhpur, Mathura, Prayagraj, and Varanasi earlier this year."

Shri Dayashankar Singh, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge)- Transport, Uttar Pradesh, and Shri Rahul Bharti, Executive Director, Corporate Affairs, Maruti Suzuki oversee the signing of Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between Maruti Suzuki India Limited and Transport Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh to automate driving license test tracks in 11 locations across the state. MoA was signed by Shri Chandra Bhushan Singh (IAS), Transport Commissioner, UP Govt and Shri Tarun Agarwal, Sr. Vice President, CSR (MSIL).

Rahul Bharti, Executive Director, Corporate Affairs, Maruti Suzuki India Limited said, "We thank the Government of Uttar Pradesh for entrusting us with this important road safety project. Together we will streamline and automate the evaluation process for awarding driving licence. The automation of driving license testing will usher in a positive transformation, that can go a long way to bring down road accidents by ensuring only capable candidates get driving licences."

Bharti added, "Maruti Suzuki has been taking focused initiatives on five pillars of road safety i.e. Engineering, Education, Evaluation, Enforcement, and Emergency care. Automated driving licence testing strengthens the 'evaluation' process with zero manual intervention to award driving licenses after a rigorous and standardized evaluation."

The automated driving test tracks, equipped with high-definition cameras and an integrated IT system, ensure a 100% computerized and transparent process for driving license testing. License applicants are evaluated through a comprehensive test with auto-generated results using technology at the automated driving test tracks. The test is designed to assess candidates according to the Central Motor Vehicle Rules (CMVR).

UNFPA India Marks 50 Years of Impactful Partnership with the Government of India

From Left — Andrea M. Wojnar, UNFPA India Representative, Dr. Natalia Kanem, UNFPA Executive Director and Kriti Sanon, Actor, Entrepreneur and Producer

From Left — Andrea M. Wojnar, UNFPA India Representative, Pio Smith, UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Director and Kriti Sanon, Actor, Entrepreneur and Producer

Celebrating a landmark 50-year partnership with the Government of India, UNFPA India hosted the50 and Beyond event, focusing on its efforts to promote gender equality, reproductive health, and women's rights.

UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency.

Acclaimed actor and entrepreneur Kriti Sanon attended the event as a special guest, supporting the organization's ongoing mission to empower women and ensure equal opportunities for all.

The event also marked the launch of the 50 and Beyond storybook, capturing the profound impact of UNFPA's grassroots collaborations with the Indian government and development partners. Centered on six key themes—Youth Power Unleashed, Tech Empowers Women, Redefining Masculinity, Healthy Ageing, My Body My Mind #MyRight, and Feminizing Climate Solutions—the book paints a forward-looking vision for UNFPA's work over the next half-century. Attendees were further treated to the premiere of the UNFPA India: 50 and Beyond Film, a visual tribute to the organization's transformative efforts nationwide.

Speaking at the event, Kriti Sanon expressed her excitement about participating in UNFPA's cause: "I am deeply committed to advocating for gender equality and ensuring every girl has the freedom to make her own choices and chase her dreams. Together, we can build a future where women and girls live free from violence and discrimination and are empowered to reach their full potential." Held at the UN House in New Delhi, the event drew several dignitaries, including Ms. Meeta Rajivlochan, Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India; Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of UNFPA; Mr. Pio Smith, Asia-Pacific Regional Director for UNFPA; Mr Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator in India; and Ms. Andrea M. Wojnar, UNFPA India Representative.

Meeta Rajivlochan, Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, emphasized the enduring partnership, stating: "UNFPA's collaboration with India is a testament to our shared commitment to youth empowerment, gender equality, and reproductive health.

Together, we look forward to continuing this journey, strengthening our combined efforts to ensure every young person in India can thrive and contribute to our nation's growth."

Dr. Natalia Kanem echoed the celebration of progress, noting: "As we embark on the next 50 years, I imagine an India where youth potential knows no bounds; where bodily autonomy is protected; and where all people stand as equals in physical and digital spaces. We foresee an India where older persons age with dignity; where climate action is led by resilient women and young people; and where technology becomes a catalyst for gender equality."

UNFPA India Representative, Andrea M. Wojnar, highlighted the strong foundation of collaboration, remarking: UNFPA India Representative, Andrea M. Wojnar, delivered a powerful message, stating: "Our 50-year partnership with the Government of India is not just a milestone—it's a movement. Together, we have made incredible strides in transforming lives, and our mission continues. As we look to the future, we will build on this foundation with renewed focus and collaboration, striving for a healthier and more equitable India."

As the evening concluded, Pio Smith, Asia Pacific Regional Director for UNFPA reaffirmed the UN's commitment to India's development journey: "We are celebrating an incredible milestone: 50 years of partnership. As we continue to realize the rights and choices of women and girls, we must ensure that everyone – especially the most marginalized – has access to health, rights, and opportunities for a brighter future. We're counting on India's leadership in this endeavor, and UNFPA is here to support every step of the way."

Since 1974, UNFPA has played a pivotal role in supporting India's development, working with the government to champion women's empowerment, youth rights, and gender equality.

UNFPA's goals include ending preventable maternal deaths, addressing unmet family planning needs, and eradicating gender-based violence by 2030, with continued collaboration with key stakeholders.

EV revolution will create toxic lithium battery monster, warn greens

Touted as environment friendly, the ongoing Electric Vehicle revolution comes with an environmental cost as it will lead to a monstrous rise in lithium-ion battery waste, environmentalists have cautioned. Environment watchdog NatConnect Foundation, therefore, launched an online campaign focusing on safe management of battery waste on the occasion of the international e-waste day.

The multi-national WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment) Forum observed October 14 as the International e-waste day and NatConnect joins the annual event with its own campaign.

For this year, the WEEE forum has chosen the theme "Join the e-Waste Hunt – Retrieve, Recycle and Revive" whereas NatConnect titled its campaign as "Beware Of Lithium Battery Monster".

The NatConnect campaign is now part of the WEEE Forum's global events for this year's International E-Waste Day.

Responding to NatConnect director B N Kumar's concerns raised with the Prime Minister, the Central Pollution Control Board had in June 2021 stated that the government was aware of the e-waste management issues and had come out with E-waste Management Rules.

While the rules are fine paper, Kumar said, the government needs to formulate a comprehensive policy for responsible disposal and even recycling the lithium battery waste, Lithium batteries, if dumped as part of landfills, can cause fires and release harmful gases and the world over concerns are being raised over their safe disposal, NatConnect said.

Moreover, corroded lithium batteries contaminate the soil and water, he said,

Kumar pointed out that exploding batteries and EV fires continue to be a matter of concern and a two-wheeler showroom at Kalaburagi, Karnataka, was set ablaze by an angry customer who was upset with the vehicle makers' alleged lack of response.

Lithium batteries are also used in mobile phones, electronic toys, energy storage systems as they can store high density energy.

Per WEEE Forum, the lithium battery waste forms part of an invisible e-waste, along with unused cables, electronic toys, LED-decorated novelty clothes, power tools, vaping devices, and countless other small consumer items. These amount to nine billion kilograms of e-waste, one-sixth of all e-waste worldwide.

Furthermore, mitigating the environmental impact of battery production, especially in the extraction of materials like lithium and cobalt, is critical, says the International Fire & Safety Journal

It involves not only technological solutions but also ethical considerations, particularly in terms of human rights and ecological preservation, the journal says.

Environment activist Jyoti Nadkarni said while her housing complex in Kharghar focuses on e-waste collection and safe disposal, the lithium battery waste management is a critical issue on which the authorities need to focus.

Kapil Kulkarni and Himanshu Katkar of Save Belapur Hills forum urged Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) and CIDCO to pay special attention to the lithium battery waste management. There is a danger of the battery cells getting mixed with the solid waste which goes into landfill, Kulkarni said

Piyush Goyal inaugurates Malabar Group's food distribution initiative at Shatabdi Hospital, Kandivali Malabar Group expands its 'Hunger-Free World' initiative

In a significant step towards combating hunger in India's urban centers, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal inaugurated Malabar Group's latest food distribution initiative at Shatabdi Hospital, Kandivali. This new effort will provide 500 nutritious meals daily to patient families at the hospital, ensuring that those grappling with medical challenges do not go hungry.

This initiative adds to Malabar Group's existing efforts in Maharashtra, where the Malabar Charitable Trust is already distributing 6,300 food packets daily in various parts of the state. With the inclusion of the 500 daily meals at Shatabdi Hospital, the Trust's food distribution in Maharashtra now reaches 6,800 meals daily, supporting vulnerable communities across the region.

This is part of Malabar Group's broader 'Hunger-Free World' programme, a comprehensive CSR effort aimed at addressing hunger and malnutrition across the country and beyond. With this addition, the Trust is now distributing over 60,000 food packets daily with 50,000 meals served across 16 Indian states and 10,000 meals daily in Zambia, focusing on schoolchildren and underserved communities in the African nation.

Malabar Group, the world's sixth-largest jewellery retailer, has embedded social responsibility at the heart of its operations. The 'Hunger-Free World' programme not only provides daily meals to vulnerable populations but also integrates a robust educational component. Through 247 micro learning centres (MLCs), the initiative reaches over 11,000 underprivileged children in India, offering them basic education to facilitate their return to formal schooling. These MLCs not only nourish young minds with knowledge but also provide essential daily nutrition, ensuring that children from streets and slums have a better chance at a brighter future.

The 'Hunger-Free World' initiative is executed in collaboration with the NGO Thanal – Daya Rehabilitation Trust, ensuring that meals reach the most vulnerable. It also aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2 - Zero Hunger, positioning Malabar Group as a key player in the global effort to eliminate hunger.

At the event, MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group emphasized the significance of the programme, "Today marks a key milestone in our ongoing mission. By extending our Hunger-Free World initiative to Shatabdi Hospital, we are not only providing 500 meals daily to families in need but also underscoring our commitment to improving lives through food security. With 60,000 meals now being served daily in India and Zambia, we are proud to play a part in the global fight against hunger. Our micro learning centres further enhance this mission by addressing another critical challenge education for underprivileged children."

The 'Hunger-Free World' initiative is executed in collaboration with the NGO Thanal – Daya Rehabilitation Trust, ensuring that meals reach the most vulnerable. It also aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2 - Zero Hunger, positioning Malabar Group as a key player in the global effort to eliminate hunger. Beyond food distribution, Malabar Group's CSR efforts include the 'Grandma Home' project for orphaned elderly women, medical care funding, educational support for female students, and housing assistance for the underprivileged. The Group contributes 5% of its profits from all verticals, including Malabar Gold & Diamonds, towards these social welfare projects, with Rs 263 crore already invested in such initiatives.

CSR INDIA UNITED

Ripudaman Bevli AKA 'Plogman of India,' Honored as Environmental Sports Champion of 2024 by Lewis Pugh Foundation

The Lewis Pugh Foundation, one of the world's leading environmental organizations dedicated to ocean preservation and sustainable future initiatives, has announced its prestigious list of Environmental Sports Champions for 2024.

Among the 37 globally recognized figures, Ripudaman Bevli, known as the 'Plogman of India,' has been named as India's representative on this esteemed list, which includes Olympians, international athletes, and global environmental leaders.

"I am honored to be in the list of Environmental Sports Champions of 2024 by the Lewis Pugh Foundation – one of the biggest environmental foundations in the world. You will see Olympians and international players from across the globe in this list, so it's a huge honor to represent India," shared Ripudaman on receiving the accolade.

Championing Environmental Action through Sport

The Environmental Sports Champions list, curated by the Lewis Pugh Foundation, honors athletes who are utilizing their platforms and influence to raise awareness and rally support for pressing environmental issues, including the ongoing climate crisis. From footballers to sailors, climbers to Olympians, the individuals on this list are using their global presence to inspire change.

Ripudaman Bevli's inclusion in this list is a testament to his trailblazing efforts in promoting environmental responsibility across India. Known for pioneering the 'plogging' movement in the country—combining jogging with litter-picking—Ripudaman has transformed a simple act of environmental cleanup into a nationwide movement. Through his innovative campaigns like the "Trash Workout" and "Plastic Upvaas," Ripudaman has inspired millions of Indians to take small yet meaningful steps to protect the environment.

Ripudaman Bevli: A Trailblazer in Environmental Advocacy

Ripudaman's journey from a former tech professional to a full-time environmental activist began in 2016, when he introduced the concept of plogging in India as part of the government's FIT India and Swachh Bharat (Clean India) initiatives. Appointed as the official Plogging Ambassador of India, his movement, 'Litter Free India,' has since mobilized over 10 million participants. His commitment goes beyond cleanup drives, with notable achievements like the 50-day, 50-city campaign in 2019, during which he ran and cleaned 1,000 kilometers across the country.

To date, Ripudaman has organized over 700 cleanups across more than 110 cities, plogging over 6,000 kilometers and setting a world record for the longest non-stop plogging run. His tireless efforts have earned him recognition from the Prime Minister of India and numerous environmental organizations, making him one of India's foremost eco-warriors.

A Global List of Champions

The Lewis Pugh Foundation's list features global sporting icons such as Australian cricket captain Pat Cummins, climber Alex Honnold, and Olympic gold medalist Etienne Scott, among others. These athletes are leveraging the power of sport to highlight the urgent need for climate action. Alongside Ripudaman, the IPL team Rajasthan Royals also represents India on the list for their efforts to empower 15 million women in rural Rajasthan to address water scarcity and boost agricultural production.

Ambuja Foundation Rural Students Excel in Sports - Qualify for State-Level Competition

17 students from Ambuja Foundation-supported schools in Chandrapur, trained under the 'After School Programme', participated in a district-level athletics competition organised by Chandrapur Athletics Association

Ambuja Foundation, an independent, pan-India social development organization dedicated to transforming rural communities, fosters athletic talent in rural communities across India via its 'After School Program' under the Education vertical. This commitment is producing remarkable outcomes, as seven students from the Ambuja Foundation-supported schools in Chandrapur have qualified for the upcoming state-level athletics competition in Pune. These successful athletes were part of a team of 17 students who competed in the district-level athletics competition, participating in events such as shot put, high jump, long jump, and javelin throw.

Out of the 17 students, 12 secured top positions – with two spots in some events. This achievement is due to the change in behaviour and commitment towards sports developed through the Ambuja Foundation's After School Program. With a focus on contributing to the nation's future athletic talent, the program encourages children in various ways and supports their participation in district, block, and state-level sports competitions.

In addition to athletics, the 'After School Program promotes sports such as kabaddi, kho-kho, and badminton. Due to the sports promotion initiative, many students have also gone on to participate in the Khelo India competitions.

The Ambuja Foundation sports promotion initiative operates in 82 Government Schools across 5 states and 7 locations, with the after-school program operational in Chandrapur, Darlaghat, Nalagarh, and Bathinda. This program aims to identify and nurture budding talent by offering specialised sports training and support through expert coaches who are State, National, and international level representatives, focusing on student-athletes with promising potential in sports. This is a testament to the Ambuja Foundation's unwavering support for sports development and promotion across the nation.

Pearl Tiwari, CEO, Ambuja Foundation said, "Ambuja Foundation fosters rural prosperity by enabling villagers and communities to find solutions to local problems. We believe sports are a powerful vehicle to engage children, improve school attendance rates, and foster enhanced discipline, focus, and spirit in rural communities. With our 'After School Program, we aim to nurture sporting talent at the village level and encourage them to play their favourite sport and realize their full potential. It's incredibly satisfying to witness the achievements of the students of the schools supported by the Ambuja Foundation. This success is a testament to our dedicated on-ground team and the coaches, who motivated these young people to become shining examples for others to aspire to."

SAVWIPL reinforces commitment to ecological restoration; plants over 700,000 trees across Maharashtra

Škoda Auto Volkswagen India Private Limited (SAVWIPL) has achieved a major milestone by planting over 700,000 trees in different parts of Maharashtra, highlighting the Group's commitment to ecological restoration. This includes the Group's recent initiative of planting 100,000th tree at the Green Future Park near its Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (CSN) car manufacturing facility, which will provide an oxygen-rich environment to the Shendra Industrial area.

SAVWIPL's tree plantation efforts are part of a larger sustainability agenda that includes a range of green projects. The Group has made notable progress in reducing its carbon footprint, including the complete decarbonization of its Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar plant, which includes operations on 100% Green Energy. Additionally, SAVWIPL has installed 18.5 MWp of rooftop solar power at its Chakan facility, offsetting nearly 30% of CO2 emissions. Further demonstrating its environmental commitment, SAVWIPL has restored 100 hectares of degraded mangrove forests in Alibaug, planting over 580,000 trees to revitalize the vital coastal ecosystem. The Group has also enhanced its sustainability efforts with rainwater harvesting capacity exceeding 600 million litres in drought prone villages of Maharashtra, reflecting its dedication to sustainable water management beyond the fence.

Over the last few years, SAVWIPL has been consistently supporting ecological restoration projects in the local area of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and Pune, and a few other places in Maharashtra. Some of the key projects include the plantation of 25,000 trees at Oxygen Park, and 11,500 trees at the Green Hub. The 63,500 trees at recently developed Green Future Park have significantly expanded these efforts.

Motilal Oswal Foundation and IIM Mumbai Announce Landmark Partnership for the Creation of Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre

In a significant move set to redefine industry-academia collaboration, the Motilal Oswal Foundation (MOF) has joined hands with the Indian Institute of Management Mumbai (IIM Mumbai) to develop a state-of-the-art learning and research hub. The new facility, Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre (MOKC), will mark a pivotal chapter in IIM Mumbai's drive to improve academic infrastructure while reinforcing the Motilal Oswal Foundation's commitment to elevating educational standards nationwide.

Key Highlights:

- Donation of Rs. 28 Cr by Motilal Oswal Foundation.
- Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre to be built on the IIM Mumbai campus

This philanthropic initiative is part of MOF's larger vision to bridge the gap between education and skill development in India.

Strategic Collaboration for Industry-Relevant Education

The Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre (MOKC) is designed to foster innovation and knowledge-sharing in key disciplines such as capital markets, business strategy, and financial research. The collaboration reflects the growing need for industry-aligned education that bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, which is crucial for India's evolving workforce.

The MOKC will be a multi-storey landmark, playing a pivotal role in advancing capital market research and education. The Motilal Oswal Foundation, with 33,400 square feet of dedicated space in MOKC, will drive innovation in capital markets, research, and development, reinforcing its significant role in advancing the industry. IIM Mumbai will utilise the rest of the expansive space of MOKC for modern classrooms, research labs, and support services.

Motilal Oswal, Trustee of the Motilal Oswal Foundation, said, “This is not just an investment in brick and mortar; it is an investment in the future of India’s youth. Education is the foundation of economic growth, and we are proud to contribute to building an ecosystem that nurtures talent and innovation. We also wish to introduce Capital Markets knowledge in mainline education system in India. This knowledge centre at IIM Mumbai a step forward in that direction.”

Prof. Manoj K Tiwari, Director of Indian Institute of Management, Mumbai, emphasised the impact of the collaboration: “The Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre marks a significant milestone in our efforts to advance academic and research excellence. The Centre will revolutionise the way we approach research and learning. With dedicated spaces for financial research and academic innovation, this Centre will empower our students and faculty to engage in transformative work that aligns with the industry’s needs. As we expand our capabilities in education and research, partnerships like this will be vital in enabling us to continue growing as a premier institution.”

The Capital Markets Centre within the new building will provide a dedicated space for research in financial markets, making it one of the most significant initiatives in bridging academia and the corporate world.

As India strides toward its goal of becoming a $10 trillion economy by 2030, initiatives like the Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre will play a crucial role in developing a future-ready workforce capable of driving the nation’s economic aspirations. The country's emergence as a global economic powerhouse depends on the strength of its human capital. Through strategic partnerships like this, India is well-positioned to cultivate the skills necessary for sustained growth. The Motilal Oswal Knowledge Centre will serve as a vital bridge between academia and industry, empowering students with the practical knowledge and expertise they need to thrive in their careers and contribute to the nation’s progress.

AU SFB expands AU Udyogini Program in partnership with Magic Bus India Foundation to nurture women entrepreneurs

AU Small Finance Bank (AU SFB), India's largest small finance bank, through its CSR arm- AU Foundation, announced the expansion of its AU Udyogini program with a new partnership with Magic Bus India Foundation (MBIF). This strategic collaboration reinforces the commitment to foster women entrepreneurship and drive community development across Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. MBIF will provide entrepreneurship orientation, entrepreneurial education and mentorship during the entire life cycle of the young women's enterprise journey.

The program is expanding to 15 additional locations across seven districts of Madhya Pradesh, and 18 locations in 13 districts of Rajasthan. More than 1300 young women from rural and semi-urban areas are expected to benefit through this extension of the program. The program initially operated in two aspirational districts of Rajasthan: Karauli and Baran. It has now expanded to include two additional districts: Sirohi in Rajasthan and Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh.

Magic Bus India Foundation will be the implementing partner for this expansion, helping women to prepare business plans, access finance and markets, set up entrepreneurs' collectives, and support in access to technology solutions that ease out the business functions and formalize the business by getting necessary registrations and mandatory certification. AU Udyogini provides rural women with essential seed funding, comprehensive capacity-building training, and continuous support to transform their entrepreneurial dreams into reality.

Speaking at the occasion, Sanjay Agarwal, Founder, MD & CEO, AU Small Finance Bank, said, "At AU Small Finance Bank, we believe

when we empower a woman, we empower an entire community. AU Udyogini program, a journey of rural women from aatmnirbharta se badlaav tak, is not just about entrepreneurship, it's about shaping the future by giving women the tools and confidence to uplift their lives and those of their families consistently since 2020. Our partnership with Magic Bus India Foundation will help us accelerate this transformation and extend the benefits to the community. The scalable model aims to reach more women, contributing to a larger vision of Viksit Bharat—a developed India where women are economically independent and socially empowered."

Jayant Rastogi, Global CEO, Magic Bus India Foundation, said, "Magic Bus believes that the economic empowerment of rural women is a critical driver of economic and social change. Our women empowerment programmes are designed to create lasting impact by focusing on self and leadership development. We create sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural women by enhancing their agency and capabilities, and by offering support services to engage in economic development. Projects like AU Udyogini will enhance women's agency and break down the structural barriers that rural women face, fostering an inclusive society. Our efforts toward rural women's economic empowerment are not just about individual success stories, but about transforming lives." The program targets women from underserved backgrounds, with over 20% being widowed, separated, or divorced. Rigorous research and a structured process ensure effective interventions and minimize dropout rates.

The program has extended support to close to over 1100 women entrepreneurs, driving socio-economic progress in rural communities. Initially it concentrated on creating entrepreneurship opportunities for women from families of daily wage earners affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the years, it has broadened its scope to empower women from distressed backgrounds in rural areas, thereby enhancing their family incomes. The program also aligns with NITI Aayog's ambitious plan to improve India's ranking in the Human Development Index by implementing its operations in aspirational districts under NITI Aayog. In May this year, AU Small Finance Bank had launched AU Udyogini Mart, at Navrangpura, Jaipur to provide Udyoginis with a dedicated space for their businesses and foster a sense of ownership. AU Udyogini program was further extended to the state of Madhya Pradesh in July 2024, aiming to nurture 1200 women by 2026.

A District-Wide Celebration of Childhood in Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh

In a first of its kind event, the district of Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh saw more than 500 Anganwadis and their supporting villages and community members celebrating their youngest children. In the past 3 years, the District Dept. of Women and Child Development has been making progress in ensuring the best quality Early Childhood Education in their Anganwadis under the leadership of District Collector, Mr. Parth Jaiswal with the able guidance of the DPO, Rajiv Singh. They have taken multiple steps to improve infrastructure, curriculum, training for the Anganwadi workers and helpers and even launched programs to involve the parents in learning activities through play. The district has partnered with Key Education Foundation as an Early Childhood Education technical partner.

Today, we observe the culmination of all these efforts as learning and play are celebrated not just by Anganwadis but by the communities at large. District officials, parents, grandparents and all others came to the Anganwadis to play, learn and recognize the importance of the early childhood years. The Anganwadi Workers have prepared all week to ensure that families can experience the Anganwadi activities as children do. Anganwadis witnessed children and families playing together, doing activities, participating in games, observing displays of children's work and most importantly having fun together.

"I did not even realize how time flew by this week enjoying Bachpan Manao preparation with the community. I also felt good showing the learning stations that I set up to the parents. I would like to do this every year!," said Sarita Agrawal, Anganwadi Worker

"Parents were so happy today to come and see how much their children are learning in the Anganwadis. It sends a great message to members of the community who hesitate to send their children to Anganwadi. We must continue to strive for this excellence in all our Anganwadis!," said Sushma Ahirwar, Anganwadi Supervisor

The district used creative methods like handmade invitations by the children and radio bulletins to ensure maximum awareness and participation in Bachpan Manao.

"The district awarded certificates to every child to recognize their uniqueness and celebrate their performance. It is an effort to recognize and ensure a ripple effect in the mindset change to put the child at the centre and the best way to do that is to recognize the child in us! Bachpan Manao is a good way to put the focus on every child at a local level by celebrating childhood in every Anganwadi and village." - Rajiv Singh, DPO

The Bachpan Manao Celebrations will culminate in a district-level Annual Celebration - Vatayan - 2024. By celebrating learning, the district is making an important statement that all early moments are learning moments that present us with a special opportunity to help our children develop.

Swetha Guhan, Director, Key Education Foundation says, "Chhatarpur district is setting an example for all districts by not just improving teaching but also making the anganwadis the ideal space for the community and its children."

BMC, HUL and JSW Foundation Launch First Jointly Set-Up Suvidha Centre

Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) and JSW Foundation, as part of their strategic partnership to establish 10 new Suvidha centres in Mumbai, today launched the first such facility in Jagruti Nagar, Ghatkopar. This initiative builds on the successful Suvidha Model initiated by HUL in 2016, which currently operates 17 centres in partnership with the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and HSBC India, impacting over 450,000 people annually.

Key Highlights of the New Suvidha Centres:

The Suvidha Centres are designed to address the comprehensive hygiene, and sanitation needs of low-income communities, offering all essential services under one roof. The tested and proven holistic approach is built around human centric design, providing safety to women & children, and working with the communities. These facilities, in addition to strong community engagement and strong operating processes leads to high satisfaction and improved health outcomes among users.

1. **24x7 access:** The new centre will benefit an additional 20,000 people, providing access to safe toilets that run 24x7, purified drinking water, showers, and laundry services.
2. **Affordable Amenities:** Services will be offered at affordable rates
3. **Inclusively designed** keeping in mind the needs of women, children, elderly and the differently abled
4. **Focus on Safety of women & children:** The centre has separate washrooms for men, women and children with facilities for senior citizens and the specially-abled. To ensure safety of the women using the facility, the washrooms are equipped with a 'panic button' for emergencies.
5. **Sustainability at the core:** 140 million litres has already been saved cumulatively through our centres. The centres are powered by solar energy.
6. **Behavior change programs:** HUL and JSW Foundation will run a comprehensive behaviour change program in the communities around the centre to ensure improvement in individual and overall community health.

Sashidhar Vempala, Chief Sustainability Officer, Hindustan Unilever, said, "We are thrilled to announce the launch of our first Suvidha center in collaboration with JSW Foundation, making this the 18th centre in Mumbai. This marks a significant milestone in our commitment to providing safe and dignified sanitation services to underserved communities in the city. This partnership not only expands access to essential hygiene facilities but also embodies our dedication to sustainability and community empowerment. Together, we are paving the way for a healthier, more inclusive future, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to thrive in a clean and safe environment."

Commenting on the first jointly launched Suvidha Centre in Jagruti Nagar, Ashwini Saxena, CEO of JSW Foundation said, "Our partnership with Hindustan Unilever Limited and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to set up the Suvidha Centres reflect JSW Foundation's commitment towards empowering the local communities with a focus on the safety and welfare of women and children. We believe this partnership will go a long way in ensuring equitable access to quality and affordable sanitation facilities for the people of Mumbai."

Additional details about Suvidha centre

- 450,000+ men, women, and children currently have access to clean sanitation facilities
- 140 Million liters of water saved by 17 centres cumulatively till date
- 9 in 10 users find Suvidha centers easy to access and inclusive
- 98% women believe Suvidha is safe for them and their children
- ~50% reduction in Diarrhoea and UTI cases among Suvidha users
- Over 90% user satisfaction among women and children on Suvidha services

Sadbhavna Vruddhashram setting up India's largest Old Age Shelter Home at a cost of Rs 300 crore

A free of cost living at the State-of-the-Art Haven, for Elderly Care in Rajkot

Manav Seva Charitable Trust in Rampar is launching the Sadbhavana Vrudha Ashram, a state-of-the-art old age home located at Rampar along the Rajkot-Jamnagar highway, with an investment of ₹300 crore. This facility, one of the largest in India, will span 30 acres and feature 7 towers, each with 11 floors, accommodating a total of 1,400 rooms. It aims to provide free, lifelong shelter to 5,000 elderly individuals who are Childless, sick, handicapped, or bedridden and require continuous care.

The ashram will be inclusive, welcoming individuals from all backgrounds without regard to religion, caste, or creed. The new facility will include various amenities such as a temple, a large kitchen named Annapurna House, a library, an exercise room equipped with fitness equipment, a yoga room, a dispensary, a community hall, and landscaped gardens. The existing Sadbhavana Old Age Home in Rajkot has been operational for ten years and currently cares for 650 childless individuals, including 200 who are completely bedridden.

To support this initiative, an 8-day global Ramkatha event led by the esteemed Param Pujya Shri Morari Bapu is scheduled from November 23 to December 1 at Rajkot. This event aims to raise awareness about tree plantation and will attract social leaders, industrialists, businessmen, political figures, donors, and activists from around the globe.

In the middle - Mrs. Deena Mehta - Former President BSE Ltd is also the honorary Advisor, Shri Parmananda Saraswati Maharaj - Guide and Mentor, Mr. Mital khetani - Chairman, Advisory Committee

Shri Swami Parmananda Saraswati, International Convener of Hindu Dharmacharya Mahasabha and Patron of Sadbhavana Old Age Home, emphasized the growing need for community support for elderly care: "In today's world, senior citizens often receive less attention from younger generations. It is crucial for more individuals to engage in such noble efforts to assist childless elders and orphans." Mr. Mital khetani of Manav Seva Charitable Trust added that they welcome individuals who are beyond 60 years and those who are socially or physically challenged. Sadbhavna Vruddhashram is a home which will offer better care for the elderly childless with all facilities free of cost. He noted that many lonely elders find joy and peace within a supportive old age home environment. At this event, special guests included Mrs. Deena Mehta, the former President of the Bombay Stock Exchange, the first woman Director on the Board of BSE, along with Dr. Girish Shah, a member of the Animal Welfare Board of India, Government of India.

Malabar Group Launches 247 Micro Learning Centres to Bring Street Children to School

As part of the Malabar Group's ongoing Hunger Free World initiative, 247 micro learning centers have been established across the country to provide basic education to street children and facilitate their transition into formal schooling. So far, 11,700 children have been enrolled in these centres, where they receive one year of foundational education to help them return to or begin formal education. The initiative ensures each child continues their studies in a structured school environment, with an annual expenditure of Rs. 10,000 per child to support their education.

In a ceremony held in Mumbai's East Govandi Tata Nagar slum, Malabar Group Chairman MP Ahammed inaugurated 101 Micro Learning Centres as part of the project's second phase, spanning 11 states. Dignitaries at the event included Vice Chairman KP Abdul Salam, India Operations Managing Director O. Asher, Group Executive Director A. K. Nishad, and Dr. V. Idrees, Chairman of 'Thanal'.

Commenting on the initiative, MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group, said, "This project reflects our commitment to creating a sustainable future for street children by providing them with an opportunity to break free from the cycle of poverty through education. We believe that through these Micro Learning Centres, we are laying the foundation for thousands of children to have a brighter future, starting with access to basic education."

Malabar Group has also announced plans to establish an additional 250 Micro Learning Centres in 16 states within the next two months. Once these are operational, the centres will be able to serve up to 25,000 children annually. Children who complete their 10th standard will receive support for higher studies on campuses across various states, with additional scholarships available to girls as part of the Group's commitment to women's empowerment.

Malabar Group Chairman MP Ahammed inaugurates a Micro Learning Center in East Govandi Tata Nagar, Mumbai, as part of the Hunger Free Word project

Micro Learning Centres aim to provide essential education, with a focus on encouraging further schooling. Teachers from local communities are appointed at a ratio of one teacher per 40 students, and children are provided with nutritious food, including milk, bananas, and eggs, during their study period. After completing their year at the centre, students are supported in transitioning to formal schools. The Hunger Free World project also addresses other critical needs of street dwellers, including healthcare, rehabilitation of mothers, access to clean drinking water, construction of sanitation facilities, and ensuring documentation to secure government benefits. The project is implemented in collaboration with the voluntary organisation 'Thanal'.

Malabar Group distributes 50,000 nutritious food packages daily across 80 cities in 16 Indian states and provides 10,000 food packets daily to schoolchildren in Zambia. The Group aims to expand this initiative, reaching 1 lakh people per day at 200 centres globally.

Additionally, Malabar Group's 'Grandma Home' initiative provides shelter for destitute women, offering free accommodations with comprehensive facilities in Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Expansion plans include new homes in Kerala, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi, and Mumbai. Recently, the Group announced Rs. 16 crore in educational scholarships for 21,000 girls, part of their ongoing commitment to empowering women and girls across India.

Since its inception, Malabar Group has spent over Rs. 263 crores on CSR projects focused on education, healthcare, and social welfare. Individuals and organisations interested in partnering with the Hunger Free World project can contact Malabar Charitable Trust or Thanal Non Profit Organisation for more information. Contact: 0495 -2726919

NATURE DEAL MUST BE MORE THAN JUST ‘A COUPLE OF NICE WORDS’

As COP16 approaches, the new executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity speaks on turning biodiversity commitments into meaningful action, state **Catherine Early**, Dialogue Earth

Since COP15 in 2022, the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) has been set up. However, only seven countries have made contributions so far, totalling US$244.61 million. Canada is by far the biggest donor, contributing US$146.18 million, followed by Germany, which donated US$43.75 million. *Image: USFWS - Pacific Region, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

The global deal for biodiversity agreed in Montreal in December 2022 was hailed as historic. Governments committed to protect and restore ecosystems, slash pollution from plastics and chemicals, and boost natural solutions to climate change.

But the world has been here before. Two previous deals agreed in 2002 and 2010 failed to live up to expectations. In the meantime, biodiversity loss has spiralled – wildlife populations have declined globally by 69 per cent on average since 1970, and the rate of loss is accelerating.

The UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is hoping to build momentum and speed up implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at its next round of talks. COP16 kicks off on 21 October in the Colombian city of Cali, with Astrid Schomaker at the helm for her first major talks as executive secretary.

Appointed in April, Schomaker is no stranger to multilateral negotiations, having worked at the European Commission since 1992, and in the environment department since 2004. Her most recent roles included director for green diplomacy and multilateralism, and director for global sustainable development, and she has headed up units on issues including marine environment and water, and chemicals and nanomaterials. She holds a law degree and a master's degree in international legal cooperation.

"COP16 is the first opportunity to demonstrate that the framework is not just a couple of nice words, but that countries are really taking action," says Schomaker. "The first thing that matters is to demonstrate alignment between action and political commitment."

By the time talks begin, governments are expected to have submitted national action plans (known as National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans or NBSAPs) detailing how they intend to meet the global targets agreed in Montreal. The CBD is also allowing them to submit targets if they have not been able to complete their full action plans in time. So far, governments have made more progress on targets, with more than 1,500 from 72 countries submitted to the CBD, compared with just 25 countries that have submitted NBSAPs.

While these are in the process of being scrutinised, all Schomaker can say is: "It's clear there are some issues that are easier than others for governments." The CBD will publish an analysis of the plans ahead of COP.

THE FINANCE GAP

COP's agenda will include solutions to closing the US$700 billion annual gap in finance needed for nature, such as a new fund for sharing the benefits of genetic resources and reforming subsidies that harm nature. Countries will also need to agree on how to monitor and measure their progress.

At the time of speaking, a week of technical talks on sharing the benefits of genetic resources and digital sequencing had just concluded. The talks were aiming to correct historical injustices relating to the ownership and control of genetic resources, traditional knowledge, and biotechnological innovation. Requiring monetary benefits from companies in sectors that rely on digital sequencing information (DSI) use was one option.

Many issues are still to be finalised, including whether the funds would be disbursed to specific projects or if a formula should be devised to allocate money per country according to biodiversity richness, Schomaker says.

"We're very optimistic, as are the co-chairs, and they have the best feel for where parties stand," she tells Dialogue Earth. "We came to this discussion basically with an empty slate, but we left after five days and nights with a draft recommendation that has narrowed down the policy options to a very clear set."

Ahead of COP16, a technical group will consider the practicalities of how such a mechanism will work, with a draft agreement expected to be finalised at COP16. Despite the complexities of the issue, Schomaker is upbeat about the potential for a deal. Though negotiators had different perspectives, it was "an extremely constructive" discussion, she says.

"Everybody there wants to have that solution by COP16, because we want companies to start paying for the information they use, and because we need the money. Once we come to COP, with all the added energy and the political pressure that brings, we think we can get it across the finishing line," she says.

FINANCE ON THE TABLE

The DSI negotiations are part of the multi-pronged approach agreed by governments in Montreal to finance the goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Other sources include a new fund to channel public money to nature, boosting contributions from the private sector and greening financial systems, and reforming subsidies that harm nature.

There seems to be little action on subsidy reform so far. Environmentally harmful subsidies increased by 55 per cent to US$1.7 trillion between 2022 and 2023, driven largely by a doubling of support for fossil fuel consumption, according to the United Nations Environment Programme's latest annual report on finance for nature.

Schomaker admits the issue of subsidies is "very, very tricky". "We are aware of the trend, but we're also aware that, for example, our host country Colombia is phasing out subsidies for fossil fuels. So there is also a counter trend, and it's about strengthening that," she says.

"We hope there will be strong messages sent that while we're discussing spending more money on biodiversity, this cannot be offset by subsidies being eight times the level of money spent on positive action," she adds.

Since COP15 in 2022, the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) has been set up. However, only seven countries have made contributions so far, totalling US$244.61 million. Canada is by far the biggest donor, contributing US$146.18 million, followed by Germany, which donated US$43.75 million.

Schomaker acknowledges that the number of countries that have stepped up so far is insufficient. "We are of course talking to governments, and governments are talking among each other, about how to strengthen the capitalisation of the fund."

At the same time, the UN's Global Environment Facility has taken steps to ensure funds can be disbursed quickly and flexibly once they are available, she says. Four projects have been approved and will receive a share of US$39.8 million, with another 18 projects under development.

The business and philanthropic sectors also need to foot part of the bill for biodiversity, she adds. The number of businesses attending COP16 will be higher than at COP15.

Stepping up finance for biodiversity is as much about official development assistance as it is about domestic finance, mobilisation, and contributions from governments and businesses, she says, adding: "Not to detract from the obligations of donors, but this global mechanism on access- and benefit-sharing from genetic sequencing information can generate significant amounts of money for biodiversity. "That's why it is so important that we actually bring this process to a conclusion and agree on how this mechanism will work at COP16," she says.

THE PEOPLE'S COP

The Colombian presidency of COP16 has given the event the tagline "the people's COP", reflecting the need to start a new movement for biodiversity and bring all parts of society to the COP, Schomaker notes. This is important to avoid the sort of opposition to action for nature seen in the EU, where farmers took to the streets to protest against the bloc's Nature Restoration Law, she says.

"The whole world has been watching this debate. For some reason, it ended up with the juxtaposition of agriculture and nature, and that, of course, is utterly false. That's why the COP is about bringing all actors on board, to make sure that the voice of farmers is being heard as policies are being developed," she says.

Schomaker acknowledges this may sound like "a lot of positive talk" but stresses: "It can be done".

At COP16, countries will discuss establishing a new subsidiary body for Indigenous peoples and local communities to strengthen their voices as the biodiversity framework is implemented, she says.

COP16 is the first of three major UN environment meetings taking place in quick succession. Governments signed up to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will meet in November and December.

Schomaker is adamant that the conventions need to work more in synergy, confessing that this is her "favourite subject". She believes that workstreams under the conventions need to be brought together more concretely at a national level, to avoid, for example, national climate plans and national biodiversity plans being developed in silos under different ministries.

However, she says: "The synergy debate has never been as active as it is this year – there is now a globally recognised narrative that the climate, biodiversity, and land degradation crises are parts of one crisis."

-(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/nature-deal-must-be-more-than-just-a-couple-of-nice-words/)

New fund to support chemicals and waste management in developing economies

One year after its adoption in Bonn, the Global Framework on Chemicals today launched its first call for projects targeting the safe and sustainable management of chemicals and waste. The selected projects are expected to work on green and sustainable solutions and to channel actions to prevent and minimise harm from chemicals and waste in some of the world's most disadvantaged countries.

"Pollution and waste constitute a daily crisis for people's health, undermine economic activity, and leave nature permanently scarred," said Sheila Aggarwal-Khan Director of the UNEP Industry and Economy Division. "Today the historic Framework is turning from text into practice and providing concrete benefits for those at the frontlines of this crisis."

At the Fifth International Conference on Chemicals Management, held in September 2023 in Bonn, delegates from around the world representing governments, private sector, civil society, academia and youth adopted the Framework. During the conference this dedicated trust fund was set up to support low-and middle-income countries, including small island developing states, in addressing chemicals, including products and waste in line with international standards.

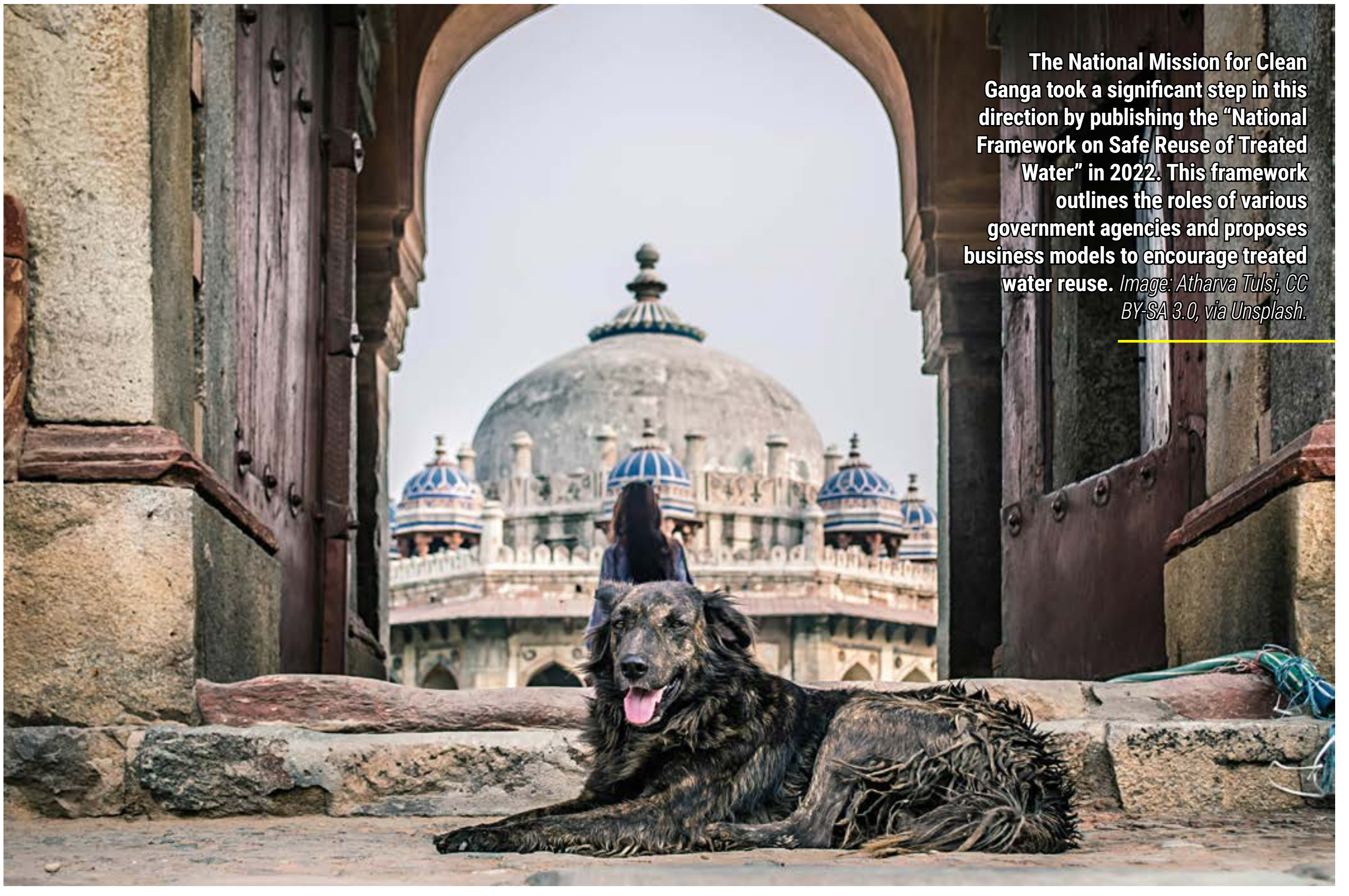
Selected projects will receive US$300,000 to US$800,000 for up to three years to support transformative change to prevent and minimise harm from chemicals and waste and to protect the environment and human health, including vulnerable groups and workers. Such projects will need to have co-financing and in-kind contributions of at least 25 per cent. Governments can apply for funding as well as civil society networks, subject to an agreement with the respective government.

The fund is aiming for medium-scale projects that strengthen national and regional capacities on chemicals and waste management, support the national policies and regulations, advance solutions along the value chain, and work with ministries, regional centres, health networks, major industry sectors, investment and development banks, small businesses, as well as civil society. Priority will be given to projects that ensure their long-term sustainability beyond the Fund's three-year funding.

The Framework outlines a set of 28 targets to address chemicals, including the prevention of illegal trade and trafficking of chemicals and waste, the implementation of national legal frameworks, the alignment of financial flows, the phase-out of highly hazardous pesticides in agriculture by 2035, the transition to safer and more sustainable chemical alternatives and greater transparency and access to information regarding chemicals and their associated risks.

The fund – which complements existing financial mechanisms, including those designed to tackle the two other planetary threats of climate change and biodiversity loss – has received initial support of around US$27 million, primarily from Germany, as well as the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the International Council of Chemical Associations. Applicants will be able to learn more in a series of webinars on the Fund, its priorities, and on how to apply.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/press-releases/new-fund-to-support-chemicals-and-waste-management-in-developing-economies/)



The National Mission for Clean Ganga took a significant step in this direction by publishing the "National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water" in 2022. This framework outlines the roles of various government agencies and proposes business models to encourage treated water reuse. *Image: Atharva Tulsi, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Unsplash.*

WHY INDIA NEEDS TO INCENTIVISE WATER REUSE

To encourage greater water reuse, India must prioritise infrastructure development, implement sound policies and allow private sector participation, opines **Anshuman**

While treated wastewater in India is often discharged into water bodies or used for non-essential purposes such as irrigating public parks, its reuse for more critical applications remains relatively uncommon.

With depleting freshwater sources, erratic rainfall patterns and growing water scarcity, it is imperative that India adopt innovative water management solutions.

Data from the Central Pollution Control Board reveals that only 28 per cent of the total sewage generated is effectively treated and a mere 3 per cent of this treated wastewater is used beneficially. This represents a significant untapped resource that could help alleviate India's water security concerns.

The failure to reuse treated wastewater also underutilises the substantial capital invested in sewage treatment plants. But without adequate infrastructure, supportive policies and financial incentives, this situation is likely to continue.

Existing challenges

Despite the growing need, wastewater reuse in India faces several challenges. The infrastructure for wastewater treatment is inadequate.

There is an absence of guidelines on sector-wise quality of treated water reuse as different sectors have distinct requirements of processed water quality ranging from biological treatment to reverse osmosis or ultrafiltration to meet quality standards.

R&D initiatives are deficient and require boosting of investment to foster innovation and accelerate the adoption of wastewater reuse practices. There is also a lack of participation by the private sector and a lack of skilled personnel.

Added to this, socio-cultural barriers often prevent the acceptance of reused water.

The high capital costs of setting up wastewater treatment facilities and advanced technologies, such as zero liquid discharge which maximises the water being recovered for reuse but is also very expensive, discourage industries and municipalities from embracing reuse practices. Financial constraints and a lack of clear incentives further hinder progress.

Benefits of water reuse

This is despite the many benefits of reusing wastewater. Reusing treated wastewater is a promising solution to freshwater scarcity.

For example, a large-scale project of using treated wastewater for agriculture and groundwater recharge in Kolar, Karnataka, demonstrated significant socio-economic benefits.

The results showed improved groundwater levels and quality, increased agricultural productivity, higher livestock and fish production, and a 118 per cent rise in land values.

The net income of farmers from cash crops doubled, highlighting the project's potential to boost agro-economic systems and support a circular economy in the water sector.

A study by The Energy and Resources Institute in thermal power plants suggested that interventions such as ash water recirculation and implementing wastewater recycling and reuse can yield a collective average monetary benefit of on average Rs 300 million per year (US$US3.57 million) with accompanying water savings of nearly 10 million cubic metres a year.

Another study by the institute found that the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board generates an additional annual revenue of nearly Rs 164 million (US$US2 million) by selling 18 million litres per day of treated water, which entirely covers its operations and maintenance costs. A similar model operates in Chennai and could be replicated all over India.

There are also benefits to be gained from recycling the valuable nutrients found in wastewater — like nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium — which if recovered can be used to reduce reliance on synthetic fertilisers. The International Water Management Institute estimates that the sewage generated from class I and II cities across India — 6,400 million litres per day according to the Central Pollution Control Board — has a nutrient load of about 2,500 tonnes. This translates into a theoretical daily monetary value of Rs 19.5 million (US$US232,000) if the nutrients have a value of Rs 8,000 (US$US95) per tonne.

> **By easing financial constraints, offering regulatory support and cultivating a market for treated wastewater, the government can drive widespread adoption of reuse practices.**

Driving the change

While several Indian states have implemented policies to promote treated water reuse, a comprehensive national framework is essential to drive widespread adoption.

The National Mission for Clean Ganga took a significant step in this direction by publishing the "National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water" in 2022.

This framework outlines the roles of various government agencies and proposes business models to encourage treated water reuse.

However, more robust policies and incentives are necessary to fully integrate treated water into India's hydrological cycle, such as:

1 Setting up water reuse benchmarks for industries

In the absence of well-defined standards for treated water usage, it is essential to equip industries with a clear set of guidelines and established benchmarks. This could include standards based on a fit-for-purpose approach to promote wastewater reuse and resources recovery, without compromising on product quality.

2 Incentives for R&D in water efficiency and wastewater reuse

The government should implement policies that incentivise industries, research institutions and universities to undertake R&D initiatives focused on innovative water treatment technologies, water efficiency practices, pilot projects and demonstrations.

3 Incentives for agriculture

Farmers may be incentivised to use treated wastewater for irrigation, especially in water-scarce regions.

4 Volumetric water pricing

Water users should be charged different rates based on their level of consumption. Higher tariffs for non-recycled water will encourage municipalities and housing societies to adopt recycled water for non-potable purposes.

5 Incentive for housing societies and residential areas

Encourage the use of treated water for non-potable purposes such as landscaping, toilet flushing and cooling systems in residential areas. This could be done by subsidising dual plumbing systems to separate potable and non-potable water supplies or providing rebates on property taxes as a reward for reducing dependency on freshwater.

6 Public-private partnerships

Engaging the private sector as a partner can fast track the development of wastewater treatment and reuse infrastructure. The government can provide financial support, while the private entities bring in technical expertise to build and maintain the systems.

7 Water use credits

Similar to carbon credits, entities that use treated wastewater could receive water-use credits, which could be monetised or traded with other developers. The 2030 Water Resources Group hosted by World Bank Group has published a handbook on wastewater reuse certificates as tradable permits which can be used as a base document for such a policy intervention.

India stands at a pivotal moment in addressing its escalating water challenges. With 72 per cent of sewage remaining untreated and more than 35,000 million cubic metres of treated wastewater expected to be available by 2050, the opportunities for large-scale wastewater reuse and related socio-economic benefits are substantial.

By easing financial constraints, offering regulatory support and cultivating a market for treated wastewater, the government can drive widespread adoption of reuse practices. This shift will not only alleviate pressure on freshwater resources but also enhance water security and sustainability for future generations.

With 72 per cent of sewage remaining untreated and more than 35,000 million cubic metres of treated wastewater expected to be available by 2050, the opportunities for large-scale wastewater reuse and related socio-economic benefits are substantial.

Anshuman is Director, Water Resources Division of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in New Delhi, India.

This article is part of a special report on water reuse, produced in collaboration with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi.

(Source:https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/why-india-needs-to-incentivise-water-reuse/)

For decades the dominant paradigm for politicians and businesses around the world has been growth at all costs. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' David Obura argues that this focus, particularly in high-consumption economies, is pushing ecosystems to breaking point. *Image: CIFOR-ICRAF, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

'YOU CAN'T GROW FOREVER ON A FINITE PLANET'

The world must shift away from growth models driving ecosystems to the brink, says biodiversity expert and IPBES chair **David Obura**

On a humid September morning, David Obura speaks to Dialogue Earth from the seaside town of Kilifi in Kenya, 70 kilometres up the coast from Mombasa. His proximity to the ocean is fitting: Obura has spent nearly three decades studying and advocating for the preservation of coral reefs, becoming a world-renowned marine scientist in the process.

Obura's work ranges from hands-on research to high-level policy at global summits, which has led him to become one of the most influential voices in the global biodiversity debate. He now chairs the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), a group that produces influential biodiversity assessments and provides policy support.

His location is also fitting for another reason: Africa has an increasingly important role to play in solving the biodiversity crisis. The continent will host the IPBES for the first time later this year, in Windhoek, Namibia.

"It's great for IPBES to hold its first major meeting on African soil," says Obura of the event, which will take place from 10-16 December. "The coincidence of me being the first chair from Africa is fantastic."

'A nature-dependent continent'

Obura says Africa is incredibly aware of biodiversity. "We are a continent where people are more dependent on nature for their livelihoods than anywhere else," he says.

One of the most pressing concerns for African nations is how to wield their influence in global biodiversity discussions. Africa has often been a recipient of global policies rather than a shaper of them, but Obura is optimistic that this is beginning to change. This African bloc is crucial, he argues, in shaping good global policy, especially as many nations continue to experience biodiversity degradation while still depending on natural resources for economic growth.

"African countries are very dependent on biodiversity. We need to promote that use in a way that's sustainable," he explains.

This means looking at wider economic issues.

> **What really needs to happen for global biodiversity conservation is to pull down the pressures that are driving the decline, and that's economic growth. We're living in a system where we're consuming 1.7 Earths.**
>
> –DAVID OBURA
> Chair, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

The bigger picture

At the heart of Obura's philosophy is a recognition of the diverse values that people assign to nature. Biodiversity, he emphasises, cannot be reduced to a commodity.

This broader view leads to Obura's critique of the global economic model. The big problem, as Obura sees it, is that endless economic growth is fundamentally at odds with the natural limits of the planet.

"What really needs to happen for global biodiversity conservation is to pull down the pressures that are driving the decline, and that's economic growth. We're living in a system where we're consuming 1.7 Earths," he says (citing calculations released by the Global Footprint Network in 2017, using 2013 data, which aimed to illustrate how humanity is exceeding Earth's carrying capacity).

For decades the dominant paradigm for politicians and businesses around the world has been growth at all costs. Obura argues that this focus, particularly in high-consumption economies, is pushing ecosystems to breaking point.

"You can't grow forever on a finite planet," he says.

Climate and biodiversity versus economic growth

Obura sees it as a major failing that biodiversity loss and climate change are often discussed as distinct challenges. He stresses that the two crises are inextricably linked, and is calling for a more integrated approach in forums like COP29 – the UN's upcoming climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan.

"You can't fix one without the other," he explains. "Climate change is just an expression of economic growth and overproduction. The pressures driving climate change are the same pressures driving biodiversity loss."

As chair of the IPBES, Obura is working to close the gap between these issues. Like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the IPBES is an international scientific body tasked with providing biodiversity and ecosystem services assessments for policymakers. But Obura insists that its scope is even wider than the IPCC's, because it covers the entire web of life.

The Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which emerged from the COP15 biodiversity conference in 2022, reflects this interconnectedness. The framework outlines a roadmap for halting biodiversity loss. Its headline-grabbing "30×30" target (for 30 per cent of Earth's land and ocean to be protected by 2030) has served as a rallying cry for global conservation. But for Obura, the framework's real promise lies in its broader, less-publicised goals.

"People focus on 30×30, but it's embedded in many other targets that are critical for it to succeed," he says. "It's like a 'Paris moment' for biodiversity, but what we all want to see now is investment in action and delivery."

Coral under pressure

Obura's personal expertise lies in coral reefs, one of the most diverse yet threatened ecosystems on Earth. They provide habitat for roughly a quarter of all marine species, but are facing unprecedented threats due to rising ocean temperatures.

"Coral reefs are at the forefront of ocean heatwaves that we're seeing," Obura says. "When they're stressed, they bleach, and if the heat is too much, they die."

Obura has been particularly alarmed by the severity of recent ocean heatwaves: "Since April last year, the North Atlantic has been much hotter than it ever has been before. Once the ocean warms up, that heat isn't going anywhere. It's staying there and continuing to be a threat."

The implications for coral reefs – and the billions of people who depend on marine ecosystems for food and a livelihood – are dire. For Africa, the stakes are especially high.

Despite the overwhelming odds, Obura is optimistic. He points to countries pioneering innovative solutions, like the Seychelles, which has arranged debt-for-nature swaps to finance conservation.

His optimism lies not just in policy frameworks, but in the power of nature itself: "Once you lose a species, you can't get it back. But biodiversity can regenerate if we give it a chance. It takes a long time – 10 to 15 years at least – but it is possible."

There are also actions that can yield more immediate results. "What we can turn around quickly are the drivers of decline," says Obura. "Things like industrial agriculture and bottom-trawling in the ocean: we can stop those through rapid choices and changing incentives in agricultural and fishing systems."

Green shoots of recovery

Obura describes the "green shoots" beginning to emerge across Africa: grassroots efforts to prioritise nature-based solutions, such as Project Mila's circular approach to black soldier fly larvae in Kenya; local knowledge systems that value biodiversity beyond its economic potential, exemplified by Tanji Beach's annual, six-month night-fishing ban in The Gambia; and an increasing awareness of the need to transition towards development pathways that are less harmful to ecosystems, as expressed by president William Ruto of Kenya at the inaugural Africa Climate Summit a year ago.

"What we need now is for the international system and our national systems to water those shoots and help them grow."

Using both his scientific platform and his role as IPBES chair, Obura is committed to facilitating political momentum and global cooperation to ease the biodiversity crisis. He describes a successful end to his IPBES stint as seeing the panel's findings translated into real, tangible action.

"I want to see a world where people understand the value of biodiversity, not just in abstract terms, but in their day-to-day lives," he says. "That's when we'll know we're making progress."

As the world stares down the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, Obura's message is clear: the time to act is now, and the stakes have never been higher: "We're running an experiment on the only liveable planet we have. And we may not be able to come back from it."

Using both his scientific platform and his role as IPBES chair, Obura is committed to facilitating political momentum and global cooperation to ease the biodiversity crisis. He describes a successful end to his IPBES stint as seeing the panel's findings translated into real, tangible action.

Between 2000 and 2020, the number of major floods more than doubled, from 1,389 to 3,254, while the incidence of storms grew from 1,457 to 2,034, according to a UN report. *Image: Claudio Accheri, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

WHY IS THE WEATHER BECOMING MORE EXTREME?

Climate change is making floods, heatwaves and storms more frequent and more intense; scientists warn emissions must be cut.

The worst floods in central Europe in at least two decades, a monstrous hurricane that killed more than 160 people in the US, two days of heavy rain claiming nearly 200 lives in Nepal - just some of extreme weather to hit the globe in September.

Human-induced climate change is making extreme weather events like heatwaves, floods and storms more frequent and deadly, scientists say, and this trend will continue if the world keeps burning fossil fuels.

The intense rain that caused deadly floods that killed at least 26 people in central Europe was made twice as likely and 7 per cent heavier by climate change, according to analysis by World Weather Attribution (WWA), a global team of scientists that examines the role played by climate change in extreme weather.

Scientists say halving planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 is crucial to stop temperatures rising by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit), which would unleash more extreme weather and heat. But the world is well off target and so extreme weather is expected to become more regular and intense.

There will also be an increased likelihood of two extreme events occurring at the same time, creating "unprecedented compound events", according to the sixth assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

So how exactly does climate change make the weather worse?

How does climate change affect weather events?

Even small increases of 0.5°C degrees in global warming can cause significant changes in the weather, according to the IPCC report.

Global warming happens when greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels are released into the atmosphere where they trap heat, causing the temperature of the air and seas to rise. The warmer atmosphere causes more moisture to be absorbed in the air, resulting in both warmer and drier conditions and heavier rainfall, Sonia Seneviratne, a lead author of the IPCC report, told Context.

Different weather extremes are affected in various ways.

Heatwaves

The heat trapped in the atmosphere

because of greenhouse gases is making temperatures hotter than they would have been without global warming.

Temperatures of 40°C and 50°C are already becoming more frequent across the world, with the last two summers breaking heat records and causing tens of thousands of deaths.

Precipitation

As the atmosphere warms, more water evaporates, increasing the moisture in the air and causing heavier rainfall.

For every degree of warming, extreme daily rainfall can increase by up to 7 per cent, according to the World Meteorological Organization. Unprecedented rainfall that caused at least 24 deaths in the United Arab Emirates and Oman in April was found to be up to 40 per cent more intense than if it had occurred without the current 1.2°C global warming above pre-industrial levels.

Floods

Between 2000 and 2020, the number of major floods more than doubled, from 1,389 to 3,254, while the incidence of storms grew from 1,457 to 2,034, according to a UN report.

Flooding is caused by increased rainfall from water stored in the atmosphere and rising sea levels. The latter happens when global warming melts ice and warms oceans, causing the water to expand, according to Seneviratne.

Drought

Higher temperatures draw more moisture from the land and dry out the soil. Dry soil cannot absorb rainwater, meaning that it runs off into rivers, increasing the risk of drought, and later floods.

Droughts can also increase temperatures as the air above the ground warms up more quickly, leading to more intense heat, said Seneviratne.

Wildfires

Intense heat and dry land and soil create perfect conditions for wildfires to spread.

A combination of climate change and land-use change are expected to increase the occurrence of extreme wildfires by 14 per cent by 2030 and 50 per cent by the end of the century, according to a report by the UN Environment Programme and non-profit GRID-Arendal.

The destruction of key ecosystems that help to absorb carbon, like peatland and rainforest, will make it harder to slow rising temperatures.

Cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons

Tropical cyclones, like typhoons and hurricanes, are unlikely to occur more frequently because of climate change, but the proportion of extreme ones is rising, according to the IPCC.

Large amounts of water held in the atmosphere and the energy created by the warmer temperatures in the air will make the storms more intense.

How much is extreme weather costing global economies?

Extreme weather and climate-related events caused nearly 12,000 disasters between 1970 and 2021, costing US$4.3 trillion in economic losses, according to the most recent update of The World Meteorological Organization's Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water-related hazards.

A study published by Nature found that annual gross domestic product could decrease by up to 10 per cent if the world warms by 3°C, owing to the economic losses incurred from climate-related events.

Typhoon Yagi, Asia's most powerful storm this year, caused over US$3 billion worth of damages in northern Vietnam, devastating export-oriented industrial hubs, destroying factories and facilities, flooding farmland and damaging homes. Individual households also face long-term economic losses from extreme events through rising home insurance premiums or costs associated with lost work days in order to prepare for, or clean up from, disasters.

Can we predict extreme weather?

Advances in technology, including artificial intelligence, and greater data availability have improved weather forecasts.

Heavy rainfall was predicted several days in advance of September's floods in Europe, allowing authorities to empty reservoirs, build flood defence walls and warn people of the imminent danger, according to the WWA report.

It said the death toll was lower compared to the 1997 and 2002 floods, pointing to the effectiveness of investments made in forecasting, early warning systems, and preventative actions such as evacuations.

According to the Global Commission on Adaptation, early warning systems - which give public information about extreme weather events before they hit and activate measures to keep people safe - can cut damage by 30 per cent with just 24 hours' notice.

In 2022, UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched the Early Warnings for All initiative to ensure that everyone is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate events through early warning systems by the end of 2027.

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(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/why-is-the-weather-becoming-more-extreme/)

Women paddle a boat through a flooded street in Hoi An, Vietnam. *Image: Toomas Tartes, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Unsplash.*

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION KEY TO FUTURE-PROOFING CLIMATE-STRESSED SOUTHEAST ASIA: REPORT

Southeast Asia is a particularly vulnerable region to climate threats. Digital solutions may be key to helping the region shore up resilience against economic losses and increasing climate-induced extreme weather events, writes **Rhick Lars Albay**

For Southeast Asia to withstand and overcome climate shocks, it must turn to digital solutions.

Such solutions, according to a new Google and Deloitte report published last month, will help communities prepare for impending weather-related disasters, strengthen the region against climate-induced disasters, and reduce economic losses linked to extreme weather events.

The APAC chapter of a report by the technology company and professional services firm, entitled Digital as a Key Enabler for Climate Action: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations Perspective, highlights climate change and digital progress as "interconnected" global challenges.

The report also notes that developing APAC countries with fewer resources face greater challenges in implementing adaptation projects, all while being disproportionately susceptible to climate shocks.

Nearly 13 million people in Southeast Asia were impacted by natural disasters such as floods, typhoons, extreme temperatures and wildfires in 2022 alone, with the Asian Disaster Reduction Center's latest Natural Disasters Data Book highlighting Asia Pacific as the most hazard-prone region globally. Ranking among the most climate-vulnerable regions worldwide is Southeast Asia, which faces a dual challenge: adapting to climate change largely driven by emissions from advanced economies, and rethinking development approaches that are progressively exacerbating global warming.

Similarly, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the regional arm of the United Nations for the Asia Pacific region, highlights digital transformation as pivotal in achieving both, all while future-proofing cities and economies.

"[In the long run], nations that lag in terms of digital development will also face a lack of disaster prevention and preparedness, hindering their socioeconomic development," Cristina Bernal Aparicio, co-author of UNESCAP's Digital technologies for climate change adaptation report, told Eco-Business.

"Embracing digital technologies is not merely a technological choice but a critical determinant to strengthen resilience, reduce inequalities, and advance sustainable development in the face of evolving global challenges," continued Bernal, who is also a consultant in climate change adaptation communications at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is the foundational international treaty signed in 1992 providing a framework for global action on climate change.

Weather and climate-related catastrophes are projected to shave off 11 per cent from the gross domestic product (GDP) of Southeast Asian economies by the end of the

Google's country managing director in Singapore Ben King highlights that digital solutions can provide developing cities with affordable access to emissions data and tools for sustainable urban planning. *Image: Google Singapore* century, according to a report by the Asian Development Bank, with Southeast Asian markets standing to lose at least 37 per cent of their GDP to unmitigated climate change by 2048.

In the most severe scenario, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand may lose economic output totalling more than seven times their 2019 GDP by 2050 to climate-induced shocks.

Better solutions

Investing in innovative early warning systems in the form of digital solutions is one effective way to offset economic risks and save lives. "The technology we need to address climate challenges already exists, but they need to be cascaded to less technologically mature communities to ensure an equitable future for all," highlights Ben King, Google's country managing director in Singapore.

As a large tech company, King added that the organisation recognises its responsibility in developing potential solutions to mitigate climate shocks, and in partnerships to enable such technology to scale.

Banking on the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital solutions, Google has launched several initiatives to drive climate action.

One such solution is Flood Hub, which utilises data and AI to provide real-time alerts and forecasts on flood information up to a week in advance, allowing local governments to provide critical time for evacuation and disaster preparation.

"The breakthroughs we're making in AI have enabled us to scale solutions that can help vulnerable communities in areas to tackle extreme weather events," King added.

Such solutions are proving especially helpful in Southeast Asia, with another report published by Nature noting more than a quarter of the region's population is exposed to floods. "For example, we've developed hyper-local flood forecasting models with AI to forecast where riverine floods will occur, which is currently available in flood-prone places like India, Thailand and Vietnam," said King.

"We firmly believe that the transformative power of [technology] should be harnessed for the benefit of all. By working together, with smart policies and a big-picture mindset, we can create a future that's both digital and sustainable.

–BEN KING
Country Managing Director,
Google Singapore

The company also strives to reduce emissions in cities through its solution Project Green Light, which uses AI and data from Google Maps to analyse traffic patterns and provide recommendations to city traffic engineers on adjusting traffic light timing.

Project Green Light is now used across 70 intersections in 12 cities including Manchester, Rio de Janeiro and Jakarta. Initial data from the 12 cities where the system has been deployed since 2023 indicates a potential 30 per cent reduction in vehicle stops and a 10 per cent decrease in emissions at intersections.

"By optimising not just one intersection, but coordinating across several adjacent intersections to create waves of green lights, cities can improve traffic flow and further reduce stop-and-go emissions," explained King.

Digital solutions can also provide cities – especially developing cities – with affordable access to emissions data, allowing them to measure and address their carbon emissions, King adds.

Google's Environmental Insights Explorer (EIE), for example, can estimate annual vehicle trips, be it by car, bus, bike, or distance travelled, and then multiply this data to help individuals calculate emissions.

To track building emissions, such tools can convert building carbon footprint data into energy use estimates using data on building energy performance, and then calculate those emissions using emissions factors, according to Google.

Such tools can essentially help cities establish emissions baselines, identify emissions sources, and influence climate-related regulation, noted King. "With EIE, we hope to empower policymakers and governments around the world to understand their environmental impact and develop effective climate action plans," he said.

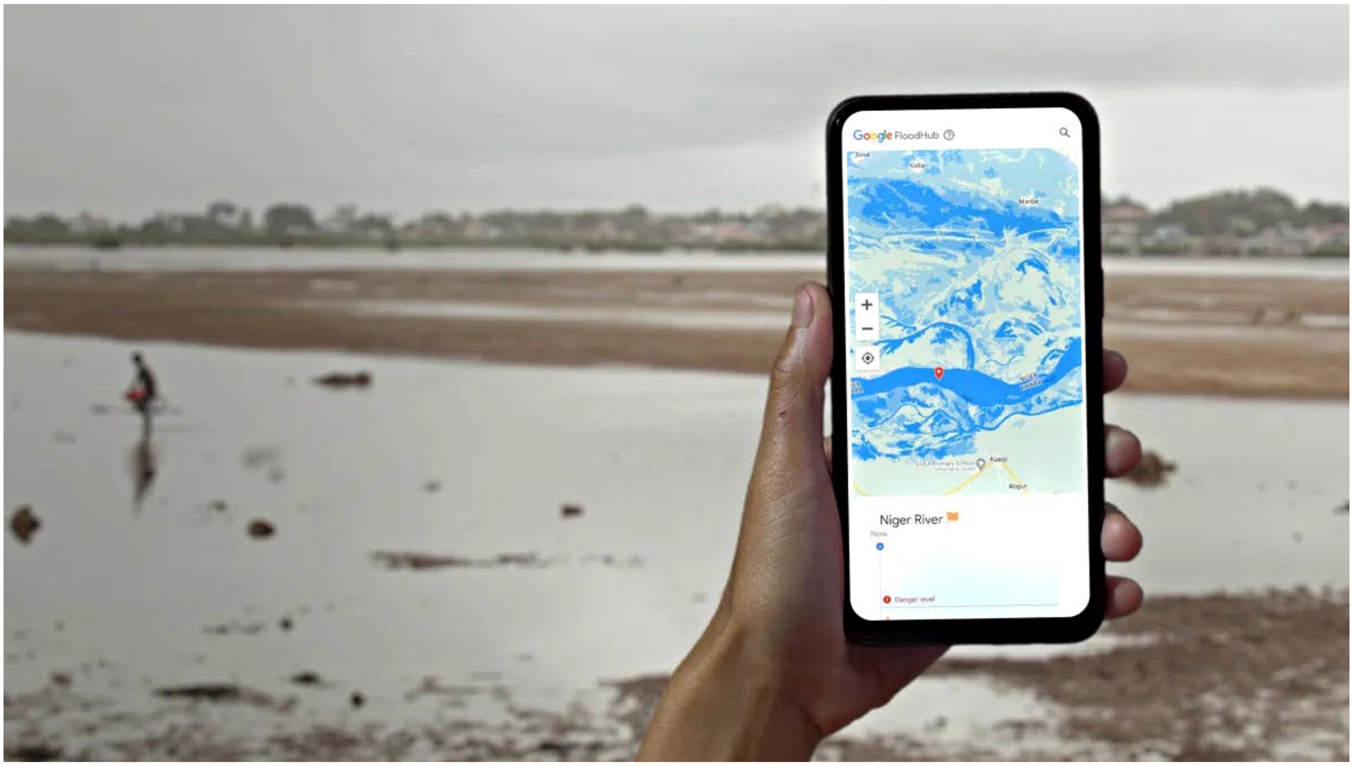
The full report, which was released on 9 September, explored how digital technologies can be leveraged to address climate challenges via three main climate action pillars: mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and foundation.

Low-carbon future

While effective, digital technologies must be scaled to bring tangible results in Southeast Asia, King noted.

"If brought to scale, digital technologies could reduce emissions by 20 per cent by 2050 in the three highest-emitting sectors: energy, materials, and mobility."

Beyond digital solutions, Bernal highlights the importance of climate-focused policies and increased



Flood Hub is part of Google's crisis response work to provide people access to trusted information and resources in critical moments. *Image: Google*

funding, which will help Southeast Asia to fund innovation, decarbonise, and shore up its resilience to climate change.

"In APAC countries, supporting digitalisation and innovation will be crucial to effective climate action and adaptation," she said. "The development policies that mainstream both climate adaptation and the use of digital technologies not only strengthen governments' commitment to adapting to climate change but also ensures that these projects are prioritised to receive funding and human capital for successful implementation."

Data, however, suggests that much more expertise is needed for further developments.

For example, Singapore needs a 55 per cent boost in its digital workforce by 2025, while Indonesia requires an additional 600,000 digital talents yearly up to 2030.

To maximise the impact of digital transformation on Southeast Asia's climate resilience, areas such as digital skills, talent, and maturity must be improved upon alongside strategic digital measures in climate monitoring, infrastructure, and innovation, highlights the APAC chapter of the report by Google and Deloitte.

In this report, Google also presents its Digital Sprinters Framework as a structured blueprint for emerging countries to accelerate their digital transformation.

To maximise the impact of digital transformation on Southeast Asia's climate resilience, areas such as digital skills, talent, and maturity must be improved upon alongside strategic digital measures in climate monitoring, infrastructure, and innovation

The shift will entail investment by governments and the private sector in the four primary categories of infrastructure, people, technological innovation, and public policies. Each category addresses specific aspects of policy that can facilitate sustainable and inclusive economic growth while harnessing the power of digital transformation.

"We firmly believe that the transformative power of [technology] should be harnessed for the benefit of all and recognise that unlocking the true potential of this technology lies in ensuring its equitable and widespread accessibility," King concluded. "By working together, with smart policies and a big-picture mindset, we can create a future that's both digital and sustainable."

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/digital-transformation-key-to-future-proofing-climate-stressed-southeast-asia-report/)

Indonesia, Canada, Russia and the US would each have to designate over 15,000 protected areas to hit 30 per cent, the report states. China would need nearly 6,000 additional protected areas. *Image: USFWS - Pacific Region, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

STUTTERING PROGRESS ON 30×30 OCEAN PROTECTION

Only 8 per cent of the ocean is protected and a global pledge to safeguard 30 per cent by 2030 faces huge challenges, writes **Daniel Cressey**, Dialogue Earth

Progress towards an international target to protect nearly a third of the ocean by 2030 is faltering: much of the protection enacted so far is largely ineffective, and thousands more protected areas are needed.

These warnings have been issued by leading marine experts as national negotiators meet in Cali, Colombia, for the 2024 UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16). At COP15 in 2022, countries signed up to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which includes the so-called “30×30” goal. Its aim is to protect at least 30 per cent of Earth’s lands and oceans by 2030. But a global assessment of progress, commissioned by the Bloomberg Ocean Fund and published last week, suggests the ocean target remains a long way off.

“Marine protected areas” (MPAs), and what are known in conservation circles as “other effective area-based conservation measures”, cover just 8.3 per cent of the ocean, the report states. Even worse, the total area where such measures are actually being implemented to deliver high or full protection is thought to amount to only 2.8 per cent.

More MPAs are being created all the time. Just this month, Australia's environment minister, Tanya Plibersek, proudly announced that the country "protects more ocean than any other country on Earth". Plibersek was remarking upon the incorporation of 310,000 square kilometres of waters around the Heard and McDonald Islands into an existing marine park in the Southern Ocean. And last week, the Azores' government approved protections for an area of nearly the same size in the North Atlantic.

"There have been more and more MPAs created ... but it's not enough," says Monica Medina, a former US Assistant Secretary of State who now works on ocean issues at Conservation International.

Based on the current rate of growth, the global assessment team estimate that only 9.7 per cent of the ocean will be protected by 2030.

Another report released this month suggests that protecting 30 per cent of the ocean will require an additional 300 large and 190,000 small MPAs in waters under government control. This does not include the high seas, a vast area that lies outside national jurisdiction.

"The results are alarming. But this is not an insurmountable challenge," says the report's author, Kristin Rechberger. She is the CEO of Dynamic Planet, a Washington DC-based company that works on environmental finance.

Indonesia, Canada, Russia and the US would each have to designate over 15,000 protected areas to hit 30 per cent, the report states. China would need nearly 6,000 additional protected areas.

This assumes each country would protect 30 per cent of its own waters, something the target itself does not specify. In fact, earlier this year, one team of researchers suggested in the journal Science that countries should be allowed to trade their ocean conservation obligations.

Adding to the problem is the fact that many of the roughly 13,000 MPAs currently in existence have been found to be poorly managed "paper parks", with little enforcement. Some allow activities such as bottom trawling, which can cause huge damage to the environment.

Rechberger's team also looked at this problem, analysing how many more MPAs were needed while excluding those that already exist but are incompatible with conservation.

The team found another 70 large and 24,000 small protected areas would be required, in addition to their previous calculation. And, if this analysis was based only on highly and fully protected areas, the total number of large and small MPAs still needed to hit 30×30 rises to 422 and 334,000 respectively.

Paper parks

Rechberger's work builds on a study released earlier this year, which looked at the 100 largest MPAs in the world. These cover 7.3 per cent of the ocean and account for nearly 90 per cent of the area of all MPAs globally.

Beth Pike, the report's lead author and director of a marine protection database (Marine Protection Atlas), found that in a quarter of the area covered, protections had not actually been implemented. A third of the area was deemed "incompatible with the conservation of nature", due to the supposed protections allowing for activities such as mining or industrial fishing.

"Things that are fully, highly protected and implemented or actively managed is really the gold standard for what it going to give us the most return on investment," says Pike, who also contributed to the 30×30 progress report.

The conference runway

Many conservation experts are hoping the COP16 meeting in Cali ends with major government commitments to create more and better protections for the ocean. Other meetings are also on their agenda.

This week in Samoa, 56 Commonwealth countries' heads of government are expected to agree a declaration on the importance of ocean protection.

Also overlapping the Cali meeting is the latest gathering of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) in Hobart, Australia. There, nations involved in the Antarctic are discussing long-mooted and long-deadlocked plans to expand marine protection in the Southern Ocean.

But, arguably, the key areas for the 30×30 goal are outside of national jurisdiction, on the high seas. These areas make up two-thirds of the ocean but just 1.4 per cent of them are currently protected, under agreements such as the convention governing the Antarctic.

In 2023, a deal was struck for an international treaty that would make it easier to create protected areas on the high seas. The treaty requires ratification by 60 countries before it comes into force. To date, only 13 nations have done so.

So, while the 30×30 goal may be simple to explain, achieving it looks anything but.

What's more, Pike points out that there are 23 targets in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. These include halting extinctions, ensuring sustainable harvesting of wild species, reducing pollution and minimising the impact of climate change on biodiversity.

"There are 22 other targets in regards to the sustainable use of those oceans, without which the 30 per cent could never succeed, even if we got to it," she says.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/stuttering-progress-on-3030-ocean-protection/)

RAPID URBANISATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE KEY DRIVERS OF DRAMATIC FLOOD IMPACTS IN NEPAL

From 26-28 September 2024, extremely heavy rainfall hit Nepal, especially the capital Kathmandu and nearby regions, causing devastating flash floods, landslides and riverine flooding from the Bagmati, Sapakoshi, Narayani, Sardu, Rew, and Nakkhu rivers and their tributaries. In total, 244 people were killed.

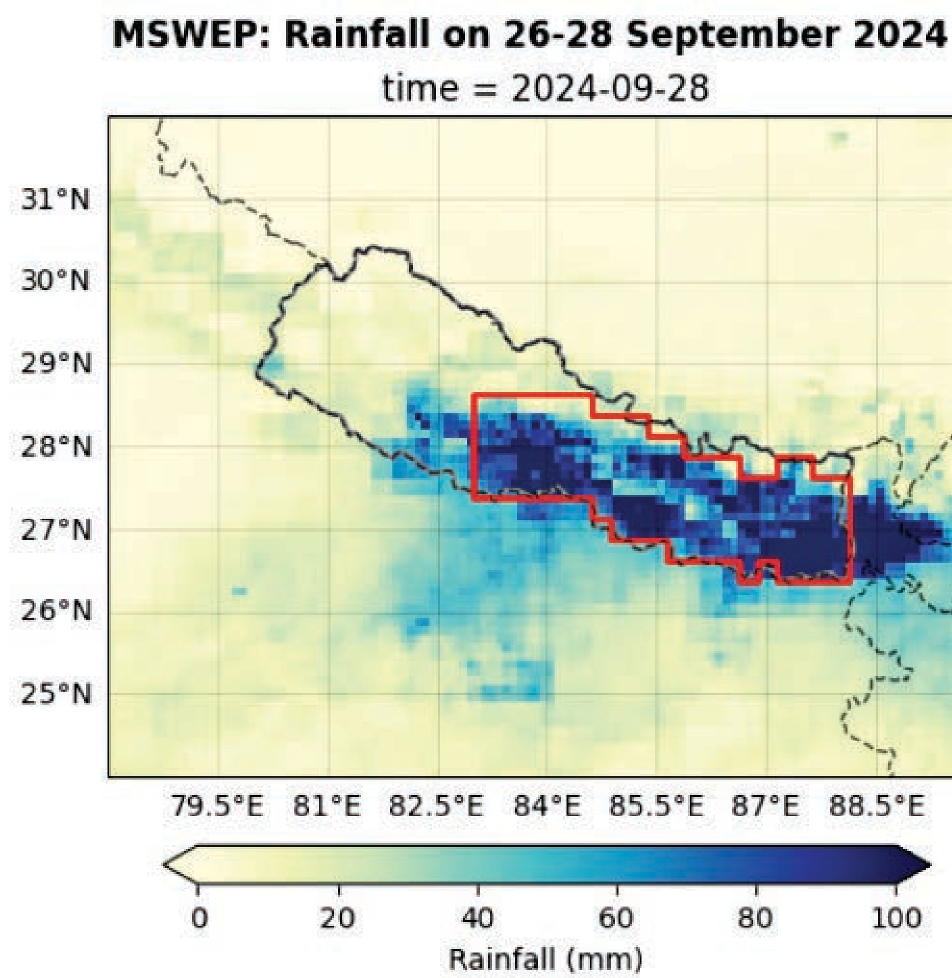
The disaster has severely disrupted transportation, damaging 19 major roads. Landslides blocked all highways out of Kathmandu, with only the Prithvi Highway partially reopened. Roads across central and southern Nepal, including vital routes like the BP Highway, Mid-Hill Highway and Araniko Highway, remain partially blocked.

Researchers from Nepal, India, Sweden, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom collaborated to assess to what extent human-induced climate change altered the likelihood and intensity of extreme rainfall that led to devastating landslides and floods.

To analyse the event, we focus on the most affected region in Nepal, including the provinces Gandaki, Bagmati, Madhesh and Koshi. The rain fell at the end of the monsoon season, when soils are generally saturated, meaning that the three days of very heavy rainfall were the main cause of the impacts. We thus use the maximum of the annual 3-day rainfall as the temporal event definition. Fig. 1 shows the accumulated 3-day rainfall over Nepal with the study region outlined in red.

Main findings

- The Metropolitan areas of Kathmandu and Lalitpur are highly exposed to flooding due to their geographic location along a valley with few natural drainage points. Rapid urbanisation (386% increase in built up areas between 1990-2020) and deforestation (28% reduction in forest cover from 1989-2019) in the Kathmandu Valley has disrupted natural water processes, increasing surface runoff and overwhelming drainage systems, while building on flood plains and near rivers has increased the exposure of people and assets to floods.
- Nepal has seen many heavy rainfall events followed by severe flooding in the past. Analysing different observation-based datasets, the relative magnitude of the observed event compared to previous years varies between datasets, making it difficult to estimate how rare the event is in today's climate. According to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM), Government of Nepal, the rainfall recorded in several stations during the event was the highest in 54 years of measurements (DHM, 08 October 2024); therefore we use a rounded estimate of 1-in-50 years to define the event for the rest of the analysis.
- To assess if human-induced climate change influenced the heavy rainfall, we first determine if there is a trend in the observations. Our best estimate is that heavy 3-day rainfall events have become about 18% more intense and just over twice more likely, but there are substantial differences between the datasets, which limit our confidence in the accuracy of these figures. The trends are stronger in the satellite era, from 1980 onwards.
- To quantify the role of human-induced climate change we analyse climate models with high resolution that are in principle able to simulate the influence of the mountains on rainfall in the study region. Overall, the available climate models indicate a 10% increase in intensity compared to a 1.3C cooler climate, and an increase in likelihood of about 70%. Under a future warming scenario where the global temperature is 2°C higher than pre-industrial levels, climate models predict even heavier 3-day rainfall events, with a further expected increase of about 3% in rainfall intensity. As only the subset of models showing the smallest change in rainfall with



global warming have future simulations available, this is a conservative estimate.

- Given the small mountainous region with complex rainfall-climate dynamics, there is a high level of uncertainty in the results. However, the increase in heavy 3-day rainfall events is in line with a large and growing body of scientific evidence on large-scale extreme rainfall in a warming world, including in Nepal, and the physical understanding that a warmer atmosphere can hold more moisture, leading to heavier downpours.
- The floods were well forecasted by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM), but warning messages did not focus on the impacts to the Kathmandu Valley specifically, and it's unclear to what extent the warnings led to early action. The Kathmandu Valley is also not the focus of flood risk management efforts in Nepal, as other regions (notably Terai) generally have been classified as high risk and have historically seen highly impactful floods. This presents an opportunity to further scale anticipatory action systems that have been shown to be cost effective in other parts of Nepal to cover highly exposed urban centres like the Kathmandu Valley.
- The 2015 Gorhka earthquake destabilised hillsides and weakened drainage infrastructure, while the COVID-19 pandemic affected the incomes of low and middle class individuals representing long-term compounding factors that increased vulnerability to floods and landslides. Deforestation and rapid urbanisation expansion, especially into river floodplains, increased the number of people in the path of the flood waters. Comprehensive spatial planning, combined with disaster risk reduction and adaptation, effective policy enforcement, and increased public awareness, are crucial to mitigate flood risks across central and eastern Nepal, including the Kathmandu Valley.

Experts are worried that Southeast Asia has fallen behind in recycling at a time when governments in the region are pushing to replace more gas-guzzlers with electric vehicles. *Image: ILO Asia-Pacific, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

SOUTHEAST ASIA RECYCLING PLAYS CATCH UP AHEAD OF BATTERY BOOM

Industry and activists say governments must invest in battery recycling infrastructure before surge in electric vehicles.

When Jayden Goh started his battery recycling company in 2019, he was betting that rapid electrification of everything from cars to energy storage would make salvaging critical minerals from spent cells a pressing demand in Southeast Asia. Five years later, the Malaysian entrepreneur's EcoNiLi has expanded from its original small facility in West Java to operate four factories in three countries with annual capacity to recycle 86,000 tonnes of lithium-ion batteries, which are used by electric vehicles.

Electrification has been championed as central in the transition away from fossil fuels, which account for over 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

The batteries required for cars and other devices powered by electricity include rare minerals, like lithium, nickel and cobalt. Demand for these metals may quadruple by 2040, according to the International Energy Agency.

But extracting finite minerals from the Earth comes at a cost, including environmental pollution and labour abuses, according to rights groups and environmental activists. And once they have reached the end of their lifespan, discarded batteries and their toxic chemicals pose further dangers to the environment and human health.

"Governments should enact policies that promote mandated minimum levels of recycled content in EV batteries to decrease the demand for virgin transition minerals," said Krista Shennum, a researcher with the nongovernmental organisation Climate Rights International.

Southeast Asia lags

China, home to the world's biggest EV market, and the European Union already require the reuse of some battery components.

Experts are worried that Southeast Asia has fallen behind in recycling at a time when governments in the region are pushing to replace more gas-guzzlers with electric vehicles. For example, Indonesia wants to see 13 million motorcycles and 2 million four-wheeled EVs on the road by 2030, compared with fewer than 100,000 today.

The switch to electric vehicles could inundate Southeast Asia with 2,166 gigawatts per hour worth of used batteries by 2040 – enough to supply more than 1 million households with electricity for a year, according to a report by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia.

End-of-life batteries are categorised as electronic waste, or e-waste, that is often hazardous, and less than a quarter of the 62 million tonnes of e-waste produced globally in 2022 was recycled.

In parts of Southeast Asia, e-waste recycling rates are even less. Singapore produces an estimated 60,000 tonnes of e-waste per year, but only 6 per cent is recycled, according to Amy Khor, senior minister for sustainability and the environment.

The city-state now has three recycling facilities capable of handling 11,000 tonnes of e-waste per year.

"The recycling of batteries supports Singapore's goals to build a circular economy and to reduce the amount of waste sent to our only landfill, Semakau Landfill," Khor said at the opening of a battery recycling plant last year.

In Indonesia, 2 million tonnes of e-waste were produced in 2021, and only about 17 per cent was recycled, according to official data.

The government in 2021 created the Indonesia Battery Corporation to produce and recycle batteries and this year issued new rules stipulating the reduction and management of e-waste. However, it remains unclear how more dead batteries will be collected.

"So far we lack the infrastructure, including collection points, transportation methods and treatment facilities, to handle e-waste and batteries," said Abdul Ghofar, pollution and urban justice campaign manager at the Indonesian Forum for Living Environment, or WALHI, an NGO.

"This fact shows that e-waste is not being prioritised by the government," he said.

Context did not receive a response to requests for comment from the Indonesian environment ministry.

Top nickel producer

Even as it takes steps to recycle more batteries, Indonesia, the world's top producer of nickel, has ramped up production of the precious metal to about 2 million tonnes, or 55 per cent of the world's supply, last year.

Activists estimate nickel mining has caused the loss of between 187,000 to 378,000 acres of forest in Indonesia in the last two decades.

And nickel refineries are largely powered by greenhouse gas-emitting coal-fired electricity plants.

Extraction and processing nickel ore "have brought considerable impacts on the environment and livelihoods of local communities," said Julfikar Sangaji, an activist with the NGO Forum Studi Halmahera. "Forest, plantations and coastal areas were destroyed due to mining activities."

Some experts warn that recycling batteries is not a cure-all and can create a new set of environmental and health risks.

"Currently, the recycling process itself consumes a significant amount of energy and chemicals," Erik Prasetyo, a researcher at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, told Context. Still, the global battery-recycling business is set to boost capacity fivefold by 2030, of which 70 per cent is planned in China, the world's leading manufacturer of lithium-ion batteries.

Already, a majority of the batteries that are available for recycling are recycled globally, research by the Circular Energy Storage Research and Consulting showed.

In Southeast Asia, a major challenge has been sourcing and collecting spent batteries in places like Indonesia that ban imports, said EcoNiLi's Goh.

"We also need the government to promote and to better educate the public [about] the importance of battery recycling ... so when EV comes in full swing, we can be ready," Goh said.

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Government of Meghalaya signs Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve health, nutrition and agriculture outcomes

The Government of Meghalaya and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) made a major stride in the area of health, nutrition and agriculture when they entered into an MoU to work together towards improving population health outcomes of the state, particularly related to maternal and newborn health, family planning, nursing education and agriculture and livestock development. Meghalaya is only the third state in India in area of both health and agriculture, after Uttar Pradesh & Bihar, with whom the Gates Foundation is establishing a partnership.

The MoU was signed in the presence of the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad K Sangma and Minister of Health & Family Welfare and Agriculture, Dr. M Ampareen Lyngdoh, M. Hari Menon, Director of the India Country Office at the Gates Foundation, and Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary, Health & Family Welfare Department on behalf of the state signed the MoU. Other members present during the signing were

Commissioner & Secretary, Planning & Investment, Promotion & Sustainable Development, Government of Meghalaya, Dr. Vijay Kumar D.; Commissioner & Secretary, Department of Health & Family Welfare, Dr. Joram Beda; Secretary of Health and Family Welfare & Mission Director of NHM, Government of Meghalaya,. Ramkumar S; Director of Health for the India Country Office at the Gates Foundation Dr. Rajani Ved, as well as other senior officials from the Meghalaya Government and BMGF.

The MoU signed today called for the realization of efficient and effective healthcare solutions in Meghalaya, and the parties also pledged to undertake numerous activities in the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially the health-related goal for the year 2030. The MoU will last for four years where both stakeholders shall facilitate successful delivery of the set objectives in the paper with efficiency checkups, monitoring, and evaluation.

Through the MoU, BMGF will provide both financial and technical support to improve outcomes in twelve key areas: comprehensive primary healthcare, family planning, maternal health and anaemia, neonatal health, immunisation, childhood wasting and nutrition, nursing education, supply chain management, digital health, results-based financing and performance management in healthcare, competency mapping and development for government functionaries, and agriculture and livestock development.

Speaking at the signing event, Sangma emphasized the importance of this collaboration and said, “We are happy and excited about the partnership that we are going to have with Gates Foundation. We need to have the right-minded people with the right desire, goal, and mindset to sit together and try to resolve the problems, the institutional setups, and the plans that we have. We are looking at expertise in terms of knowledge. To conclude, for us what matters is how to make life better for our citizens.” He also stressed on improving the socio-economic conditions of mothers and the female population at large. “We have started to make plans based on the real problems, the institutional systems and what we have to do to address the problems. We will go the extra mile to make sure that we achieve the goals that we want. It will not be easy, but it is a continuous process,” he said.

Lyngdoh added, “We are very happy that you are already in the field for so long, so you are familiar what our gaps are, you are familiar with what we need to get done. I would like to see this community participation. I hope that we will be able to evolve a module which would likely be suitable for replication across the board in North-eastern states and other areas. I am looking forward to the MoU signing.”

The collaboration between the Government of Meghalaya and the Gates Foundation is based on three strategically oriented goals for

changing the current state of health care. First, it seeks to lower maternal, neonatal and child mortality through increasing access to family planning, managing anaemia and developing emergency transport to reduce death rates. Second, the partnership aims to promote health and nutrition services provided by government and non-government organizations with special reference to gender. Finally, the partnership will build the capacity of local institutions by ensuring that they are involved in policy formulation, research and breakthroughs in healthcare to support sustainable change.

M. Hari Menon, Director – India Country Office & South & Southeast Asia Director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation stated, "Our partnership with the Government of Meghalaya underscores our commitment to ensuring equitable access to essential health and nutrition services. We look forward to partnering with the Government to strengthen the health system, foster innovation, and enhance institutional capacity to help achieve long-term, sustainable health outcomes for the people of Meghalaya."

Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary & Development Commissioner, Government of Meghalaya commented, "It is a significant step in our endeavour towards reaching people of Meghalaya for quality health and nutrition care through this partnership with the Gates Foundation. Altogether, our mission is to develop a health system that can be safe for future generations."

The partnership will also focus on several key program areas, such as the creation of IT solutions for primary healthcare as well as improving family planning by increasing the number of contraceptive methods and availability. It will also involve enhanced maternal and neonatal health with reference to anaemia and other essential infrastructure joined to hidden childhood wasting and anaemia through supplementary feeding and immunization. Also, nursing education shall be augmented by a redesigned curriculum that is globally competent and improved supply chain management to increase drug and diagnostics availability. Moreover, adopted digital health will improve research-based decision-making capabilities with the use of performance-based financing. There will also be cooperation in areas of agriculture and livestock development emphasizing building value chains and supporting small farmers in the state of Meghalaya.

The Meghalaya State Health Society will be responsible for the coordination of the activities funded by the Gates Foundation and monitoring the progress and planning on sustainability. The Gates Foundation will invest financial as well as technical resources, attracting national and international technical support for the state's health agenda.