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[World Environment Day 2023: Need to think beyond carbon footprint, to plastic and water footprint](#)
— [Nandini Piramal](#)

India's progress as a thriving economy prompted the Prime Minister's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. This vision emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts and responsible use of resources to deal with climate impact. If left unaddressed, climate change could lead to significant GDP loss and increased poverty rates in India. Niti Aayog's 8th Governing Council meeting highlighted the urgency to prioritise climate change mitigation and adaptation to build a resilient economy, converging the long-term development plans of states and union territories.

Climate change strategies need to think beyond carbon footprints. Reducing plastic and water footprint alongside carbon footprint is the need of the hour. While the government is working on structural solutions, individual contributions to sustainability can no longer be ignored. India's Mission LiFE focuses on water and energy conservation as well as reducing plastic use. Aligning with the global 'Beat Plastic Pollution' campaign for World Environment Day, it is time to reflect on India's efforts to ensure a better tomorrow for her citizens.

NO MORE SNOOZING THE ALARMS OF CLIMATE

Climate change is real; that it is human activity induced is now well established. By focusing on human activities, absolute disasters can still be averted. India is relying on a multilateralist framework following the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) proposed by United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Converged efforts involving decarbonisation, renewable energy deployment, reduction of water and plastic footprints, and disaster risk reduction hold great promise.

India figures amongst the top 10 most climate-vulnerable countries. While images of extreme weather are top of mind, timely efforts to improve adaptive capacities, especially of underserved and vulnerable communities can save lives. The time to act is now but it requires a comprehensive approach for us to claim a rightful place among growing and developed nations

BUILDING AN INFRASTRUCTURE TO TRANSITION FROM IMMEDIATE FIX TO SUSTAINABILITY

India is positioned to play a lead role in International Solar Alliance for building a sustainable solar infrastructure, meeting the need for decarbonising. Similar levels of attention are required to reduce water footprint—promoting conservation, efficiency in agricultural use of water, and reuse of grey water. Reducing plastic footprint requires plastic waste management through the strategic collection, sorting, and processing of plastic.

Sustainability initiatives cannot be left to schemes and programs alone but need to tap into the potential of youth and women. Employing an ecosystem approach that leverages Digitization, Decentralization, Inclusion, and Leadership can pave the way for sustainability.

DIGITISATION CAN NUDGE BEHAVIORS AND SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

The use of technology can inspire behaviour change and aid the adoption of environmentally friendly practices that are affordable and accessible. Optimising, targeting, tracking and monitoring can help industry and supply chains become more energy and resource-efficient. Government initiatives, like mobile application Meri LiFE, offer easy and quick ways to track activities that serve communities, enhancing their adaptive capacity and climate resilience. India's booming startup ecosystem is also pivoting towards the adoption of green tech for a sustainable infrastructure that promotes environment-friendly practices. Thus, combining technology with behavioral insights can nudge us towards sustainability.

DECENTRALISATION TO INCORPORATE CLIMATE AS A GLOCAL ISSUE

The manifestation of climate change is local, hence the calls for hyperlocal solutions. Empowering leaders at district and block level, especially Sarpanches through training and tools will push them to make conscious choices to reduce energy, water, and plastic footprints. However, this calls for empowering them such that they are able to weigh the choices they make to prioritise and address the consequences of climate change.

LEADERSHIP CAN FUEL OWNERSHIP AND ENABLE BETTER DECISION MAKING

With Digitization, Decentralization and Inclusion there will be a readiness for action. For multiple government schemes and departments to come together, State, district and block level employees need training on technical issues. But real change will be triggered when they undertake a personal transformation journey where they see climate change with a sense of urgency and know how to contribute, fueled by optimism that each one can make a difference regardless of position, department, geography or domain.

CONVERGENCE FACILITATES CLIMATE GOALS THROUGH INCLUSION

Environment conservation is inextricably linked to development. Setting priorities and pursuing action plans alone will not do. To promote sustainability, it is crucial to tap community groups such as rural women, tribal people or differently-abled people, bring in their perspectives, and co-create solutions

Myriad schemes are already in action but only with coordinated action can these be optimised and facilitate a shift towards sustainability. Schemes like Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Catch the Rain campaign, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employee Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Atal Bhujal Yojana, More Crop Per Drop, grey water components of Swachchh Bharat Mission, Year of Millets all optimise for water, but they need to work together. Convergence is the key here; so if a village has water supply infrastructure, it also

practices efficient water use in agriculture, grey-water reuse and keeps plastic from choking drains and ponds.

Engaging and empowering youth and women will bring fresh perspectives and innovations and build a climate-resilient ecosystem. By making conscious choices about energy, water, plastic and waste they can create a secure, vikasi and sustainable reality for all.