

# Environment Mainstreaming in Indian CSOs



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SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

## ***Environment Mainstreaming in Indian CSOs***

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# FOREWORD

The air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we consume, all lead to none but one benefactor- our environment. In the fast pacing 21st century life, individual lives are running on the values of self-interest and exploitation for economic and financial indulgence; often overlooking the environment we so often exploit. Yet, with the change in Earth's environment, the world is undergoing a climate crisis resulting from human activities. With greenhouse emissions seeping into the atmosphere, heat waves and their later effects are causing devastating harm all over the globe. This erratic climate change poses hindrances to not only human life but also the health of their economic and social well-being. Considering the interconnectedness of our ecosystem and the intangible bond we share with it, the choices we make today determine how our future generations will live.

Recognizing this rapid need for action, it is imperative for Civil Society Organizations to initiate the issue of environment into the mainstream discourse. Since the overarching goal of CSOs is to work towards the betterment of their target groups, this paper acts as an informational research work which educates and encourages civil society organizations to mainstream the environment so as to help them assess their constraints better and create adaptable solutions that will further aid in social transformation and development. To aid the organization towards mainstreaming the environment, this paper contains a set of recommendations which can be adapted and adopted according to an organization's circumstances.

VANI as a voice of the Civil sector brings convergence on common sectoral issues such as that of the environment and promotes mainstreaming the environment into an organization's focus. After realising the kind of disastrous effects the environmental crisis has on the target communities which CSOs work with, VANI recognized the urgency to act on critical issues of sustainable climate change and environment protection. Ultimately, our individual efforts all combine to create a collaborative effort that will not only lead to a sustainable future for our future generations but also towards a healthier and safer world for everyone. Taking collective action and addressing this issue at the institutional level is now not merely a matter of choice but a prerequisite for our survival on Earth.

I would like to acknowledge and extend my gratitude to IM Swedish Development Partner for sponsoring this project and Ms Samiksha Gosain, Communications Intern, for drafting and editing this document.

**Harsh Jaitli**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

# CHAPTER 1

## What is Environmental Mainstreaming

During early September of 2022, Western part of United States of America experienced a scorching heatwave that set all time high record temperatures. It fuelled wildfires which could only be quenched by an eastern Pacific tropical storm. Not only did 61 million people<sup>1</sup> face active extreme heat advisories, but also adverse health effects of heat were contributed towards by the excessive increase in temperatures which reached triple digits (Fahrenheit). Brian Kahn, an atmospheric scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said "If you look at the sheer magnitude of all-time high temperatures that were set—in any month, in any year—this heatwave is definitely unique". Building on the same thesis post studying the Southern California Heatwaves in detail, climate scientist Glynn Hulley stated that the 2022 heat wave ranked as one of the worst heatwaves the US has seen in the past four decades. Correspondingly, in the United Kingdom more than half of the weather stations recorded their hottest day ever in 2022 during the July heatwave. As the recorded high temperatures soared in summers, during the five heat periods between June and August 2022 there were 3271 excess deaths<sup>2</sup> (which are 6.2% above the five-year average of the total deaths in England and Wales). According to the Met Office Weather Forecast for the UK, temperatures passed 104 Fahrenheit for the first time, which they attributed is virtually impossible without human-induced climate change. Making the summer of 2022 the continent's hottest on record, the heatwaves coupled with the long running drought to not only damage the functioning of UK but also other countries like Portugal and France wherein thousands of people were forced to evacuate their homes.

Not just heatwaves, floods also caused heavy devastation this year. In the case of Pakistan, torrential monsoon rains triggered the most severe flooding in Pakistan's recent history. According to the officials at United Nations, it could take six months for floodwaters to recede in the hardest hit areas. The impact of the flood was felt in all four of the country's provinces and approximately 15% of its population. According to Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, "Pakistan has never seen a starker and more devastating example of the impact of global warming ..." and he claimed that Pakistan's actions did not contribute to this adversity. The aftermath of the flood and excessive rain not only damaged livelihoods and resulted in the loss of innocent lives but also damaged Mohenjo-daro, a UNESCO world Heritage Site.

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1 Information available at <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/150318/a-long-lasting-western-heatwave>

2 Information available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-63171417>

With the unprecedented pace at which climate adversities are affecting countries all over the world, every year we reach a new record high influenced by human-induced climate change. It makes one wonder where our selfish and ignorant pursuits are leading mankind. Mother nature gives back to us abundantly, and we can pass on the gift of a healthy future to our future generations by taking things in our hands at present and working proactively to take care of Earth. If we do not take responsibility for the 'now', our future generations are bound to face the wrath of climate adversities.

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"We, the present generation, have the responsibility to act as a trustee of the rich natural wealth of future generations. The issue is not merely about climate change; it is about climate justice."

**Shri Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister of India<sup>3</sup>

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Envisioned by Hon'ble Prime Minister to be a 5 trillion-dollar economy and a global powerhouse by 2024-25, India was ranked the last (180<sup>th</sup>) in the 2022 Environmental Performance Index<sup>4</sup> (EPI) with an overall score of 18.90. Developed in 2022 by World Economic Forum, Yale Centre for Environmental law and policy and Columbia University, the index is a measure of environmental sustainability. In accordance with United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Agenda 2030, the EPI index measures and ranks the state of sustainability in various countries. The EPI uses 40 performance indicators across 11 issue categories to carefully rank 180 countries on the health of their environment, climate change and ecosystem vitality so as to present how close the countries are to the promised environmental policy targets. Not only does it function as a performance card, but it also provides guidance for the countries to perform better towards a sustainable future. A country's position in the index indicates how effectively they are tackling the environmental challenges they face, for example in the 2022 Index<sup>5</sup> Denmark ranks number one with a score of 77.90 due to its strong results and efforts towards protecting public health, preserving natural resources and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, countries like India and Myanmar, which are placed at the bottom two positions, show how they lack in tackling a spectrum of sustainability requirements. Unlike countries like Nepal which face border challenges and civil unrest, and can effectively blame their low scores on weak governance, India's score of 18.9 reveals its lack of better assessment and policy planning. The EPI rank of India highlights its visible theory practice gap when it comes to answering environmental concerns; what it promises on the global and diplomatic front, it fails to deliver because of its lack of effective assessment of problems and therefore poor and inadequate solutions. This disparity sheds light on the precarious state of the environment under the backdrop of climate emergency in a third-world country striving to be the economically strongest.

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Frequency and intensity of extreme climate events in India have increased by almost 200 percent since 2005.

**Council on Energy, Environment and Water Report 2021<sup>6</sup>**

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3 An excerpt from PM's speech at Samvad, Global Hindu Buddhist Initiative (3<sup>rd</sup> September 2015). Available at <https://youtu.be/LwzoTIAj4PM>

4 Wolf, M. J., Emerson, J. W., Esty, D. C., de Sherbinin, A., Wendling, Z. A., *et al.* (2022). *2022 Environmental Performance Index*. New Haven, CT: Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy. [epi.yale.edu](https://epi.yale.edu)

5 UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world : the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html> ]

6 Mohanty, Abinash, and Shreya Wadhawan. 2021. Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability – A District Level Assessment. New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

There is no escaping the fact that people make the country what it is and therefore must not be overlooked. Among the 1.39 billion people living in India (the second most populous country in the world for the year 2021), more than 800 million are considered poor. Plagued with poverty and Covid 19 pandemic, questions arise on the state of living of those who reside in the recesses of this system. Who helps those who are trampled not only by poverty and inequality but also by the burdening weight of environmental hazards? On top of all that, the evil of the pandemic still haunts households that have lost not only their loved ones but also their means to survival, basic healthcare and right to decent living. While poverty continued to deepen its roots in the country, post the pandemic around 150-199 additional million people were estimated to become poor. The pandemic brought out two sides of the environment (both physical and social environment), one that blesses an individual with fresh air and clear skies and the other which leaves an individual stranded and unable to afford and access basic necessities like healthcare, education and security.

Situations like these emphasize the government's and other organizations' failure to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment. This causes an impediment which leads to devastating results. The environment in this sense comprises the natural environment (air, land, soil, water), the resources it supports (flora, fauna and minerals) and the associated cultures and traditions. For their survival and growth, the poor are heavily dependent on the natural resources available in their vicinity. Climate change impacts these resources adversely, thereby threatening their survival. The underprivileged are more prone to face the wrath of environmental hazards that threaten their livelihoods and development which ultimately pushes them further into the pit of poverty. For example, on October 12, 2014, Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh witnessed the worst cyclonic storm in modern history called the *Hudhud*. The devastation caused by the cyclone was unparalleled, it caused 61 deaths and estimated damage of Rs.219 billion. Not only that, local authorities estimated that up to 70% of the trees were uprooted, there was extensive damage to kutcha houses, transportation systems were disrupted and communication services were considerably damaged. The aftermath of the hazard showed a rise in basic commodity prices making them inaccessible to the poor and the damage caused to crops impacted not only the supply of produce but also the availability of daily wage workers. Due to 80% of shelters in north Andhra Pradesh being concrete, the heavy impact of the cyclone was faced by those living in vulnerable, low-lying areas; struck by the unprecedented cyclone, the underprivileged groups lost household assets (a household asset is anything you own which is of monetary value, for example, your home, car, bank account, cash, jewellery etc) and experienced reduced livelihood opportunities. In such a situation, not only a strong government response is required but also determined local response mechanisms are needed for the recovery and rehabilitation of the downtrodden.

Considering Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) work for the betterment of the underprivileged section of society, it is crucial for them to recognize this interconnectedness and consider it as a factor while formulating policies, programmes and initiatives. In order to tackle this problem through an environmental lens, mainstreaming environment is the need of the hour. *Environment mainstreaming*<sup>7</sup> is "the informed inclusion of relevant environmental concerns into the decisions of institutions



*that drive national, local and sectoral development policy, rules, plans, investment and action".* Since the interdependency of environment and development in a country like India is often overlooked, economic growth often accompanies pollution, loss of livelihoods, poverty and poor healthcare systems. In the State of India's Environment report 2021 published by Centre for Science and Environment, an assessment of 88 clusters identified and assessed as 'Polluted industrial areas' showed the worsening case of environment pollution in India. The data highlighted the inactivity from the side of the people in power to control or reduce pollution even in areas like Tarapur (which was recognized as the most polluted industrial cluster between 2009 and 2018). The report is one of many that highlights India's worsening performance toward a sustainable future as it continues to see the environment as the 'other' in its path toward economic development.

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*Environment mainstreaming aims to diminish the 'otherness' of the environment, its stature as an external entity and the ease of its disposability by coming up with integrated solutions which enable efficient planning.*

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The theory and practice gap is prevalent at all levels from international to individual level. At normative level environment saving is widely acknowledged, however, implementing in real life is lacking. This is because of lack in conviction in the importance and urgency. Thus, in this scenario organisations can play a very important role. For example, this can be done by adopting and implementing policies for creation and disposal of waste for its employees and communities with whom they work. They can also be encouraged to adopt similar practices in lifestyle choices and in their occupation. Some common examples include avoiding excessive use of water, electricity, paper and plastic products, inefficient use of naturally available resources and use of personal transport. This catalytic nature of change and revolution, starting at individual level, is just the right tool to mainstream environment not only in the general conversations but also the day to day working of organizations and largely, the world.

Therefore, it is important to bring together the frequently separated fields of environment and development into greater synergy when dealing with the betterment of the people. Considering the looming danger of climate emergency, the blueprint for social transformation requires mainstreaming the environment in the larger discourse concerning development.

# CHAPTER 2

## The Environment emergency and a stride towards Sustainable Development: an insight into India's theory and practice gap

Environmental issues transcend geographical borders, they persist as a recurrent, ever-changing factor in the global arena. Against the backdrop of COVID-19 and border tensions, the hazardous state of the environment persists to be a universal concern. With the constant change in global climate, global warming as a phenomenon illustrates the difficulties mankind may face if their actions don't cease being exploitative. Simply put, Global warming is the gradual heating up of the earth's oceans, landmass and environment. In addition to nature-induced climate change, it is supplemented with the exploitative nature of human activities (for example, unprecedented emission of greenhouse gasses). According to United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Environment Emergency is defined as a "sudden-onset disaster or accident resulting from natural, technological or human-induced factors, or a combination of these, that causes or threatens to cause severe environmental damage as well as loss of human lives and property." Global temperatures have risen by 0.14-degrees Fahrenheit per decade since the 1880s, but the recent trend has been twice as fast (0.32-degrees Fahrenheit). 2021 was the sixth warmest year on record during the period from 2013-2021 being the ten warmest years. With the global temperature rising at such an alarming rate in the world, impacting climate such as increasing heat, change in monsoon patterns and sea levels rising, ecosystems and livelihoods attached to it get damaged causing severe developmental setbacks.

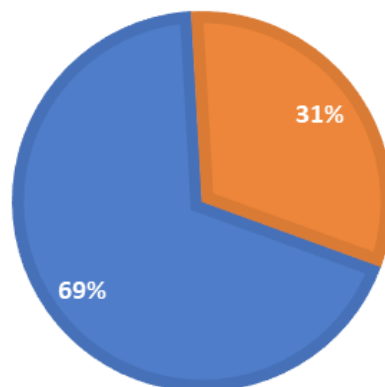
Although climate change affects everyone, the group of people who will face the wrath are the ones who are vulnerable, unequipped to adapt and underprivileged, for example, poor people living in climate adversity prone areas. In **Council on Energy Environment and Water's District level assessment to map India's climate vulnerability**<sup>8</sup>, it is reported that more than 638 million people out of India's population of 1.39 billion, reside in districts which are hotspots of extreme climate events (75% of Indian districts).

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<sup>8</sup> Mohanty, Abinash, and Shreya Wadhawan. 2021. Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability – A District Level Assessment. New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

## PEOPLE RESIDING IN DISTRICTS IN INDIA WITH EXTREME CLIMATE EVENTS

■ total population    ■ population residing in vulnerable districts



The report further highlighted the heightened number of extreme weather events increasing from 250 (between 1970 and 2005) to 310 recorded post- 2005 alone. In case of flooding, India is housing 97 million people who currently are being exposed to extreme floods, with Assam having six of India's eight most flood-prone districts in the last decade. Since 2005, the number of cyclone-affected districts has increased by at least triple, and the frequency of cyclones has increased by at least twice; 258 districts have been affected by cyclones alone in the past decade. Combined with extreme rainfall, flooding, and thunderstorms, cyclonic events have witnessed a 12-fold increase in the last 50 years. Their effects are more disastrous due to the amount of damage they cause. Human-induced activities such as flawed urban planning and deforestation have also given rise to urban floods. Due to activities such as land use surface change, deforestation, and encroachment on forests, many areas are witnessing floods and droughts during the same seasons in districts of Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Bihar.

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*According to Abinash Mohanty, Programme Lead at CEEW<sup>9</sup>,*

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*"The current trend of catastrophic climate events results from a mere 0.6 °C temperature rise in the last 100 years. India is already the fifth most vulnerable country globally in terms of extreme climate events and it is all set to become the world's flood capital. Access to finance and technology along with democratisation of weather and climate-related data is critical for building climate resilience, especially for vulnerable countries from the Global South like India. Embracing risk assessment principles will be equally crucial to safeguard Indian agriculture, industry, and large-scale infrastructural projects from the vagaries of climate change,"*

The study suggests that the extent of climate adversity's impact on an individual can be measured by assessing the *Exposure* (the intensity of contact between an individual and climate hazard), *Sensitivity* (individual's susceptibility to climate change, which may vary according to their medical conditions, geographical locations, diet etc)

<sup>9</sup> Mohanty, Abinash, and Shreya Wadhawan. 2021. Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability – A District Level Assessment. New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

and *Adaptive Capacity* (the ability of an individual or community to adapt and cope with climate hazards). The study recommends mainstreaming risk and vulnerability assessments at all levels to enhance the area's adaptive capacity in order to produce sustainable development plans that districts can adopt and adapt to their developmental strategies. The district-level assessment to map out India's Climate Vulnerability pointed out that if India implemented a robust risk mitigation mechanism and invested in better disaster preparedness it could've saved India Rs. 676 trillion. This shows how important it is to consider the environment as a factor in planning.

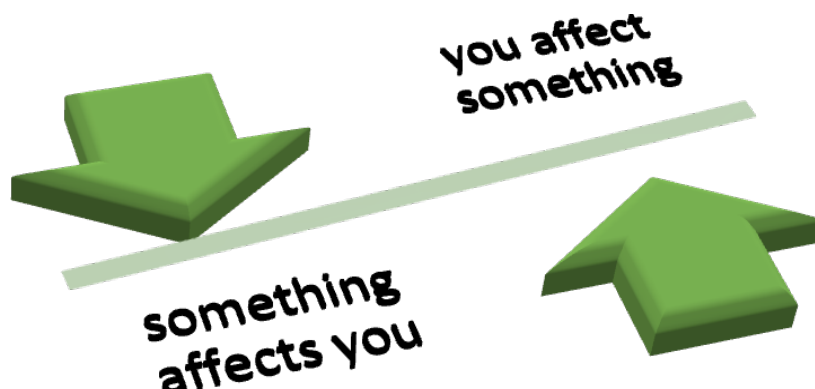
Similarly, the Ministry of Earth Sciences recently published a report on climate change titled 'Assessment of Climate Change over Indian Region'<sup>10</sup> which encapsulates data on regional climate change in India and the climatic extremes that the country faces. The report prepared by Centre for Climate Change Research (CCCR) is first of its kind wherein discussion on human-induced global climate change on regional climate is looked at in details. It reported that the surface air temperature over India has risen by about 7 degreeCelsius during 1901-2018 which is causing the warming in the environment. The complex interconnectedness of global warming and regional specific influences have led to India witnessing a rise in rainfall, drought and flood occurrences and increase in intensity of cyclones. Due to the exploitative human activities the civilization took part in since the industrial revolution, the global average temperature has risen by 1 degree Celsius. In the case of India, it has witnessed a higher frequency of droughts and drought affected areas since 1950s. Rapid changes in the country's climate are heavily consequential for the country's biodiversity and natural resources. Due to the absence of regional records and inadequate data collection, the changes in the regional and district level are not understood and therefore, often not catered to robustly. Climate change affects people all over the world differently and therefore influences their development and quality of life in a plethora of ways. The requirement of a daily wage worker in Assam would be difficult from the requirements of a worker in a drought prone region like Rajasthan, their difficulties and, therefore, the hindrances to their daily lives would be different. To undertake the right policies and programmes, and to formulate locally relevant adaption strategies in order to assist disaster management, the government must recognize environment as a factor and a cause while working on a region's development and social transformation.

The interdependence of environment and development is an area India has to work towards. India was ranked 132 out of 191 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) 2021-22 released on September 8, 2022. The Human Development Index is a measure of a nation's health, education, and average income. Almost 90% of countries showed a reduction in their HDI value in 2020 or 2021 against the backdrop of crises like COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine which shook the foundations of social and economic platforms. In the latest Human Development Report - *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*<sup>11</sup>, the intersection of various crises is highlighted by acknowledging the global inability to respond individually to interconnected crises. India's decline in HDI value from 0.645 in the 2020 report to 0.633 in the latest report foregrounds India's incompetence to deal

10 R. Krishnan, J. Sanjay, Chellappan Gnanaseelan, Milind Mujumdar, Ashwini Kulkarni, Supriyo Chakraborty. 'Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region' A Report of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Government of India. Springer Singapore. Ebook ISBN: 978-981-15-4327-2

11 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2022. Human Development Report 2021-22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World. New York.

with interlinked crises and it is highly influenced by its failing life expectancy from 69.7 to 67.2 years (which can be attributed to the health crises faced during the pandemic wherein the healthcare systems failed to accommodate such a huge population).



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*"Climate change is a terrible problem, and it absolutely needs to be solved. It deserves to be a huge priority."*  
**Bill Gates**, Founder of Microsoft

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Recognising this interlinkage and its role in the emerging environment emergency, global leaders have undertaken several actions such as formulating the Paris agreement, the Glasgow pact and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to effectively tackle multitudes of environment and climate-related issues.

A legally binding international treaty on climate change, the Paris Agreement was adopted by 196 parties at the Conference of the Parties<sup>12</sup> (COP21) (COP is a United Nations Climate change conference which is attended by countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in 2015. The agreement aims to limit global warming and to do that countries must regulate greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible. It is considered a landmark because, for the first time, nations came together for a common cause which was to combat climate change. The agreement seeks to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industry levels. It works on a 5-year cycle of climate action to bring economic and social transformation after which they have to submit its plans for climate actions known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). NDCs encapsulate the country's plan of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to achieve the goals laid down by the Paris agreement and consequently their plan to adapt to climate changes and build resilience. India's first NDC had three primary targets: The first was to reduce the emissions intensity of the economy by 33–35 per cent below 2005 levels, the second was to have 40 per cent of installed electric power from non-fossil-based energy resources by 2030 and the third target was to create an additional (cumulative) carbon sink of 2.5-3 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO<sub>2</sub>e) by 2030 through additional forest and tree cover.

At the UN Climate change Conference in Glasgow<sup>13</sup> (COP26), around 120 world leaders were brought together along with participants, observers and media representatives for a span of 2 weeks to discuss all the facets of climate change and how to effectively deal with it. The outcome was rigorous cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions and a

<sup>12</sup> Available at <http://www.cop21paris.org/about/cop21>

<sup>13</sup> UNFCCC, 'Glasgow Climate Pact, Decision -/CP.26, advance unedited version' available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/310475> [1/CP.26].

more extensive sustainable pathway than what was laid down in the Paris agreement. It acted as a crucial step towards better policy formation as it recognized the climate emergency and acknowledged the increasing impact climate change has on people in the developing world. In COP26, In accordance with the 5-year rule, India updated its NDCs in 2020. The updated NDCs largely propagate a “healthy and sustainable way of living based on traditions and values of conservation and moderation, including through a mass movement for ‘LIFE’– ‘Lifestyle for Environment’ as a key to combating climate change”. They also put forward India’s aim to “adopt a climate-friendly and a cleaner path than the one followed hitherto by others at corresponding level of economic development”.

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“The world is facing a confluence of crises that threaten the very survival of humanity. All of these crises – and ways to prevent and navigate them – are addressed holistically in the SDGs. We ignore them at our own peril.”  
**Liu Zhenmin**<sup>14</sup>, *Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs*

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Taking into consideration the interdependence of environment and development, the United Nations has more often than once insisted upon the symbiotic relationship between the two. Built upon the spirit of sustainability are the UNDP Sustainable Development Goals <sup>15</sup>(SDGs) which focus on Agenda 2030. The agenda seeks to eradicate poverty in all its forms as it’s a global challenge and a prerequisite for sustainable development. It presents 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets which encapsulate the spirit of human rights for all and gender equality. One of the areas of importance it works on is the **Planet**; SDGs aim to protect the planet from degradation, motivate sustainable practices to consume, produce and manage its natural resources and take urgent action on climate change.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of the immense challenges faced by humanity to sustainable development, amongst the evil of poverty and inequality, SDGs also consider global health threats, natural disasters, natural resource depletion and adverse effects of natural degradation (desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity) as key aspects in a country’s strive towards sustainable development. It observes that climate change is one of the greatest contemporary challenges because many countries rely on their biological support system (the environment) for their survival. Goal 6 (**Clean Water and Sanitation**), Goal 7 (**Affordable and Clean Energy**), Goal 11 (**Sustainable Cities and Communities**), Goal 12 (**Sustainable Consumption and Production pattern**), 13 ( **Climate Action**: take urgent action to combat Climate Change and its Impacts), Goal 14 (**Life below water**: conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine sources for sustainable development\*<sup>16</sup>) and Goal 15 (**Life on Land**: protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss) focus on the aspect of environment explicitly.

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14 Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

15 UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world : the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html> [accessed 27 October 2022]

16 Details added by the author



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



India in its second Voluntary National Review <sup>17</sup>((VNR) is a process through which countries assess and present national progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including achieving its 17 Sustainable Development Goals) making a paradigm shift to a “whole-of-society” approach wherein the Government of India partners with subnational and local governments, civil society organizations, local communities, people in vulnerable situations and the private sector to achieve their commitments to Agenda 2030. India’s adopted mottos of **Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas** (Collective Efforts for Inclusive Growth), **Sashakt Bharat** (Empowered and Resilient India), **Swachh Bharat - Swasth Bharat** (Clean and Healthy India) and **Satat Bharat - Sanatan Bharat** (Sustainable India) reflect the robust activities of government to achieve the goals it promised.

The theory-practice gap in India is too prevalent post-pandemic and it must reassess its strategy. India has slipped from rank 120 (in 2021) to 121 in 2022, out of 163 countries, with an overall SDG score of 66 out of 100. Facing major challenges in achieving 11 of 17 goals (including zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, gender equality and sustainable cities and communities), *The State of India’s Environment in Figures, 2022* revealed that India is failing to meet the targets it set for itself. For example, only 45% of the target to provide safe piped drinking water to all by 2022-23 is achieved. Furthermore, as envisaged in the National Forest Policy, the aim to increase 33.3% of forest area is falling behind as by 2019 only 21.6% of India was under forest cover. On top of that, India suffered severely in dealing with quality education and life on land aspects. Out of the 28 Indian states, Jharkhand and Bihar are the least prepared to meet the SDG targets by the year 2030 while states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh ranked the first position (information collected from NITI Aayog’s SDG India Index 2020-21<sup>18</sup>).

<sup>17</sup> Available at [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26279VNR\\_2020\\_India\\_Report.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26279VNR_2020_India_Report.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Available at [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26279VNR\\_2020\\_India\\_Report.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26279VNR_2020_India_Report.pdf)

The latest United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 shows how destructive the impacts of the recent global happenings were on the achievement of those goals. Covid 19 pandemic has cost many lives, it not only burdened the global health systems to the point that they collapsed but it also pushed many people to the new bottom of poverty. The most vulnerable like poor women and children suffered the most. For instance, as a consequence of not being able to go to school, not only did children's education suffer, but also their primary source of nourishment stopped as well, especially for those who used to attend schools for midday meals. India particularly was deeply impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, from April to June 2020 India's GDP dropped by 24.4% which resulted in the worst economic contraction the country has witnessed since post-independence. During India's first national lockdown between April and May 2020, individual income dropped by approximately 40% while the households on the bottom rungs of society lost three months' worth of income. 230 million people fell into poverty after just the first lockdown and the urban unemployment rate jumped from 8.8% in April to June 2019 to 20.8% from April to June 2020. In the second wave, India was the worst hit globally with rural India being affected worse than urban India. There was a 46% increase in biomedical waste between April-May 2021 and the risk of infectious diseases entered the list of major global economic threats for the first time since 2006. In 'State of India's Environment 2021' report, the Centre for Science and Environment emphasizes the danger of climate change. The report observes that India was the fourth worst hit in the world in terms of Internal displacements due to extreme weather events and natural disasters. The report also foregrounds India's lagging response to climate change, for example in the case of renewable energy, only 55% of the target is met and therefore it's impossible to fulfil the promise it made in theory. Another example of which is the inability of the country to operationalize even one of at least 50 solar parks it promised to set up by 2021-22.

What India promises on the theoretical and geopolitical front, it is unable to achieve in practice. The dual phenomenon of climate change and global warming cause environment emergency which must be tackled through rapid needs assessment and proactive action; therefore, environment mainstreaming is a crucial need of the hour.



# CHAPTER 3

## VANI's Preliminary Study on Environment Mainstreaming in the Indian CSOs

In a country where more than 80% of the population resides in districts which are highly vulnerable to climate events, the need for proactive action is not a choice but an urgent necessity. While the journey begins with acknowledging the interconnected nature of the issue of environment to that of development of the country and its people, an informed inclusion of the environment in the policies and programmes at all levels is what is needed. Considering the fact that the state of the environment affects the communities they work with, CSOs have to deal with a new set of challenges to combat not only the post-pandemic evils but also the increasing environmental hazards and climate emergencies. During these most challenging times, without a robust evaluation of the problem at hand, every action will fall short. Therefore, building on the fact that economy and society share an intangible bond with the environment for social transformation, it is crucial for CSOs to assess environment as both a factor and a cause in order to pave way for sustainable future for generations to come.

The challenges of COVID-19 are still haunting India. The CSOs have more on their plate than they had in the pre-pandemic period. The change in environment has impacted their operations and funding. To abide by the expectations of the new funders and to align themselves with their views, Indian CSOs must equip themselves with the knowledge of changing funding avenues and strengthen their organizational capacity. The three major avenues of funders which open up for CSOs are Corporate, Global (International Funders) and the Youth. Despite the fact that they have three different sets of values and requirements, one thing unites them- a sense of social responsibility towards the environment.

The Companies Act 2013 made it mandatory for the corporate to fund social sector interventions. This brought a change in the thinking and operation of CSOs. It is important to mention that under Schedule VII of the Act, companies can take part in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is a commitment undertaken by Businesses to look beyond the financial arena and inculcate social and environmental concerns in their business operations. Prior to The Companies act 2013 (incorporated in 2013, the Companies Act regulates corporate law in India, including incorporation,

responsibilities, directors and dissolution of companies.), CSR was seen as a mere philanthropic activity done in goodwill and under moral responsibility under Companies Act 1956. However, after being replaced, it added an additional section i.e., Section 135- clause on CSR obligations for companies listed in India which covers the essential prerequisites pertaining to the execution, fund allotment and reporting for successful project implementation. With the advent of this new act, India became the first country to enact legislation mandating CSR activities and mandatorily reporting CSR initiatives. The act required companies to spend at least 2% of their average net profits in every financial year on Civil Society Organizations. The companies can partake in “ensuring environmental sustainability, ecological balance, protection of flora and fauna, animal welfare, agroforestry, conservation of natural resources and maintaining quality of soil, air and water including contribution to the Clean Ganga Fund set-up by the Central Government for rejuvenation of river Ganga”. Therefore, it is beneficial for CSOs to integrate environment not only because of the precarious state it is in, but also because it opens an avenue for them to collect funds and investments through corporate. Similarly, the Social Stock Exchange acts as a mediating platform which is being set up to serve the private and non-profit sector both. Regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), it aims to provide Social Enterprises (non-profit organizations and for-profit social enterprises having social intent and impact as their primary goal) with a supplementary revenue to raise funds. In a capitalist economy that thrives on exploitation, it is only fair that CSOs gain from such acts and exchanges.

Youth in general work on the tenets of ethics and social consciousness. As buyers, they are prepared to pay an extra amount for sustainable products. As sellers, companies indulge in CSR to enhance their brand image. However, similar to CSR but more measurable framework that companies in the corporate world use is that of ESG (Environment, Social and Governance). While CSR is an internal framework that focuses on showing internal working (corporate volunteering, lowering carbon footprint etc), ESG provides a more quantitative measure of sustainability which helps investors in better assessment. It provides a valuation of the businesses on the basis of environmental, social and governance factors and therefore can be used by investors to assess how sustainable the company is.

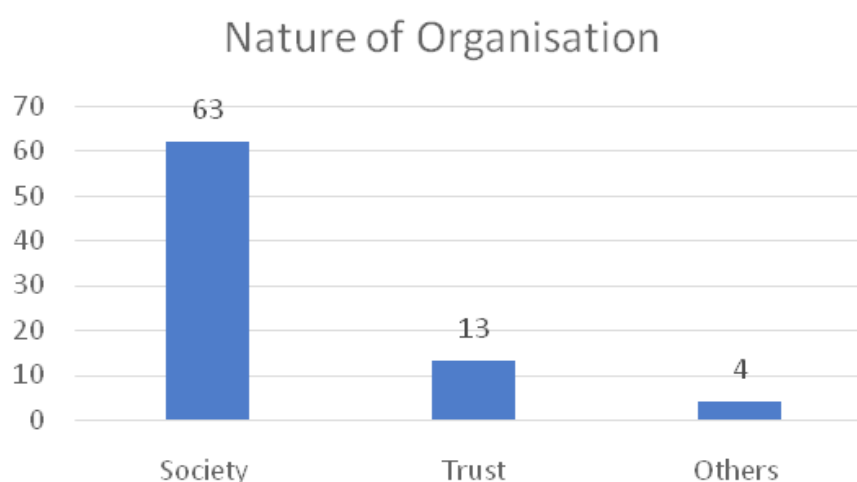
Corporates view social impact too as a product and therefore as investors the brand value of a cause is essential to them. The ESG practices are increasingly being embraced by organizations across industries, geographies and sizes. With the advent of Ukrainian crisis and the affect it has on geopolitics, the increase in ESG considerations in companies’ decision-making is being foregrounded; various companies are taking major decisions and discontinuing operations in Russia and taking up activities in response to societal concerns. Therefore, through frameworks like ESGs, we understand how a company’s actions towards sustainability helps build them an image that aids their promotions and that’s why CSOs could benefit from investors and earn the company’s trust by mainstreaming environment not only in their organizational policies but also in their areas of work.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

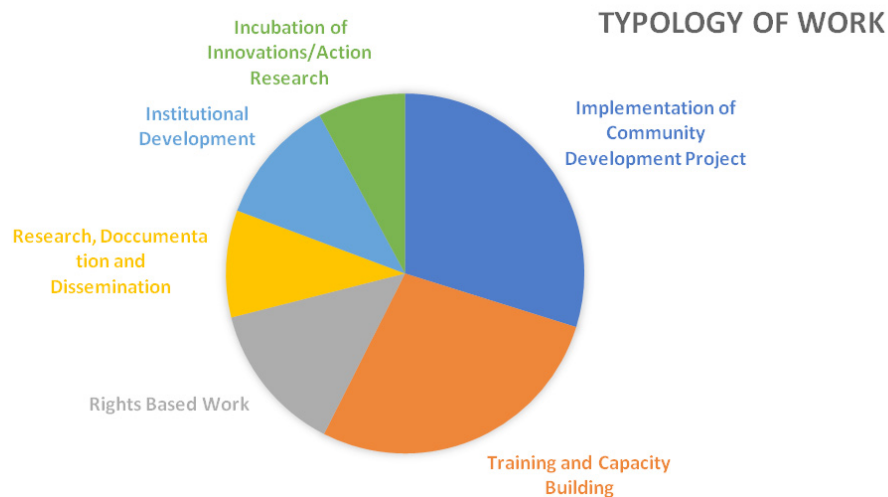
In order to assist the CSOs to evolve and adapt to the requirements and expectations of new investors, VANI's role as a national network aims to bring convergence on common sectoral issues and one area is environment. VANI conducted a preliminary online survey on Environment Mainstreaming amongst its member organisations and other CSOs in India. The objective of the study was to assess awareness about environment and work area co-relation and environment friendly practices within organisations. The long term aim was to encourage CSOs to mainstream environment into organization's policy, programmes and projects. In the survey, total 79 organizations participated out of which 54 were member organizations of VANI.



Organizations with various sets of legal incorporation took part in the survey, out of which 80% were societies and 16% were trusts. The remaining belonged to the other categories.



In the areas of typology of work, the trend showed that almost 86 percent of the participant organizations were working on Community Development. 80 percent of organisations worked on Training and Capacity Building.



The need for environment policy stems from the conscious integration of an organization with the values and lessons of green consciousness. Mainstreaming the environment into their policies, programmes and projects not only highlights an organization's commitment toward a sustainable future for the communities they serve but also disseminates the fundamental values UNDP's Sustainable Development Goal 13 advocates. Out of VANI's member organizations, 44 percent of the organizations had an environment policy in place. 76 percent of the organisations with over 16 years of work experience had a formal environment policy as compared to 24 percent responding organisations with organisations that were set up in the last decade.

89 percent of the responding organizations mentioned that their target beneficiaries were being affected by the changing environment. However only 50 percent acknowledged that their organization's work affected their environment. Only 44 percent of the organisations working on environmental issues had a formal environment policy. The probable causes of the above behaviour could be lack of commitment of formalisation of the environmental concerns and corresponding practices amongst organisations.

67.08% of participant organizations were working in the environment sector but only 44% of those had an environment policy. Additionally, 67.08% of the participant organizations focused on work in the environment sector, but only 44% of those had an environment policy in place. This disparity highlights the lack of inclusivity within organizations. Among the member organizations,

Although the study is preliminary, not extensive and based on convenience sampling, it captures the essence of the argument that Indian CSOs lack in areas related to environment- be it in the integration of it as a factor in decision making or as a cause in itself. With the contemporary set of funders/donors/investors demanding an inclusive framework which the CSOs aim to build with their funders.

Nothing exists in isolation, all actions for the betterment of society at large require different entities to come together in order to create a deep impact. For civil society organizations, factors such as changes in government, the COVID 19 pandemic, an irregular inflow of funds and so on act as hurdles; in recognizing the need for unified action and the importance of interlinking different thematic areas, the society can strengthen itself and it influence on policymakers and eventually branch out to create new avenues for itself.

# CHAPTER 4

## Why should Civil Society Organizations assess the Environment as both a factor and a cause

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*India is the seventh most vulnerable country with respect to climate extremes.*

*Germanwatch 2020<sup>19</sup>*

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Climate change impacts countries all over the world extensively, especially the underprivileged in particular stressing their already deteriorating economic, political and social crises. Organizations at the local level are key to integrating environmental issues into society's development and transformation; mainstreaming the environment both as a cause and factor depends on catalytic action among interlinked organisations. The issue of environment is a dynamic one which requires constant adaption and adoption, chiefly through persistent evaluation of the relationship environment shares with the development sector. Unfortunately, due to the persistent othering of the environment from the developmental sphere, the general public fails to achieve the desired measure of social transformation.

The interlinkage of Environment with Health, Education and Economic Development stems from its role as the base of communities and livelihoods. For a country like India, it is impossible to fight the evil of poverty reduction and lacking development without addressing the overlying issue of unequal control of wealth and opportunities along with the deep-rooted socio-economic and political inequality. People already plagued with such disadvantages, sink deeper into poverty when met with climate or environmental adversity. Speaking of which, the Covid19 pandemic stands as the pre-eminent example to highlight the interlinked nature of developmental issues with environment that hinder India's growth; due to the lack of investment in the health sector, the pandemic foregrounded inaccessibility of hospital beds, shortage of oxygen cylinders and unavailability of trained medical professionals which resulted in an unprecedented loss of life and trauma.

According to CEEW's study<sup>20</sup> 'Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability', India is the seventh most vulnerable country with respect to climate extremes and therefore to effectively tackle the volatile climate landscape, hyper-local strategies are the need of the hour. Hyperlocal strategies identify area-specific risks and come up with area-exclusive policies and programmes which could further help CSOs effectively help their target communities with adaptable solutions.

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19 Mohanty, Abinash, and Shreya Wadhawan. 2021. Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability – A District Level Assessment. New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

20 Mohanty, Abinash, and Shreya Wadhawan. 2021. Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability – A District Level Assessment. New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

The theory-practice gap highlighted in chapter 2 elucidates how India fails to adopt the SDGs into their system at the grassroots level due to the marginalization of the area's environmental concerns and how it affects the day-to-day life of the common people. For example, in a flood-prone area like Assam, the large-scale soil erosion and devastation not only results in the loss of human lives but also heavily impact the daily commute. With people not being able to get prompt medical care and children being locked in homes for days, areas like healthcare and education get heavily impacted. Understanding the interconnectedness of different thematic issues with the environment and adopting a cross-sectoral approach helps CSOs initiate proactive action and branch out to fit the changing and challenging times.

Organisations like VANI play a crucial role in bridging the gaps and helping create a standard to follow. As an apex body of voluntary organizations, VANI's accountability toward the environment and its active governance in the same area encourages its member organizations and the CSOs it works with to contribute toward a clean, healthy and sustainable planet. Since 2014, VANI has been one of the ten project partners involved in the development and promotion of the Global Standard on CSO Accountability<sup>21</sup>. One of the 12 commitments that the standard promotes, is 'Healthy Planet', which works towards protecting the natural environment and enhancing its ability to support life for future generations (Commitment 3). The commitment upholds the values of sustaining life at present and ensuring one for future generations by actively acknowledging the disproportionate consequences of environmental degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss on the poorest and most marginalized in society. Under the commitment, CSOs must develop and implement strategies which aid the protection of environment and natural resources by dismissing its otherness and integrating it in their policies and planning. Along with their active participation in the abovementioned initiatives, VANI frequently engages on their social media handles to insemminate knowledge. For example, on the occasion of World Environment Day 2022, VANI urged its members and civil society organizations to 'Gear up for Action' towards a healthy planet and scale up their actions on all levels to mainstream environment into their thinking and functioning. With a video <sup>22</sup>that was equal parts engaging and informative, VANI has adapted to the changing times and consequently adopted new forms of information dissemination to raise the urgent call for action to mitigate collective change towards climate consciousness.

One of VANI's roles is that of a resource centre for CSOs. VANI conducts evidence-based research and studies<sup>23</sup> to aid CSOs and educate them. One such study is 'Inclusive Governance for Voluntary Organizations Study Report'<sup>24</sup> which aims to aid CSOs to strengthen their internal structure while actively preparing them to tackle external challenges. In the changing socio-political environment, CSOs must be transparent and take accountability wherever needed when it comes to their internal functioning. The objective of the study was to enable CSOs to be 'inclusive and conducive' in their functioning and thus the study report also presents a sample environment policy which an organization can adapt and adopt according to their circumstances.

(Refer to Annexure 1 for the VANI's sample Environment Policy)

21 Available at <https://www.csostandard.org/>

22 Available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=813066109658774>

23 Available at <https://www.vaniindia.org/resources/publications>

24 Available at <https://www.vaniindia.org/uploads/resources/Inclusive%20Governance%20Study%20Report.pdf>



## **ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

An environmental policy is an organization's declaration of commitment to the environment. It should unify the environmental vision of all key stakeholders: employees, management, partners, shareholders, customers, and suppliers. It is one of the first steps to reducing an organization's environmental footprint. An environmental policy should be long-lasting, with specific consideration given to growth, expansion, and long-term goals. As the policy will represent the views and goals of the organization, it should be approved by senior management. When writing an environmental policy, keep it short and simple, and focus on commitments that are realistic, achievable, and relevant to the organization's activities and practices.

The following commitments or principles by the organization:

- Educate staff on relevant environmental issues.
- Reduce waste.
- Establish a green procurement policy.
- Seek a recycling service provider, if available, and establish an office recycling program.
- Minimize use of water and energy.
- Comply with applicable provincial and federal environmental regulations, as well as worker safety legislation.
- Minimize impact of transportation: employee commuting, travelling for meetings and conferences.
- Seek environmentally friendly cleaning, washroom, and office supplies.
- Minimize use of hazardous and toxic substances found in the office.
- Support local environmental actions within the community.

The organization that will focus on putting the policy ideals into practice.

### **EDUCATING STAFF**

Educate staff about the environmental policy and ask all staff and management to commit to the policy. The environmental policy will improve employee morale by showing the organization's commitment to the environment.

### **Model Environmental Policy**

The organization recognizes environmental protection as one of our guiding principles and a key component of sound business performance. The organization will work in a manner that ensures a safe and healthy workplace for our employees and minimizes our impact on the environment. We will operate in compliance with relevant federal, provincial, and municipal environmental legislation, and we will strive to use environmental best practices in all we do. We will:

- Incorporate environmental concerns and impacts into all of our decision-making and activities;
- Promote environmental awareness among our employees and encourage them to work in an environmentally responsible manner;
- Train, educate, and inform our employees about environmental issues that may affect their work;
- Reduce waste by initiating recycling programs within the office – including the recycling of paper, cardboard, beverage containers, plastic containers, and other materials that are accepted by a recycling provider;
- Purchase environmentally responsible products that have been selected based on criteria including- toxicity, durability, use of recycled or re-furbished materials, reduced energy and/or

water consumption, reduced packaging, and ability to be recycled, refilled or re-furnished at the end of its useful life;

- Promote efficient use of resources throughout our facility including water and energy;
- Avoid unnecessary use of hazardous materials and seek alternatives whenever feasible;
- Regularly communicate our environmental program to our clients, customers, and the public and encourage their support;
- Strive to continually improve our environmental performance by periodically reviewing our environmental policy in planning our current and future activities; and
- Investigate and initiate recycling programs and/or safe disposal options for materials such as e-waste and hazardous waste.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Environment mainstreaming aims to diminish the 'otherness' of the environment, its stature as an external entity and the ease of its disposability by coming up with integrated solutions which enable efficient planning.*

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Civil society organizations like Society for Development Alternatives<sup>25</sup> is a pioneer in this arena, by supporting technological innovations which are built upon the values of green consciousness, it is the world's first social enterprise dedicated to sustainable development that strives to deliver life-changing results on a social, environmental and economic level. The organization's aim bringing together the frequently separated fields of environment and development into greater synergy, for the people and the environment, as the blueprint for social transformation. In villages where women are largely dependent on natural resources and agriculture, they face the brunt of environmental hazards. For example, in drought-prone areas like Rajasthan, women have to walk for miles to fetch drinking water. This not only is a waste of their time but is also hurdling their opportunity to get an education and employment. Given zero to minimal status, they are trapped in the web of poverty. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of environmental crises with other disciplines like women's issues and the lack of availability of opportunities for women in India, DA's concept of TARA Akshar+ teaches women how to read, write and do simple arithmetic. It aims to build the capacity of women and develop their skills in order to inculcate values of enterprise development and help them provide meaning and dignity to their life.

At the grassroots level, organization such as Mount Valley Development Association (MVDA)<sup>26</sup> is one such civil society organization which works towards improving the quality of life of communities residing in Tehri Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. Inspired by the idea of Sarvodaya movement which advocates 'progress for all', the organization started as an effort to accelerate the poor economic growth and the stagnant state of development of the local districts. Identifying the interconnectedness of the communities' well being with the state of environment, the programmes of this organization followed a cross sectoral approach aiming for an overall sustainable development of the local communities. Promoting the tenets of holistic living, the organization aims to improve the quality of life of people through their programmes which promote early childcare, girl child education, agriculture conservation and proper use of agriculture biodiversity.

Making sure that their target groups get proper assistance from different government schemes, the organization's mission is to be a catalyst of change in supporting local communities towards poverty eradication through sustainable livelihood initiatives. Emphasising the importance of using existing livelihood options, MVDA's livelihood and agricultural programmes mitigate issues such as of climate change, environmental damage and natural disaster management to further assist the development and capacity building of locals. MVDA's 'Holistic Rural Initiative for Development Action and Yield' (HRIDAY) is one of their programmes which not only promotes holistic development through livelihood enhancements (through education, natural resource management, infrastructure development etc) but also aims to prevent distress migration from rural to urban areas due to lack of opportunities by establishing agriculture as sustainable livelihood alternative.

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25 Available at <https://www.devalt.org/>

26 Available at <http://mvda.org.in/>

Such programmes contribute towards social development of the community by empowering all sections of the society through employment opportunities. Catering to the interconnectedness of issues such as of employment, nature and gender discrimination, MVDA's HRIDAY's end goal is to increase economic independence of individuals through building local resilience to climate change, promoting gender equity and advocating for environment friendly organic farming.

As climate emergency continues to heavily impact the world, CSOs should aspire to not only reduce their ecological footprint but also create a humanitarian impact that eventually develops into a large-scale movement working towards a healthier, happier future. Organizations such as Goonj<sup>27</sup> aim to bridge the gap of inequality and build equitable relationships between cities and villages by using the underutilized urban resources as tools to trigger development. Goonj is a member organization of VANI, and their work reflects the humanitarian values which the movement towards sustainability stands for. Goonj works on areas related to Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation, Access to Water, Sanitation, Health, Livelihood, Education and Environment. As a promoter of 'circular economy', Goonj ensures maximum use of each material; as an advocate of TRASH-based economy, it uses huge quantities of old reusable material to create a valuable resource. The values of Goonj teach us how sustainability can be achieved even at the grassroots level simply by creating avenues of innovation and not looking at things as big or small. Their work reflects that even small actions at the individual level impact the community at large and eventually the country as a whole.

# Recommendations

Civil society organizations are the voice of the nation and it is only right if the voice itself is amplified through every tenant of the organization. As nothing exists in isolation, the organization's efforts towards environment mainstreaming should start from within itself. Revolution doesn't happen overnight, therefore, for an organization to create impact and educate others about the importance of environment consciousness, it must also adopt practices and policies that work in the same direction.

There are three ways to mainstream environment within the organization. Firstly, by donations and pledging to minimal commitment levels such as going paperless, adopting hybrid work mode, banning plastic use in the office premises etc. Considering the 3 Rs- Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, CSOs can mould the everyday working of their organization accordingly. Secondly, by adopting environment policies and implementing inclusive HR practices, the organizations can aid environment consciousness within the official working. These practices include refresher trainings, ensuring policy is signed by staff, facilitating the implementation of environment policy across the organization and reviewing and updating the policy as and when needed. And thirdly, by adopting environmentally conscious behaviour during resource allocation, budget planning and resource allocation.

One way to achieve their goal is by adapting/adopting the right Environment Policy. The Environment policy should ideally outline the organization's climate change and environment related practices, standards and principles to the members of the organization. The policy should commit and integrate environmental and climate change considerations into its work, policies, strategies and planning in order to minimize any negative effect the organization may have on the environment and lessen the carbon footprint. The Environment Policy should be in line with the tenets of UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the need for unified action against climate change and environmental degradation which affect everyone globally causing influx in economies, adverse impact on human lives and loss of a better future opportunities.

## Environmental Sustainability Policy Development Alternatives Group


We, at Development Alternatives Group, are committed to sustainable development and continual improvement in our environmental performance. In line with our vision and mandate for creating sustainable livelihoods at scale, we shall strive to:

- Incorporate sustainability principles and practices in our research, operations and community /multi-stakeholder engagement processes.
- Demonstrate leadership in applying eco-efficient and sustainable design principles, and adopting low carbon pathways for resource management, wherever possible in our projects, programmes and operations.
- Embed and promote environmental sustainability across the DA Group entities and within the broader community in which we operate and can influence.
- Ensure shared responsibility and transparent engagement of staff at all levels in decision-making processes related to environmental sustainability.
- Raise awareness and encourage action for sustainability through training and general education of staff and the wider community.
- Monitor and evaluate performance on a regular basis, using agreed targets and indicators.

This policy applies to all DA Group employees, staff and consultants engaged in organisational activities across all locations of DA Group operations.

We ensure that we will comply with local and national environmental legislations and regulations. Our environmental policy will be communicated to all interested parties and made available to the public.

Place : New Delhi  
Date : 08-08-2019

  
Dr Arun Kumar  
President

Being mindful of our eco-consciousness would be the right step towards creating an impact, therefore, other than adopting an Environment Policy, the organization should be mindful of the available already finite resources like water, paper, electricity etc. Change happens at home; therefore adopting a hybrid working model wherever possible and adapting to the post-pandemic times is the need. To actively reduce the Greenhouse gas emissions associated with its work, organizations should cut down on

traveling by personal transport and should opt for public transport whenever possible. To undertake implementation of environmentally conscious practices, organizations should train their staff to raise awareness and encourage them to be mindful. Conducting workshops, webinars, and trainings on relevant areas of environment sustainability from time to time is a great way to mainstream environment in the workings of the organisation.

In view of the interconnectedness of various environment issues affecting a particular area and the subjectivity of the issue, CSOs should try to adopt hyper local strategies. It could be as simple as sourcing from the local businesses, funding the local NGOs and donating to the local Self-help groups. A robust needs assessment should be done before any decision making so that the specific issues of a particular area are effectively dealt with. To bring sustainable change, it is important that CSOs consider the levels impact and mould their actions accordingly. On an individual level, the members of the organization can work keeping in mind environmentally conscious behaviour. On an organizational level, policies, programmes and budgeting can be done considering environment as both factor and cause affecting not only the individual and the organization, but also the community at large.

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“Adults keep saying: “We owe it to the young people to give them hope.”

But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic.

I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.”<sup>28</sup>

**Greta Thunberg**

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One must always be mindful of the larger good they’re working towards: creating a better world for the future generations while undertaking the responsibility for the present. India is far from fulfilling the potential its leaders envisioned for it, in the fast pace race for economic development one must not overlook the environmental destruction it is causing. The pandemic shed light on India’s inadequacies to reach the bottom rung of the society and help them in difficult times; proactive action in the areas of adaptable solutions, data collection and awareness creation should be the responsibility of the government as well as CSOs so as to ensure that no one is left behind. With the everchanging economic scenario and instability due to global political conflicts, the demand and supply chain for basic necessities is bound to get rigged. CSOs working with different target groups should assess their lacks and strong points and create job opportunities in such a way that everyone is able to fend for themselves while also creating opportunities for others’ social development.

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28 Greta Thunberg, *At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on January 25, 2019.*





## About Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

VANI is a national network of Indian Voluntary Development Organisations (VDOs). Currently VANI has 624 members with an outreach to around 10,000 VDOs across India. The membership of VANI ranges from grass roots to the national organizations. The members work on a range of priority development issues of the government including education, health, nutrition, integrated child development, livelihood, skill development, environment, natural resource management, climate change, water and sanitation, emergency response and preparedness, agriculture, poverty and so on, in some of the most remote areas of the country. In the year 2017-18 our network collectively reached out to over 32 million people belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups including children, disabled people, women, elderly, farmers, dalit, tribals, disaster survivors, unemployed, youth, LGBT, sex workers etc. VANI through its efforts and strategies aims to build a strong civil society sector not only at national but regional and local level as well.

VANI was set up with the mission to promote voluntarism, create space for the sector by fostering value based voluntary action. VANI's interventions are focused to strengthen the external and internal enabling environment. To ensure the external enabling environment, VANI conducts evidence-based advocacy which includes regulatory frameworks and resource generation. In order to achieve this VANI works with the government, private sector, bilateral, multilaterals and other stakeholders. For strengthening the internal enabling environment, VANI works towards building resilience and promoting accountability, transparency and compliance through the interactive educational events and information dissemination. VANI strives to become a resource centre by conducting evidence-based research; publishing studies, articles and reports not only at state level but national and global level as well.



## Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

(An Apex Body of Voluntary Organisations)

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