

THE

CONSERVation

Catalyzing conservation that counts

January - March 2026

Issue 4



SBI FOUNDATION
Service Beyond Banking



For private publication only

ABOUT US

SBI Foundation - Service Beyond Banking

We, at SBI Foundation, feel a sense of responsibility towards the society we operate in. Our offerings come with a commitment to act ethically, bring a difference and create a positive impact on society. We believe in making CSR not just an initiative of the SBI group but an ethos. The foundation of our programs is reflective of our ethos, values and our vision.

SBIF CONSERW

SBIF CONSERW is the Foundation's flagship program in the area of Environment and Sustainability. The aim is to ensure environmentally conscious production and consumption, clean energy adoption, restoration of ecosystems and natural resources and conservation of wildlife to contribute towards CONSERVING our planet for a better and sustainable future.

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The CONSERWation Story

January - March 2026

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MANAGEMENT TEAM

Managing Director & CEO
Swapan Dhar

President & COO
Pratyush Mehrotra

Chief Financial Officer & Administrator
Sushil Kumar Verma



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About the Cover

The cover photo features a beneficiary whose home was electrified under Project Vibha, a community-led renewable energy initiative supported by SBI Foundation, SBI Card and SBI Green Fund. Implemented in the remote districts of Gajapati and Kalahandi, Odisha, the project is bringing reliable clean energy access to underserved rural communities.

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*With the support from Marketing and Communications Team.

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Together for Tomorrow: Words from our Managing Director & CEO

Swapan Dhar

**Managing Director & CEO
SBI Foundation**



Dear Readers,

It is my pleasure to present the 4th edition of The CONSERWation Story, which brings together a diverse collection of articles, reflecting, some of the most pressing environmental challenges along with promising sustainability solutions, shaping India today. From renewable energy and ecosystem restoration to water conservation, waste management, urban resilience, and wildlife conservation, these stories focus on the interconnected nature of human relationship with the environment and the collective efforts required to secure a sustainable future.

This issue explores the way communities, institutions, researchers, and practitioners are responding to environmental challenges through innovation, collaboration, and long-term commitment. We understand the growing role of renewable energy in India's development journey and the opportunities for Corporate Social Responsibility to contribute meaningfully to the country's clean energy transition. We also partnered for coastal landscapes where mangrove restoration efforts are strengthening ecosystem resilience while supporting local communities, and learn how community-led waste management initiatives are creating sustainable livelihoods while promoting cleaner and healthier surroundings. Through stories of water conservation and restoration, we are reminded of the value of each drop and the importance of managing natural resources responsibly in an increasingly water-stressed world. The outcome emerging from the CONSERW Conclave 2025–26 encourage us to rethink the future of urban ecosystems and green spaces as cities adapt to the realities of a changing climate. Finally, we step into some of India's most ecologically significant landscapes, where efforts to conserve wildlife and protect critical habitats are helping secure a future for biodiversity while fostering coexistence between people and nature. Together, these stories demonstrate that environmental stewardship is most effective when science, community participation, and sustainable development work hand in hand.

At SBI Foundation, through the CONSERW initiative, we remain committed to supporting solutions that restore ecosystems, strengthen livelihoods, promote sustainable resource management, and build climate resilience. We believe that meaningful and lasting change is possible when communities, civil society organisations, government, researchers, and the private sector work together towards a shared vision of sustainability.

We hope this edition inspires reflection, dialogue, action and reinforces the importance of collective responsibility in building a future where people and nature thrive together.

Reaching the Last Mile: Remarks from President & COO

At SBI Foundation, we believe that meaningful environmental action requires balancing ecological conservation with community well-being. Through the CONSERW initiative, we support efforts that strengthen eco - systems, promote sustainable resource management, & build climate resilience across diverse landscapes.

In this edition of The CONSERWation Story, we bring together perspectives on renewable energy, ecosystem restoration, waste management, water conservation, urban resilience, and wildlife conservation. These stories highlight how communities, practitioners, and institutions are working together to address environmental challenges while creating lasting social and ecological impact.

As CONSERW continues its journey, this publication will remain a platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and lessons from the field, while showcasing the many ways in which environmental stewardship can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient India.



Pratyush Mehrotra, President & COO, SBI Foundation

From Financial Support to Success: Remarks from CFO & Chief Administrator

Sustainable development is strengthened by responsible stewardship, where thoughtful investments and collaborative action create lasting value for communities and the environment. The stories in these pages demonstrate how investments in renewable energy, ecosystem restoration, water conservation, waste management, and wildlife conservation are delivering measurable impact while promoting resilience and sustainable growth.

They reaffirm that meaningful change is achieved when financial responsibility goes hand in hand with innovation and strong partnerships. At SBI Foundation, we remain committed to supporting initiatives that generate lasting environmental and social impact through responsible and transparent use of resources. We hope these stories inspire continued collaboration towards a more resilient and sustainable future.

Sushil Kumar Verma, Chief Financial Officer & Chief Administrator, SBI Foundation



Beyond Numbers, Towards Lasting Impact

As we bring out this edition of The CONSERWation Story, we continue our effort to create a platform that captures the diverse experiences, ideas, and initiatives emerging from the CONSERW programme. This edition reflects the many ways in which communities, institutions, and practitioners are responding to environmental challenges while working towards a more sustainable and resilient future. The stories featured in this issue explore themes ranging from renewable energy and ecosystem restoration to waste management, water conservation, urban resilience, and wildlife conservation. Together, they highlight the importance of collaboration, innovation, and community participation in driving meaningful environmental action. As CONSERW continues to grow, documenting and sharing these experiences remains an important part of our journey, helping inspire greater awareness, learning, and collective action towards environmental sustainability.

Ritesh Sain, Program Head - CONSERW & ACE



Editor's Note

I present to you the fourth edition of The CONSERWation Story. This issue brings together perspectives on renewable energy, ecosystem restoration, waste management, water conservation, urban resilience, & wildlife conservation, highlighting the collective efforts shaping a more sustainable and resilient future.

Through stories from communities, practitioners, and conservation partners, the edition showcases innovative approaches to environmental stewardship and sustainable development. We thank our contributors, reviewers, implementing partners, and readers for their continued support, and remain committed to fostering knowledge, dialogue, and action for conservation.

Jeevan X Kodiyan, Assistant Manager - CONSERW



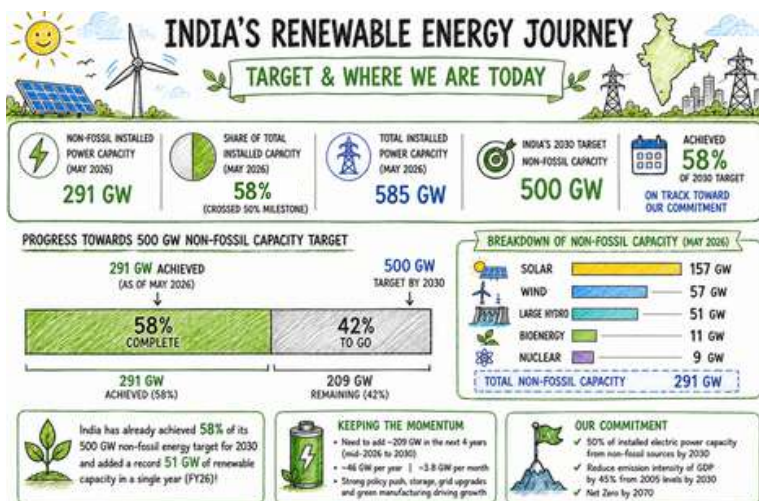
FUELING INDIA'S RENEWABLE FUTURE

Leveraging CSR to Power India's Clean Energy Transition

Pratyush Mehrotra

India's renewable energy is among the country's proudest economic achievements. The nation crossed the halfway mark of over 50% of installed power capacity from non-fossil sources in mid-2025, five years ahead of its Paris Agreement commitment and is comfortably on track toward its 500 GW non-fossil target for 2030.

However, energy transition measured purely in gigawatts tells only half the story. The other half is about land, livelihoods, skills, and trust. This is precisely the half where Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has a role to play that policy and project finance cannot fully discharge on their own.



The Gap Between Megawatts and Communities

Utility-scale renewable energy projects by design are capital and land intensive but comparatively light on local employment once the construction ends. A 500 MW solar park may need thousands of workers to build, but only a few dozen to operate. For villages that once hosted grazing land or marginal farms, the arrival of a solar park can mean upfront compensation but often little durable change in local livelihoods, skills, or institutions.

Renewable Energy Projects are built around tariffs, capacity utilisation, and financing costs and not around funding schools, water systems, or vocational training in host villages. That is the space where CSR funds which are not tied to a project's own commercial return can come into play.

Five Pillars for CSR Intervention

1. Building Skills for the Green Economy: India will require a large workforce of technicians for solar operations, wind maintenance, battery storage, and emerging sectors such as green hydrogen. CSR supported training programmes, can prepare youth from project-affected communities for these opportunities while promoting greater participation of women in the clean energy workforce.

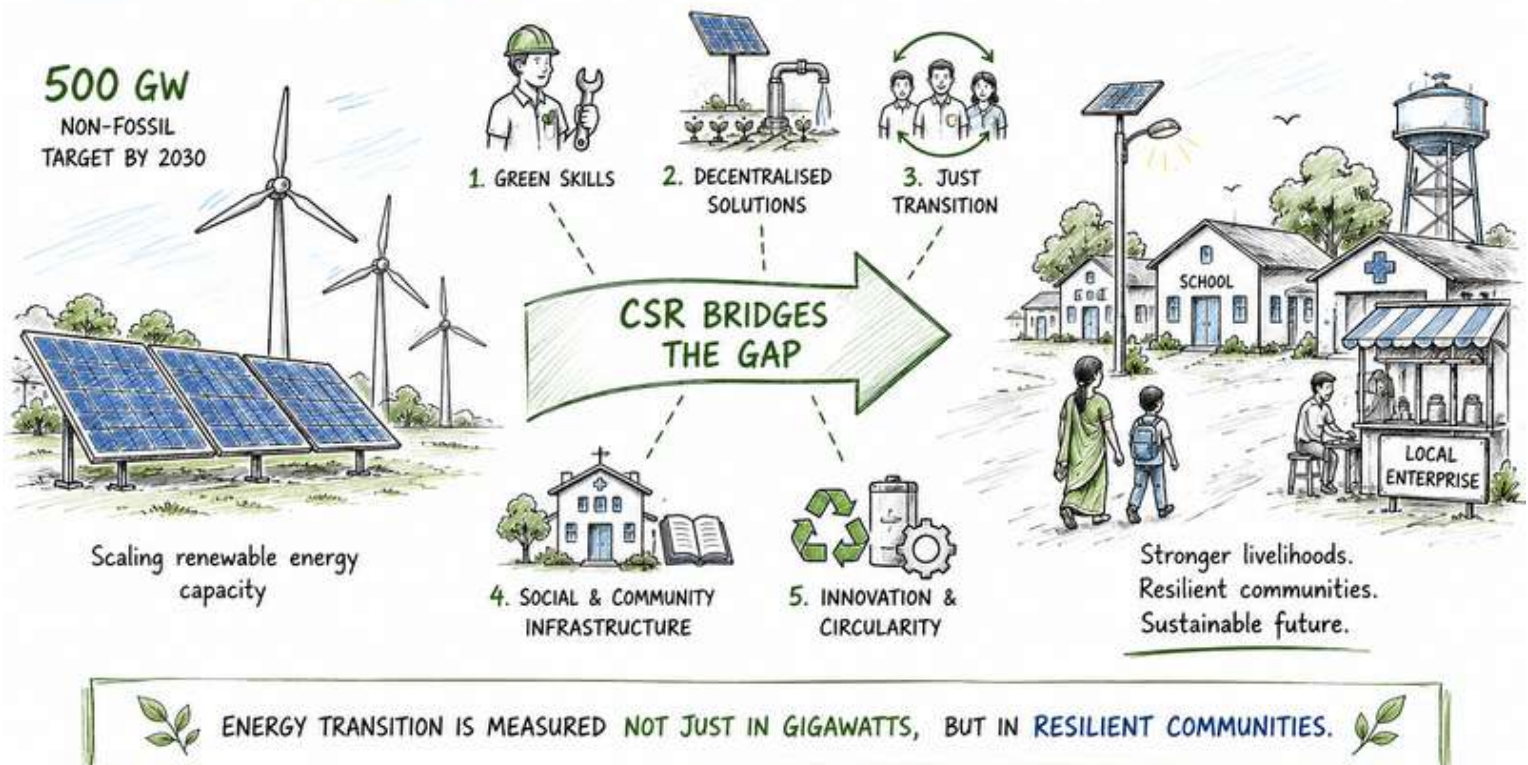
2. Advancing Decentralized Renewable Energy (DRE) Solutions: Small-scale interventions such as solar-powered irrigation pumps, cold storage facilities, mini-grids, and charging infrastructure can significantly improve rural livelihoods. While these projects may not attract commercial investment at scale, they are well suited for CSR funding and can deliver tangible community benefits.

3. Facilitating a Just Transition: As India gradually diversifies away from fossil-fuel-dependent growth models, communities linked to coal mining and thermal power generation will require support to adapt. CSR can finance reskilling, livelihood diversification, and local enterprise development, helping ensure that the transition remains socially equitable.

4. Strengthening Social Community Infrastructure: Investments in education, healthcare, water, sanitation, and community assets near renewable energy projects can improve local acceptance and ensure that communities experience the transition as a source of development rather than disruption.

5. Incubating Innovation and Circularity: Emerging challenges such as battery recycling, solar panel circularity, energy storage, and grid integration require patient capital that traditional project finance often cannot provide. CSR can help incubate innovative solutions and pilot projects that later become commercially viable.

CSR POWERS INDIA'S ENERGY TRANSITION



From Philanthropy to Strategic Integration

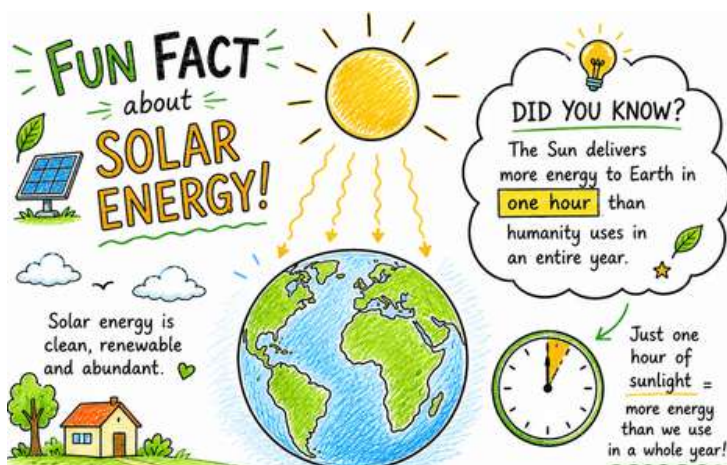
To maximize the impact, CSR must move beyond fragmented philanthropy and become a strategic pillar of India's clean energy transition. This will require a shift towards the geographies where renewable energy projects operate and a tighter alignment with national programmes such as PM-KUSUM and PM Surya Ghar Yojana.

As India builds a sophisticated climate finance ecosystem through green bonds, blended finance, and sustainable finance Taxonomy and frameworks, CSR represents a distinct form of

capital which is purpose-driven, patient and localized.

While commercial finance can build solar parks, wind farms, and transmission networks, CSR can build the human capital, local institutions, livelihoods, and community trust that make these investments sustainable over the long term.

Ultimately, India's energy transition will be measured not only by the gigawatts it installs, but by the resilience, and prosperity it secures for the communities living alongside it.



Pratyush Mehrotra.

President & COO
SBI Foundation

About the Author

Pratyush Mehrotra is the President and COO of SBI Foundation. With a professional interest in sustainability, ESG, and climate finance, he has spent much of his career working at the intersection of finance and development. Outside of work, he enjoys playing cricket and remains a keen follower of the game.

FROM ANCIENT FLAMES TO THE GREAT FIREBALL

Humanity's transition to a Renewable Future

Jeevan X Kodiyan

On a cold evening hundreds of thousands of years ago, a small group of early humans gathered around a fire. The flames provided warmth against the night, protection from predators, and a place to cook food. To those sitting around it, fire was a tool of survival. In hindsight, it was something much greater; it was humanity's first energy revolution.



The story of civilization is, in many ways, the story of energy.

Long before electricity, engines, and industrial machinery, human societies depended on the energy available directly from nature. Firewood provided heat and light. Human & animal labour powered agriculture, transportation, & construction. Wind filled the sails of ships and turned early mills. Rivers drove waterwheels that ground grain & supported small industries. Life moved at a pace determined largely by the energy that could be harnessed locally.

For thousands of years, this arrangement served humanity well. Villages grew into towns, trade routes expanded, and civilizations flourished. Yet energy remained limited. Wood had to be gathered, animals had to be fed, and physical labour constrained the scale of what societies could achieve.

As populations increased and economies expanded, the search for more concentrated and reliable sources of energy intensified.

The answer; lay right beneath our feet.

Coal had been known and used in various forms for centuries, but it was during the eighteenth century that it began to transform the world. Inventors and engineers discovered how to harness coal to power steam engines, and the consequences were profound. Factories no longer depended on rivers. Production could continue regardless of season or weather. Railways connected cities and regions that had once been separated by days or weeks of travel. Steamships crossed oceans with unprecedented reliability. The Industrial Revolution was, at its heart, an energy revolution.

Coal enabled humanity to move beyond the limitations of muscle power, animal labour, and seasonal water flows. It provided access to immense stores of energy accumulated over millions of years, driving economic growth and technological innovation on a scale never before seen.

Then, came oil.

Unlike coal, which first powered factories and steam engines, oil initially found widespread use as a source of light. Refined into kerosene, it illuminated homes and streets during the nineteenth century, providing a cleaner and more affordable alternative to many existing fuels. Its true transformative potential, however, emerged with the invention of the internal combustion engine. As automobiles, trucks, ships, and aircraft became increasingly common, petroleum evolved from a lighting fuel into the engine of modern mobility.



Oil wells in Baku, Azerbaijan, from *The Romance of Modern Chemistry* by James Charles Philip, 1909.

By the early twentieth century, oil was powering transportation networks, mechanized agriculture, and industrial expansion across the world. Its high energy density, versatility, and ease of transport made it indispensable to rapidly modernizing economies. Natural gas soon followed, finding widespread use in electricity generation, manufacturing, and households. Together, coal, oil, and natural gas formed the foundation of the modern energy system.

Over time, fossil fuels became so deeply embedded in everyday life that their presence often goes unnoticed. The electricity that powers homes and offices, the fuel that transports people and goods, the fertilizers used to grow food, and countless products used in daily life all depend, directly or indirectly, on fossil fuels. Modern supply chains, healthcare systems, manufacturing industries, telecom networks, and transportation infrastructure have all been shaped by the availability of abundant and affordable energy.

The electricity that powers homes and offices, the fuel that transports people and goods, the fertilizers used to grow food, the materials used in construction, and countless products used in daily life all depend, directly or indirectly, on fossil fuels. Modern supply chains, healthcare systems, manufacturing industries, telecommunications networks, and transportation infrastructure have been built upon the availability of abundant and affordable energy.

The scale of this dependence is difficult to overstate.

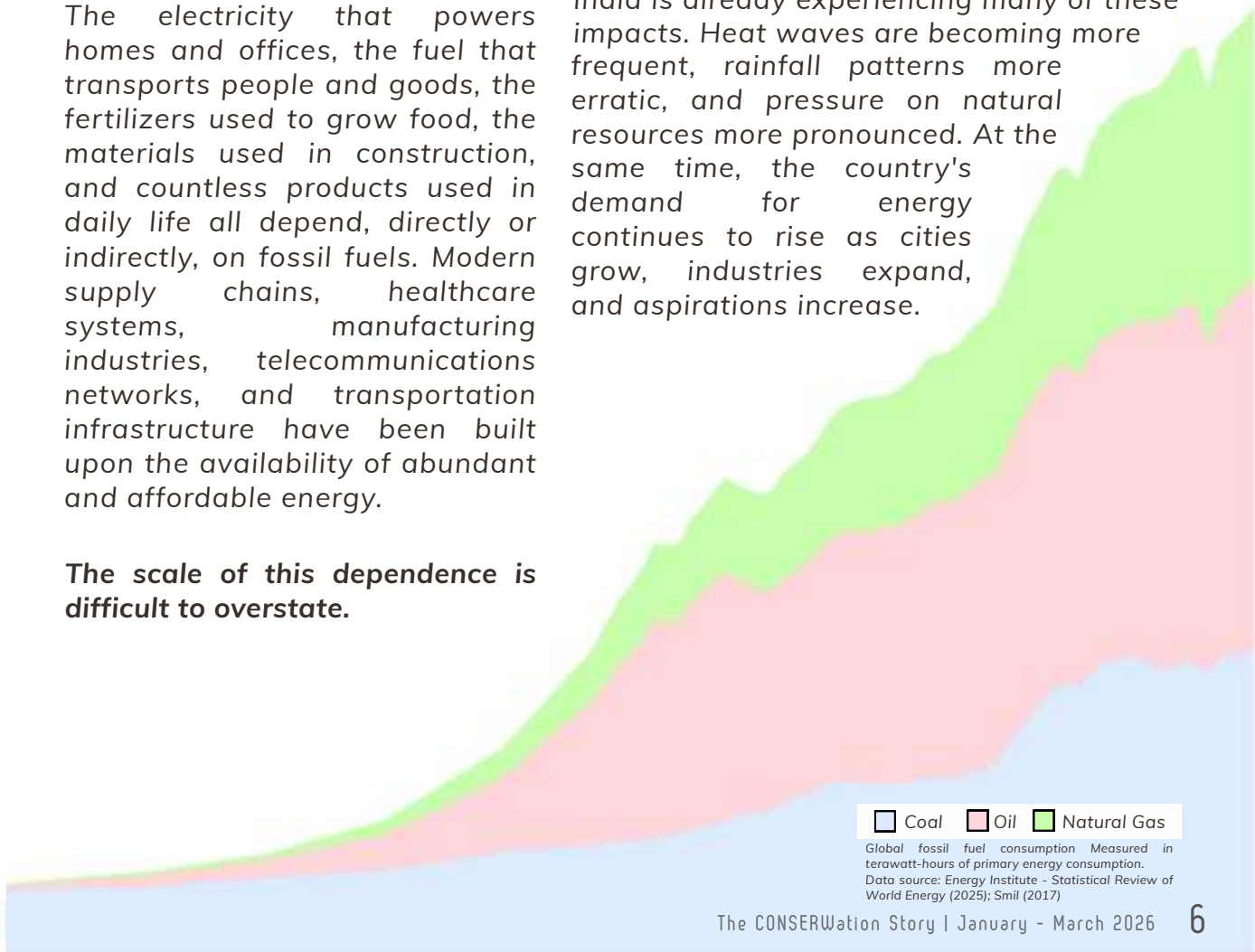
For more than two centuries, fossil fuels have powered unprecedented improvements in living standards. They have supported industrialization, expanded access to education and healthcare, enabled global trade, and helped lift billions of people out of poverty. The modern world is, in many respects, a product of the fossil fuel age.

Yet every energy source carries consequences.

The same fuels that enabled extraordinary progress have also contributed to environmental challenges that are becoming increasingly visible. The combustion of coal, oil, and natural gas releases greenhouse gases that accumulate in the atmosphere, driving climate change. Across the world, rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, extreme weather events, and ecological disruptions are affecting communities, economies, and natural systems.

India is already experiencing many of these impacts. Heat waves are becoming more frequent, rainfall patterns more erratic, and pressure on natural resources more pronounced. At the same time, the country's demand for energy continues to rise as cities grow, industries expand, and aspirations increase.

140,000 TWh
120,000 TWh
100,000 TWh
80,000 TWh
60,000 TWh
40,000 TWh
20,000 TWh
0 TWh



This has brought the world to another important moment in its energy journey. Just as societies once transitioned from wood to coal and later from coal to oil and gas, the twenty-first century is witnessing the rise of renewable energy.

In many ways, renewable energy is both humanity's oldest and newest source of power.



Long before coal mines and oil wells, people relied on wood, wind, water, and sunlight to meet their energy needs. What distinguishes today's renewable energy revolution is not the resources themselves, but the technologies that allow them to be harnessed with unprecedented efficiency and scale. Hydroelectric dams, solar panels, and modern wind turbines represent the latest chapter in humanity's long effort to capture the energy provided freely by nature.

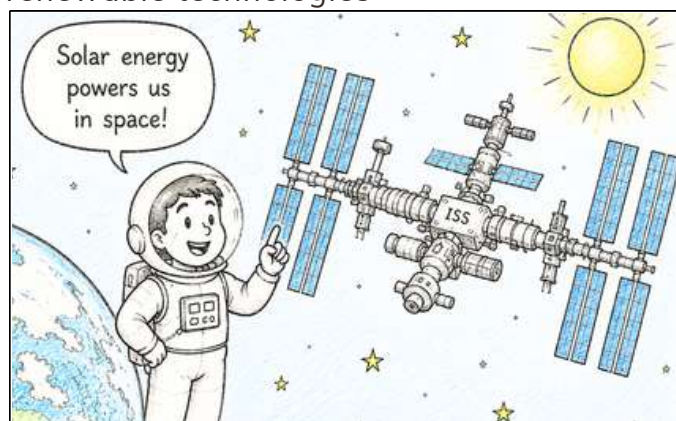
Unlike fossil fuels, Renewable Energy (RE) sources are continually replenished by natural processes. Sunlight, wind, flowing water, and biomass offer opportunities to generate power without depleting finite resources. Over the past few decades, rapid advances in technology have made these energy sources increasingly efficient, reliable, and affordable, transforming them from niche alternatives into mainstream components of the global energy system.

For India, the potential is particularly significant. With abundant sunshine across much of the country, strong wind resources in several regions, and a growing ecosystem of innovation and investment, India is well-positioned to emerge as a global leader in renewable energy. Solar panels are appearing on rooftops, schools, hospitals, industries, and public buildings, while wind farms are contributing to the electricity needs of entire regions.

In rural areas, decentralized renewable energy systems are bringing reliable power closer to communities, reducing dependence on distant grids and expanding access to essential services.

Yet the significance of renewable energy extends beyond simply replacing one source of electricity with another. Every major energy transition in history has reshaped the way societies function, and renewable energy has the potential to do the same. Buildings are increasingly being designed not only as consumers of energy but also as producers through rooftop solar systems and building-integrated technologies. Floating solar installations are transforming reservoirs and water bodies into productive energy assets while helping reduce water evaporation. In agriculture, solar-powered irrigation systems are improving reliability and lowering operating costs for farmers.

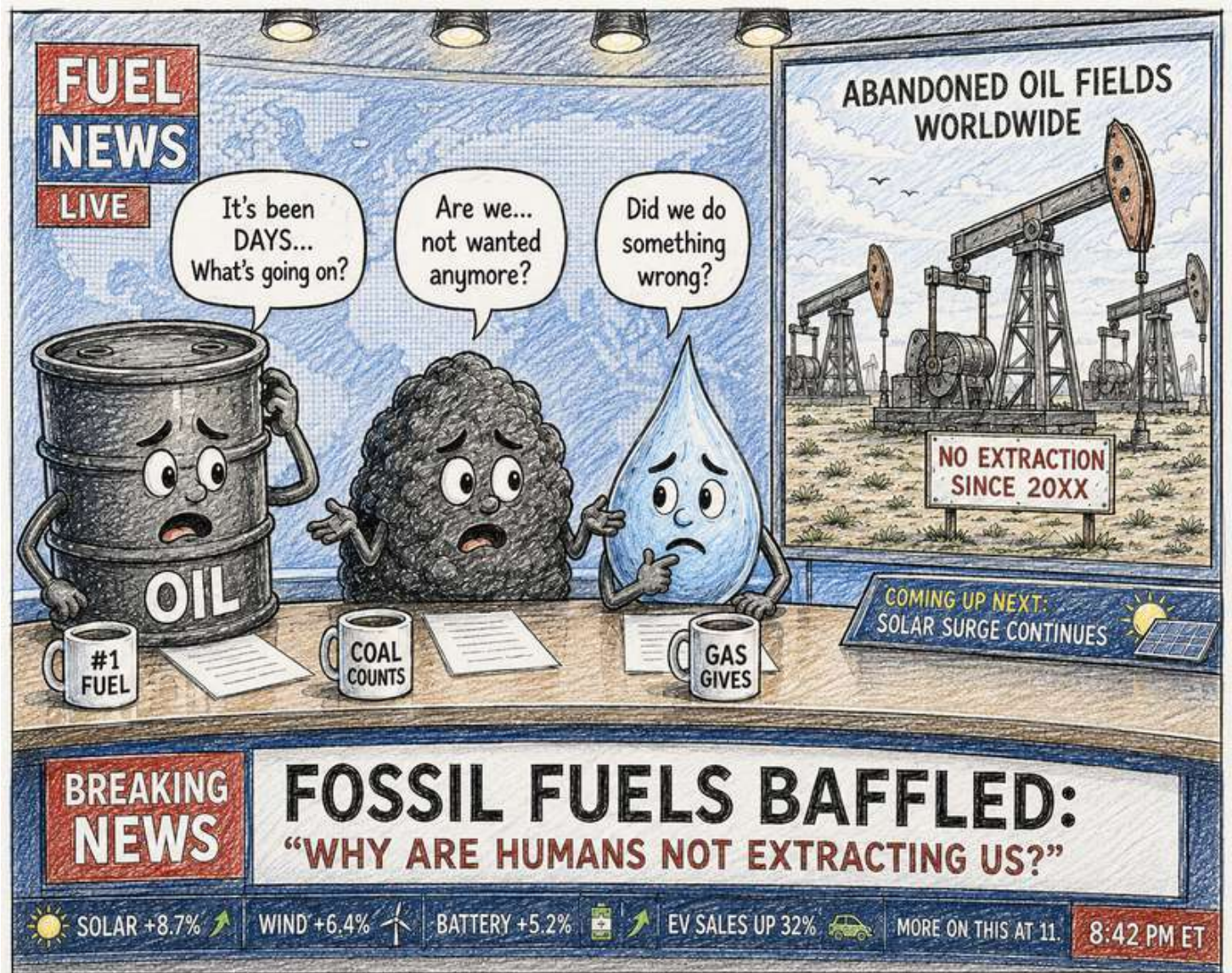
Advances in battery storage, smart-grid technologies, & renewable energy systems are transforming how electricity is generated, distributed, and consumed. Future energy networks are expected to be more decentralized and resilient, enabling communities, institutions, & industries to generate, store, and manage their own power. At the same time, renewable energy is expanding into sectors traditionally dependent on fossil fuels. Green hydrogen is emerging as a promising solution for heavy industry & long-distance transport, while renewable -powered desalination systems & clean-energy data centres demonstrate the growing versatility of renewable technologies.



Perhaps less widely appreciated is the role RE already plays beyond Earth.

REs are even supporting activities beyond Earth. Solar power has long been the primary energy source for satellites and space missions, including the International Space Station, and is expected to remain vital for future space exploration.

As India continues its development journey, renewable energy is poised to become an increasingly important foundation for a more resilient, efficient, and sustainable future.



These developments highlight an important reality: renewable energy is not simply an environmental alternative. It is a reliable and adaptable source of power capable of supporting everything from rural electrification and industrial production to scientific research and space exploration.

The shift towards renewable energy is not a rejection of the fossil fuel era. Coal, oil, and natural gas played a crucial role in shaping modern society. Rather, renewable energy represents the next stage in humanity's evolving relationship with energy, one that seeks to sustain development while reducing environmental impacts.

One day, the person writing this article, the people who published it, and perhaps even you, dear reader, may all become fossil fuels. Let us hope that when that day arrives, humanity has long since moved on. After all, the greatest tribute to the fossil-fuel age may be for future generations to regard it as exactly that; a thing of the past, pun entirely intended.



Jeevan Xaviour Kodiyan
Assistant Manager
CONSERW, SBI Foundation

CONSERW CONCLAVE

Arya Meher B S

Recognising the growing challenges posed by climate change, air pollution, and water stress in urban India, CONSERW organised the CONSERW Conclave 2025–26 on 18th March 2026 under the theme “Conserving Urban Ecosystems and Green Spaces: Air and Water for a Changing Climate.”

The Conclave comprised of two panel discussions and working sessions featuring experts, policymakers, practitioners, corporate leaders, and civil society representatives to deliberate on sustainable and scalable solutions for strengthening urban resilience. Through focused panel discussions and stakeholder engagement, the event explored the role of urban ecosystems, green infrastructure, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in addressing environmental challenges while fostering collaborative action towards cleaner, healthier, and more climate-resilient cities.

The CONSERW Conclave featured two panel discussions that explored critical environmental challenges facing urban India and identified practical pathways for climate resilience and pollution management.



Mr. Swapan Dhar, MD & CEO, SBI Foundation, inaugurating the conclave by watering the plant

Panel 1: Understanding and Adapting to Climate Change in Urban Ecosystems

The first panel highlighted the urgent need to position climate change as a central consideration in urban planning and decision-making, particularly in rapidly expanding cities. Panellists underscored the importance of adopting decentralised, nature-based solutions as effective and scalable approaches to addressing urban climate risks such as heat stress, flooding, and ecosystem degradation.

The discussion emphasized the role of urban forests, wetlands, rain gardens, green corridors, and permeable surfaces in strengthening urban resilience.

These interventions were recognised for their ability to enhance stormwater management, support groundwater recharge, reduce urban flooding, and mitigate the urban heat island effect. Panellists further stressed that successful climate adaptation requires context-specific solutions tailored to local ecological and socio-economic conditions.



Panel 1 (from left) : Mr. Saransh Bajpai (Moderator), Associate Program Director for Climate Economics and Finance at WRI-India; Mr. Kartikey Chaturvedi, Program Associate, Council on Energy, Environment and Water; Mr. Harshvardhan, CEO, Consortium for DEWATS Dissemination Society, CDD India; Ms. Sanskriti Menon, Senior Program Director, Center for Environment Education; Mr. Tikender Singh Panwar, Member, Kerala Urban Policy Commission.

The need for stronger collaboration among governments, corporates, research institutions, and civil society organisations was also highlighted. Participants called for platforms that facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices, while advocating a shift from fragmented interventions towards integrated, ecosystem-based urban planning frameworks that embed climate resilience at their core.



Panel 2: Addressing Air and Water Pollution in Urban India – Solutions and Strategic Pathways

The second panel focused on practical and scalable solutions for tackling air and water pollution in urban India. A key theme that emerged was the importance of decentralised and hyperlocal air quality monitoring systems in addressing urban pollution, particularly for critical pollutants such as PM2.5 and PM10.

Panellists noted that while source-based mitigation measures can be complex and resource-intensive in large metropolitan centres, Tier II cities present significant opportunities to adopt innovative and localised approaches to pollution management.



The discussion highlighted the value of strategically deployed air quality sensors and forecasting tools, such as the SAFAR dashboard, in identifying pollution hotspots and enabling proactive, data-driven interventions.

The panel also emphasised the need for immediate and practical measures, including mechanised dust control, improved waste management systems, and the promotion of circular economy practices. These interventions were identified as critical components of integrated, city-specific strategies aimed at reducing emissions, improving environmental quality, and enhancing public health outcomes. Collectively, the discussions reinforced the importance of collaborative action, evidence-based planning, and innovative solutions in building cleaner, healthier, and more climate-resilient urban environments.

led with Jeevamrutam

The Sustainability Store



The Conclave showcased a pop-up store by Tisser Artisan Trust displaying upcycled products from post-consumer textile waste. This initiative, led by the Textile Committee, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, in collaboration with SBI Foundation, Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC), Tisser Artisan Trust, and industry partners, demonstrates how post-consumer textile waste can be transformed into valuable products through circular economy practices.

The project aims to create a scalable and sustainable model for textile waste management by promoting responsible consumption, resource recovery, and recycling. By diverting textile waste from landfills and water bodies, the initiative contributes to reducing environmental pollution while generating livelihood opportunities through employment and enterprise development.

The products showcased at this pop-up store represent the potential of textile circularity, turning discarded materials into resources and advancing a more sustainable future for the textiles sector.

Working Group Discussions

The conclave featured five thematic Working Group Sessions that enabled participants to engage in focused discussions and develop practical recommendations for strengthening urban environmental sustainability and climate resilience.



Ms. Aditi Pandey, CDD; Mr. Sanjay Singh, Paramarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan; Mr. Shailesh Kotru Gramin Vikas Trust; Ms. Ruchi, SBI Foundation; Mr. Vimal Dubey, NIWCYD; Mr. Parveen Kumar SBI Foundation; Maulik Sisodia, Tarun Bharat Sangh, Debendra Kumar Naik, SBI Foundation.

The **Urban Climate Resilience and Heat Risk Reduction** group focused on addressing the urban heat island effect through city-level cooling strategies. Participants recommended hotspot mapping, development of Heat Action Plans, promotion of cool roofs and terrace gardens, and collaborative CSR-led initiatives supporting nature-based cooling solutions and vulnerable urban populations.



Ms. Khushi Singh, J-PAL; Ms. Kirti Jain, Dasra; Mr. TISSER, Mr. Harshvardhan, CDD; Ms. Rajashree Verma, SBI Foundation; Mr. Aman Bhaiya SBI Foundation; Mr. Bhagvan Kesbhat, Waatavaran; Ms. Pooja, APAG; Ms. Kritika Choudhary, APAG.

The **Strengthening Urban Green and Blue Spaces** group advocated for the integration of green and blue infrastructure through Water-Sensitive Urban Design approaches. Recommendations included the use of permeable pavements, retention basins, green filter strips, and decentralised wastewater treatment systems to enhance water management and urban greening. The group also highlighted the need to explore innovative risk mitigation measures, including climate-related insurance mechanisms for vulnerable communities.

The **Urban Water Security and Pollution Management** group highlighted the growing gap between water demand and supply in urban areas and stressed the need to adopt the principles of “Reuse, Recycle, and Reduce” in urban water management. Key recommendations included mandatory rainwater harvesting, strengthening community-led water governance mechanisms, restoring urban water bodies, and establishing knowledge-sharing platforms to facilitate learning and replication of successful models.



Ms. Sanskriti Menon, NFD-CEES; Ms. Anwesha Saha, SBI Foundation; Ms. Deepti Kommera, Gravis; Mr. Parth Kumar, CSE; Mr. Kamal Kumar Murari, TISS.

The **Addressing Air Pollution in Urban Ecosystems** group emphasized a combination of awareness, action, and innovation. Recommendations included strengthening institutional capacity for implementing Clean Air Action Plans, improving construction and demolition waste management through decentralised collection systems, and promoting urban forestry interventions with a stronger focus on ecological outcomes and long-term impact.



Mr. Subhadip Mondal, SBI Foundation; Mr. Somenath Bhattacharya, SEED; Mr. Aseem Srivastava, SBI Foundation; Ms. Nehal Dholakia, Catch Foundation; Ms. Anupreeta Chaatarjee, SBI Foundation; Ms. Pallavi Rao, Heartfulness Foundation; Sweta Jhunjunuwala, Paramarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan.

The **Strengthening CSR Partnerships** group discussed ways to enhance the effectiveness of CSR investments through deeper and more strategic collaborations between corporates and implementing organisations. Participants recommended adopting a focused approach by concentrating efforts on selected themes and geographies, promoting joint learning and co-creation, and supporting long-term investments of three to ten years to achieve meaningful and sustainable ecological outcomes.

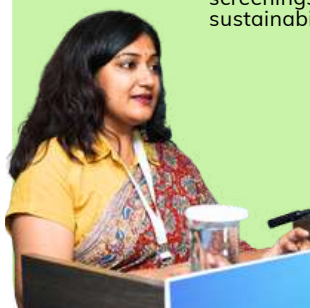


Mr. Anurag Srivastava, Atul Foundation; Ms. Aditi Dhillon, WTI; Mr. Saransh Bajpai, WRI-India; Ms. Harshita Wadehra, WTI-India; Ms. Jyoti Verma, Roundglass Foundation; Ms. Tanisha Vishwakarma; Ms. Siddhi Kadam, SBI Foundation; Mr. Anjan Jena, CORE.

The working group discussions underscored the importance of integrated planning, collaborative partnerships, community participation, and long-term commitment in building resilient, sustainable, and climate-responsive urban ecosystems.

Environmental Narratives on Screen

As part of the conclave, two short films were screened highlighting important conservation issues. The screenings offered practical insights from the field and provided an engaging complement to the discussions on sustainability and conservation held during the conclave.



The film 'Kannur Kandal project' produced by SBI Foundation as part of the project 'SBIF Aranya': Restoring Mangroves in Kerala with the Wildlife Trust of India focused on the significance of mangrove ecosystems and the need to protect these vital coastal habitats. The film was introduced by Ms. Aditi Dhillon, WTI.

The film 'Jwala' was introduced by Dr. Anish Andheria, made as part of the project 'SBIF CONSERW': Heater of Hope with Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT). The explored efforts to reduce human-tiger conflict and promote coexistence between communities and wildlife.



The CONSERW Conclave 2025–26 provided a valuable platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaborative problem-solving on some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing urban India. Through insightful panel discussions and focused working group deliberations, participants highlighted the importance of integrating climate resilience, pollution management, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable urban planning into future development pathways.

The conclave underscored the critical role of CSR in supporting innovative, scalable, and long-term solutions through strategic partnerships and community-centred approaches. The recommendations and insights emerging from the discussions will help guide future programme design and investments under the CONSERW initiative. A compendium capturing the deliberations and recommendations of the conclave is published with the support of knowledge partner of the Conclave CDC India. We hope the Conclave will wider learning, inform policy and practice, and contribute to building cleaner, healthier, and more resilient urban ecosystems across India.



Mr. Jagannath Sahoo, Former President & COO, SBI Foundation concluding the conclave with closing remarks and vote of thanks.



Arya Meher B S

Assistant Manager
CONSERW, SBI Foundation

URBAN HEAT ISLANDS: A UNIQUE CHALLENGE FOR URBAN INDIA

Why India's Cities Are Becoming Heat Traps

Shivam Sharma

In late May 2026, India dominated global temperature rankings, with 97 of the world's 100 hottest cities located in the country on one of the month's most extreme days. The number is striking, but it tells only part of the story. This is not just climate change arriving at the city gate. It is also a design problem. India's urban future makes this especially urgent. Officially, about 31.2% of the country is urban. The Economic Survey 2023–24 expects that more than 40% of Indians will live in urban areas by 2030.

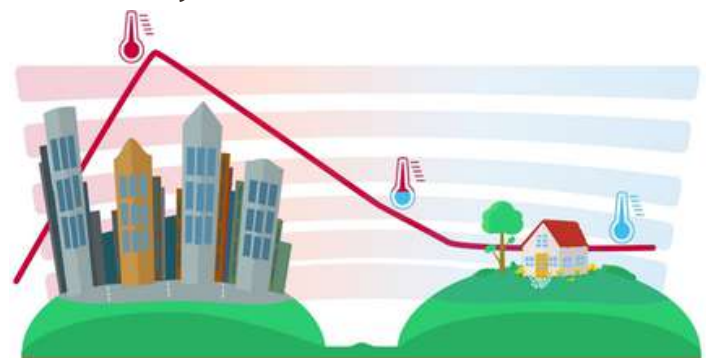
Buildings, roads, and other hard surfaces absorb and re-emit more heat than natural landscapes, while limited greenery reduces cooling from shade and evaporation. The phenomenon is known as the urban heat island effect. In simple terms, cities do not just experience heat; they trap and intensify it.

The causes are built into the city itself. Asphalt, concrete, dense construction, traffic, and air-conditioning exhaust all add to the heat load. Narrow streets and tall buildings can block airflow. Indian city planning has historically prioritised roads and buildings over shade and green space. Lack of trees and parks removes the city's natural cooling system. Many Indian metros have very little tree cover for their size. The result is not only hotter afternoons, but warmer nights, when people and infrastructure get little relief.

The human cost is severe. Between 2001 and 2019, India officially recorded 19,693 heatstroke deaths, though researchers say this is likely an underestimate because heat-related deaths are often misclassified. A 2026 *Frontiers* study found that even a multi-day heatwave can produce tens of thousands of excess deaths nationwide.

The burden is often more pronounced in urban areas, where the urban heat island effect intensifies already dangerous temperatures. Outdoor workers, daily-wage labourers, children, and older adults are among the most vulnerable because they have the least protection from prolonged exposure.

The answer is not just emergency response after a heatwave arrives. Cities need to be designed to stay cooler in the first place. That means more trees, wider shade cover, parks, ponds, wetlands, and rain gardens. These features do more than lower temperatures: they also help absorb stormwater, reduce flooding, and make public spaces more usable. Cooler roofing and paving materials can cut down the amount of heat stored during the day. Better street design can also improve airflow and reduce the heat trapped between buildings. Even small changes, when scaled across a city, can make a real difference.



Graphical representation: urban vs rural heating.

This also needs policy support. Heat action plans must be updated, funded, and tied to local planning rules. New housing, roads, and commercial projects should be reviewed for heat impact, not just traffic or water demand. Public spaces need drinking water, shade, and rest areas, especially in dense neighbourhoods and around transit hubs.

Without intervention, every new block of asphalt deepens tomorrow's heat problem. But with shade, water-sensitive planning, and greener streets, cities can be made safer and more liveable even as temperatures rise. The question is no longer whether India's cities will heat up. It is whether they will be designed to cool down.



Shivam Sharma

**Assistant Manager
CONSERW, SBI Foundation**

WHEN MANGROVES LEARN TO WALK: THE LIVING EXPERIMENT OF THE THOOTHUKUDI COAST

From 150 acres planted to forests that seed themselves; keeping hope rooted when the monsoon fails

Rajendraprasad Nallathambi



Avicennia marina seedlings planted in 2024 are now tall, healthy and flowering at the Vaippar estuarine restoration site. Photo: PAD / SBIF CONSERW: ARANYA Project.

At the edge of the Thoothukudi coastline, where the land is neither fully land nor fully sea, something quietly extraordinary is happening. It is a story of a forest that grew where none existed and then, without any human instruction, began to walk and grow another.

This is the living journey of SBIF CONSERW: ARANYA, a flagship initiative supported by the SBI Foundation, demonstrating what happens when community dedication partners with nature's stubborn resilience.

The First Steps: A Forest That Multiplied

The journey began between 2010 and 2015. People's Action for Development (PAD) a community organization working on coastal conservation in the Gulf of Mannar since 1985 planted 1,50,000 seedlings of *Rhizophora* (the iconic stilt-rooted mangrove) across 150 acres of estuarine land near Punnakayal. The planting was deliberate, but what followed was something no blueprint could have predicted.

With a foothold, nature took over.

Today, that original 150-acre plantation has naturally expanded into nearly 300 acres of dense, self-sustaining mangrove forest. The trees produced torpedo-shaped seedlings called propagules, which dropped into the water, drifted on tidal currents, and anchored themselves further up the coast at Punnakayal. A decade after the first seedling went into the ground, one act of deliberate restoration had quietly seeded an entirely new forest. The mangroves had literally learned to walk.

A Tale of Two Seedlings

Building on this natural momentum, March 2024 marked the launch of the next ambitious phase under the SBIF CONSERW: ARANYA project, covering the broader Punnakayal coastal ecosystem of Thoothukudi District. PAD established a community-managed nursery at the Vaippar estuarine site and planted 2,00,000 seedlings of *Avicennia marina* (the grey mangrove) across 200 acres of estuarine land. Today, at roughly two and a half years old, those trees are tall, healthy, and beautifully flowering.



The original 1,50,000-seedling *Rhizophora* plantation near Punnakayal, planted between 2010 and 2015, has naturally expanded to nearly 300 acres of dense mangrove forest. Photo: PAD.

The estuary is rapidly transforming back into the vibrant ecosystem it once was. PAD exceeded this target, establishing 2,50,000 seedlings at no additional cost to SBI Foundation, a testament to the community's enthusiasm and resource mobilisation capacity.

However, ecological restoration is rarely a straight line.

In 2025, a second species 2,00,000 *Rhizophora* seedlings went into the same Vaippar site. Then, the monsoon failed. The crucial estuary mouth closed, cutting off the tidal flushing of seawater and sediment that these specific mangroves depend on. While the grey mangroves thrived, the *Rhizophora* seedlings stalled stunted, but stubbornly holding on.

The Unglamorous Work of Keeping Hope Rooted

When the rains ceased, PAD and the local community didn't give up. Instead, they took action by using mechanical pumps to extract water from the sea and the Vaippar river, mimicking the natural tidal flushing that the monsoon didn't deliver. This process is demanding and requires daily effort, but it's effective salinity levels remain controlled, and the seedlings continue to survive.

Species-wise Plantation Achievements and Current Status of Restored Mangrove Areas

Species Planted	Project Phase	Current Status
<i>Avicennia marina</i> (Grey Mangrove)	Planted March 2024 – 2,00,000 seedlings (2,50,000 achieved)	✅ Tall, healthy and flowering.
<i>Rhizophora apiculata</i> (Stilt Mangrove)	Planted Monsoon 2025 – 2,00,000 seedlings (2,50,000 achieved)	⚠️ Stunted by 2025 monsoon failure; estuary mouth closed. Kept alive via artificial flushing. Seedlings are surviving.

Side-by-side contrast — *Avicennia* (thriving) vs *Rhizophora* (stunted), Vaippar 2026

Two species, two stories: *Avicennia marina* thrives (left) while *Rhizophora* seedlings remain stunted following the 2025 monsoon failure (right). Both; being actively tended at Vaippar. Photo: PAD / SBIF CONSERW: ARANYA Project.

Looking Forward

Grounded in the proven success of the Punnakayal site, the PAD team expects that within three to four years and with a return to normal hydrological cycles the Vaippar site will also close its canopy and become a dense, thriving forest comparable to what stands at Punnakayal today.

Through the SBIF CONSERW: ARANYA project, SBI Foundation is doing far more than funding environmental milestones. It is partnering with coastal communities to give nature the chance to heal itself, one wave, one pump, and one walking mangrove at a time. At Vaippar, one species is flowering, and one is waiting — but both are being fiercely tended toward a greener tomorrow.

PAD team / community operating water pump at Vaippar estuary



Community members and PAD field staff operate mechanical pumps to simulate tidal flushing at the Vaippar estuary, keeping salinity levels viable for the struggling *Rhizophora* seedlings. Photo: PAD / SBIF CONSERW: ARANYA Project.



Rajendraprasad Nallathambi Ph.D

Co-Founder/Executive Director
Peoples Action for Development (PAD)

About the Author

Rajendraprasad and his wife, Lucial Joy, were deeply moved by a tragic factory accident in Sivakasi in 1985 that claimed the lives of 54 children. Determined to help keep children out of hazardous work and in school, they founded People's Action for Development (PAD). Forty years later, their vision continues to inspire PAD's work, empowering communities and creating opportunities for a safer, more hopeful future.



THE LAST DROP WE NEVER NOTICE

How much is a drop of water worth?

Ankita Murudkar

If you had asked me this question a year ago, I probably would have smiled and moved on.

After all, water was always there. In my kitchen. In my bathroom. In the bottle delivered to my doorstep within minutes. Like millions living in cities, I had never really paused to think about it. Then one field visit changed the answer forever. It was an ordinary morning. The kind of morning that starts with a rush of daily chores, unfinished tasks, and thoughts already racing towards the day ahead.

I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast before leaving for work. As I finished making chapatis and stepped out of the kitchen, the doorbell rang. While walking towards the door, something caught my attention. The kitchen tap wasn't fully closed.

A tiny drop of water fell.

Tip...

A few seconds later, another.

Tip...

Then another. Without much thought, I turned the tap off and carried on with my day.

After all, it was just a few drops of water.

A few days later, while washing clothes, a sudden power cut interrupted the washing machine cycle. When the power returned, the machine restarted and consumed more water than usual. Again, it seemed normal. Nothing extraordinary. Nothing worth remembering. Or so I thought.

A few months later, I found myself in a remote village during a field visit. It was one of those scorching afternoons when the sun seemed determined to squeeze every last drop of moisture from the earth. As our vehicle made its way through the village, I couldn't help but notice the dry landscape around me: the parched fields, the dusty pathways, and the silence that often accompanies scarcity. Then, amidst that silence, I noticed a small group of women gathered around an old well. Curious, I walked towards them, unaware that the next few minutes would challenge everything I thought I knew about the value of water. I assumed they were dawdling



Stakeholder meetings pre water conservation intervention

water. What I saw next left me speechless. One woman had climbed deep inside the well. Not a few feet. Much deeper. The water level had fallen so low that she could not even fill a vessel directly. She was collecting water in her cupped hands and slowly pouring it into a container. Handful by handful. Drop by drop. Another woman stood above, waiting to pull the vessel up. For a moment, I simply stood there. Unable to speak. Unable to move. The ground beneath my feet seemed to disappear.

As I watched her struggle for every drop, an uncomfortable thought crossed my mind. Back in Mumbai, whenever I run out of drinking water, I don't even leave my house. I simply open my phone. Open Zepto or Blinkit. Add a bottle of water to the cart and within minutes, someone rings my doorbell. The entire process takes less time than making a cup of tea. But here, water could not be delivered in ten minutes. Here, water demanded patience. Here, water demanded effort. Here, water demanded courage. For me, water was convenience. For her, water was survival. The contrast was heartbreaking. And suddenly, those tiny drops falling from my kitchen tap flashed before my eyes.

Tip... Tip... Tip...

For the first time, they no longer seemed insignificant.

That evening, I could not stop thinking about what I had witnessed. How many times had I left a tap running while answering a phone call? How many times had I allowed water to flow unnecessarily while washing dishes? How many times had I assumed that water would always be available tomorrow? Perhaps this is the irony of abundance. We value things only when they become scarce. That day, I realized that water scarcity is not merely a challenge of nature. It is a challenge of access, conservation, a collective responsibility. The woman in that well was not facing a one-day crisis; she was confronting a reality that millions across rural India continue to live with every day. That day, I understood why initiatives like Jaldhara are not merely water conservation projects.

They are interventions in dignity.

And above all, they are interventions in hope.

The word Jaldhara combines two powerful ideas.

"Jal" means water.

"Dhara" means a continuous flow.

Together, Jaldhara represents the uninterrupted flow of life itself.

Over the past year, SBI Foundation and CONSERW have supported Jaldhara projects across some of India's most water-stressed regions. From the deserts of Rajasthan in districts such as Phalodi, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Barmer and Tijara, to villages in Mahisagar district of Gujarat, Dindori and Chhatarpur districts of Madhya Pradesh, Jalna district of Maharashtra, and communities in Assam, these projects are helping villages strengthen their relationship with water.



Water discharge monitoring by CHIRAG

The interventions may sound simple. Percolation tanks. Earthen bunds. Continuous Contour Trenches (CCTs). Check Dam. Farm bunding. Recharge shafts. Tankas. Khadins. Nadi rejuvenation. Spring shed development. Construction of new water harvesting structures. Revival of existing ones. But their impact extends far beyond engineering. Every structure captures rainwater that would otherwise be lost.

Every recharge structure strengthens groundwater reserves.

Every rejuvenated water body becomes a source of security for families that depend on it.

This year's delayed and uneven monsoon is a reminder of how vulnerable our water resources are to climatic variations.

Even after mid-June, several parts of Maharashtra, including Mumbai, Pune, and surrounding regions, witnessed below-normal rainfall and prolonged dry spells.

Scientists often associate such irregular rainfall patterns with large-scale climate phenomena such as El Niño, which can alter monsoon behaviour, reduce reservoir inflows, impact river flows, and slow groundwater recharge.

When rains arrive late or fall unevenly, the consequences extend far beyond agriculture. They affect drinking water availability, reservoir storage, groundwater reserves, and the livelihoods of millions. These uncertainties make water conservation and groundwater recharge initiatives like Jaldhara not just desirable, but essential for building climate-resilient communities.



Pond rejuvenation work by Heartfulness Institute

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about water is that we notice it the least when it is available and value it the most when it is gone.

The story of water is therefore not just about rivers, reservoirs, or rainfall.

It is about people.

It is about the choices we make every day.

And it is about the legacy we leave for generations yet to come.

As I conclude this story, I leave you with a few simple questions.

The next time you see a tap dripping, will you notice it or ignore it?

The next time you let water run while washing dishes or brushing your teeth, will you remember the woman standing at the bottom of that well?

The next time rain falls outside your window, will you see it merely as weather, or as a resource that sustains millions of lives?

Perhaps the future of water security does not depend only on large projects, policies, or technologies. Perhaps it begins with a change in perspective one household, one community, and one drop at a time.

Because somewhere in India, even today, a single drop of water is not just a drop.

As the saying goes,

**"पाणी वाचवणे ही केवळ सवय नाही,
तर पुढच्या पिढीला दिलेली एक निःशब्द शिदोरी आहे."**

The question is not whether water is valuable.

The question is: Do we value it enough?



Ankita Murudkar

**Assistant Manager
CONSERW, SBI Foundation**

TRANSFORMING VILLAGES THROUGH SUSTAINABLE ZERO WASTE MANAGEMENT

A Journey Towards Cleaner Communities

Nagaraj Raghava Anchan

Some projects create infrastructure. Some create livelihoods. But the most impactful projects create lasting behavioural change within communities. The Zero Waste Management initiative implemented by Hasiru Dala with the support of SBI Foundation's CONSERW programme is one such transformative journey.

The project was implemented across ten Gram Panchayats and one urban ward situated along the riverbanks of Dakshina Kannada district, namely Pavoor, Harekal, Boliyaru, Konaje, Neerumarga, Baltila, Goltamajalu, Jokatte, Pudu, Naringana, and Bengre Ward. These ecologically significant regions are located along the Netravati and Gurupura river systems, which eventually flow into the Arabian Sea.

Before the intervention, the region faced significant waste management challenges. Open dumping of waste along roadsides, drains, and riverbanks was common.

During monsoons, large quantities of plastic and mixed waste entered rivers and eventually reached the sea. Many Panchayats lacked functional waste collection systems, processing facilities remained underutilized, and awareness regarding waste segregation was limited.

Recognizing that sustainable waste management requires more than infrastructure alone, the project adopted a comprehensive approach built around three key pillars: strengthening systems, creating livelihoods, and driving behaviour change.

The first focus area involved strengthening waste management infrastructure and institutional systems. Door-to-door waste collection services were introduced and expanded, non-functional waste processing facilities were revived, and capacity-building programmes were conducted for Panchayat representatives, officials, and community stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainability.



Sanjivini Okkuta and Hasiru Dala collecting, processing and diverting waste from landfills

The results of the initiative have been significant. Active waste management systems were established across all project locations, benefiting more than 12,000 households through regular waste collection services. A total of 2,391,000 kilograms of waste has been diverted from open dumping sites, rivers, and landfills through segregation, recycling, composting, and scientific waste management practices.

Community-led environmental restoration efforts also played an important role in the project. Beach cleanups, riverbank cleanups, and village cleanliness drives resulted in the removal of approximately 92,980 kilograms of waste from environmental hotspots and dark spots, preventing pollution from reaching rivers and the Arabian Sea.

Organic waste management emerged as another major success. Nearly 112,000 kilograms of wet waste is processed every month and converted into nutrient-rich organic compost. This compost is supplied to local farmers, supporting sustainable agriculture, improving soil health, and reducing dependence on chemical inputs.

The project also addressed the growing challenge of textile waste management. Large quantities of discarded clothing that previously ended up in landfills are now being transformed into value-added products through a women-led initiative called “Sooji Mallige.” Fifteen women from Sanjeevini Self-Help Groups were trained to manufacture bags, pouches, mats, laptop bags, mobile purses, and decorative items using waste textiles. The initiative has successfully prevented approximately 5,400 kilograms of textile waste from reaching landfills while generating a monthly income of ₹10,000–15,000 for each participating woman.

The project's impact extends beyond waste management. Cleaner surroundings and improved sanitation have contributed to healthier communities. Schools have become centres of environmental awareness, while menstrual health programmes have encouraged the adoption of sustainable alternatives and improved awareness among adolescent girls.

Today, the project locations stand as examples of how community ownership, institutional support, and environmental commitment can create lasting impact. Fifty-six women have secured sustainable livelihood opportunities, thousands of households practice waste segregation, Panchayats operate functional waste management systems, and significant quantities of waste are prevented from polluting rivers, land, and coastal ecosystems.

Most importantly, communities themselves have begun taking ownership of cleanliness and environmental stewardship. Residents actively participate in cleanup drives, households segregate waste at source, and children have emerged as ambassadors of sustainable living within their families and communities.

This journey demonstrates that sustainable waste management is not merely about handling waste. It is about transforming behaviours, strengthening local institutions, creating livelihoods, protecting natural ecosystems, and building cleaner, healthier, and more resilient communities.

The project stands as a testament to what can be achieved when community participation, institutional support, and environmental commitment come together with a shared vision for change. More importantly, it demonstrates that sustainable development becomes possible when communities themselves become custodians of their environment and drivers of long-term transformation.



Nagaraj Raghava Anchan

**Project Manager
Hasiru Dala**

About the Author

Nagaraj Bajal is a Project Manager at Hasiru Dala, Mangaluru, working to make waste management more effective and community-driven. Originally from Karwar, he moved to Mangaluru to contribute to environmental initiatives and promote sustainable living. Passionate about creating cleaner communities, Nagaraj works closely with local bodies and residents to implement waste management projects, encourage waste segregation, and promote zero-waste practices. He has also spent countless early mornings conducting roadside awareness drives, engaging directly with citizens and inspiring small changes that make a lasting impact on the environment.

A FLICKER OF HOPE

A Ghoramara tale

Sabita Patra Dolai (32) lives in Hatkhola village on Ghoramara Island with her husband and daughter. The family primarily depends on daily wage labour for their livelihood and survives on a monthly income of around ₹7,000. Like many climate affected and landless families on the island, they face daily challenges in securing a comfortable and supportive environment for their children.

During a visit by the SEED team, Sabita shared how difficult evenings used to be before the installation of the solar home system. Her daughter, relied on a kerosene lamp to study after sunset. The lamp provided poor illumination and generated additional heat inside the house, making it uncomfortable for her to concentrate on her studies. As a mother, Sabita often sat beside her daughter and manually fanned her with a hand fan while she studied. This was physically exhausting, especially after a long day of household work, but she felt it was necessary to help her daughter continue her education.



23 December 2025
09:30 AM IST

Reaching Ghoramara after crossing the Ganga felt like stepping into a different world. The island, isolated yet vibrant with life, carried a unique charm of its own. What struck me most was the look of surprise and curiosity on the faces of the people when I mentioned that I was from Kerala. Kerala was not an unfamiliar place to them; rather, it was a destination closely connected to many of their lives. A large number of the male members of Ghoramara's families migrate to Kerala for work and are engaged in various forms of labour. Conversations about Kerala instantly created a sense of familiarity and connection, bridging the distance between the two regions and making me feel unexpectedly at home in this remote island community.



-Arya Meher BS

Assistant Manager
CONSERW
SBI Foundation

Following the installation of the solar home system, the household now has reliable lighting and a fan, creating a much more comfortable environment for studying. Her daughter can now study independently during the evening hours without struggling with dim light or excessive heat. "Earlier, my daughter studied under a kerosene lamp, which gave very little light and made the room hotter. I would sit beside her and fan her with a hand fan while she studied, and my hands would become tired. Now she can study comfortably under proper light and fan, and I feel happy seeing her focus on her studies," Sabita shared with the SEED team.

For families like Sabita's, access to clean and reliable energy is doing more than providing electricity; it is helping create a better learning environment for children and reducing the daily burden on caregivers.



Alima Ahmad

Senior Manager – Partnerships and Communications
SEED (Society for Socio-Economic and Ecological Development)

About the Author

Alima Ahmad is the Senior Manager – Partnerships and Communications at SEED (Society for Socio-Economic and Ecological Development), a Kolkata-based nonprofit working with climate-vulnerable communities in the Sundarbans. With a Master's degree in Social Work from Jamia Millia Islamia and over 17 years of experience, she leads strategic partnerships, donor engagement, and communications, helping bring the stories of the Sundarbans' people and ecosystems to wider audiences.

A JOURNEY TO DIGNIFIED EMPLOYMENT

How dignified employment, institutional support, and social recognition transformed the lives of waste workers



Sukanti Behera lives in Balisahi Slum of Nuapada, Cuttack, with her family of five members, including her husband, two sons, and mother-in-law.

Her husband, Tutu Behera, works as a welder in a local workshop and earns a modest income to support the family. The couple has two sons:

- Debananda Behera (9 years), studying in Class III at a government school
- Ajay Behera (5 years), attending the local Anganwadi Centre

Like many families from vulnerable urban communities, Sukanti's household faced economic hardship and struggled to meet regular expenses.

Before becoming associated with the Waste No More project, Sukanti worked as a domestic worker in three large households, carrying out cleaning and other household works during the morning and afternoon. Though she worked hard throughout the day, the work provided limited income and, more importantly, lacked dignity and respect.

Despite her efforts, she often felt socially excluded and disconnected from any formal institution or support system. Employment was irregular, and she had little recognition for her contribution.

About one year ago, Sukanti joined the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) at Sartol as a Safai Mitra under the Waste No More in Cuttack project supported by SBI Foundation and implemented by CORE.

Joining the MRF brought significant changes to her life. For the first time, she became associated with a structured institution and started working collectively as part of a team. The employment provided her with regular wages directly credited into her bank account, creating financial stability and confidence. Beyond financial benefits, Sukanti experienced something she values deeply: respect and recognition.



She shares that several officials, including senior municipal authorities, regularly visited the MRF and interacted with workers respectfully. During New Year celebrations, senior officials including the Commissioner and Mayor visited the centre, greeted the Safai Mitras, and offered roses in appreciation of their efforts. Such gestures made her feel proud and valued for the work she performs.

She also enjoys participating in various celebrations and awareness events organised at the MRF, including Women's Day and other special occasions. Working together as a group has created a sense of belonging and happiness in her life.

Impact on Family and Livelihood

The dignified income earned through her current work has helped Sukanti improve her family's overall condition. She now contributes actively to household finances and supports:

- Payment of her son's tuition fees
- Repayment of family debts and borrowed money
- Household expenses alongside her husband

One of her proudest achievements has been purchasing a scooty for her family through an EMI arrangement, which reflects her growing financial confidence and aspirations.

The project has also strengthened Sukanti's social security and inclusion. Through the initiative, she received life insurance coverage with compensation support of up to ₹20 lakh, providing a sense of security for her family's future.

Additionally, the CORE team has continuously assisted her and other workers in accessing government schemes and services, helping them become more connected with institutional support systems and welfare programs.



6 May 2026
09:45 AM IST

My visit to the Material Recovery Facility reinforced the transformation described in Sukanti's story. What I found particularly striking was the emphasis placed on the well-being and professional development of the Safai Mitras. Seeing them confidently operate heavy machinery, use fire safety equipment, undergo regular health check-ups, and benefit from health insurance challenged many conventional assumptions about sanitation work. These are not merely welfare measures; they reflect a model that recognizes waste workers as skilled professionals deserving of safety, dignity, and respect. In my view, this holistic approach is what truly distinguishes the initiative and makes its impact both meaningful and sustainable.



-Satyam Ojha
Assistant Manager
CONSERW
SBI Foundation

"Earlier I worked in different households, but we never received respect despite our hard work. Now I work with dignity and people recognize our efforts. I feel proud when officials appreciate us. I am happy that I can support my children's education and contribute to my family's future."

— Sukanti Behera

Sukanti's journey demonstrates how dignified employment, institutional support, and social recognition can transform the lives of waste workers. Through the Waste No More project, she has moved beyond merely earning a livelihood to becoming a confident contributor to her family and community, with improved financial stability, social inclusion, and hope for a better future.



Kalinga Sahoo
Program Manager
Cooperation for Rural Excellence

About the Author

Kalinga Sahoo is a Program Manager at CORE, Cuttack, with over six years of experience in waste management. Passionate about community-driven environmental solutions, he works to strengthen waste management systems through circular economy approaches, sustainable management of low-value plastics, and inclusive livelihood opportunities for waste workers. By collaborating closely with local bodies and communities, he promotes waste segregation and practical zero-waste solutions that deliver lasting environmental impact.

PLASTICS AND ANIMALS

Aditya Vikram Gupta

We all are well aware that plastics have become a part of daily lifestyle in most of individuals and also a irreversible part of daily life. From packaging materials to daily use cutlery, we have come to rely more on plastics over sustainable and reusable materials. Prolonged use of plastics have negative impact on human health. The term “Microplastics” is now, more than the news, it has become the part of the system. From traces of microplastics in the ice of Antarctica to the human blood, it seems no place on earth is left from the presence of microplastics.

When humans became used to plastic, how can animals be left behind, “YES”, rightly read. Animals became victims of plastics as well & adapted themselves to use plastics. Looks like Darwin’s theory of “Survival of the Fittest” is always proved to be right.

Many times, we see from news headlines & environment campaigns, how plastic is harming animals from marine animals; like sea turtles eating plastic bags, getting confused with jelly fish, hermit crab using plastic glass as home, animals getting strangled in fishing nets, to terrestrial animals, as victims often dying on eating plastic waste.



But some animals have adapted themselves how to use plastic. As urban area increases and forest decreases, the movement of animals to human settlements has now become a new norm. Animals came for food and they have realized that when a human carrying something in plastic bag or throwing something, it most likely to have food in it.

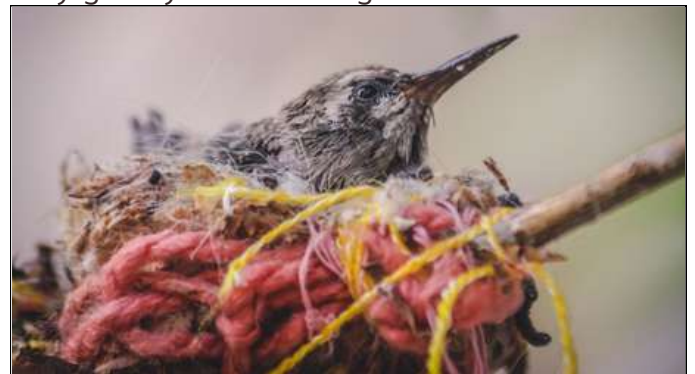
We have seen that monkeys have learned the art to steal and to make a deal. Monkeys snatch bags and search for any edible items or else take some valuable item like specs from the tourists or localities and they will return only if they are

provided with some food specially some soft drink/packed juice & the most interesting part is they have learned the art to open bottle.

The usage is not only related to the terrestrial animals, the avian species too have leaned some of it. They have learned the art of making nest using plastic as one of its materials. Generally, it requires grass, leaves etc. for nest making but now plastic has entered as one of its components like plastic straw, thread etc is being used.



It is up to us how to tackle this plastic menace otherwise we don’t know that in what form and in what manner this plastic waste would come back to the society that may go beyond the imagination.



Therefore, we need to travel back in time in terms of usage of reusable and environment friendly materials, use of cloth/tote bags etc.



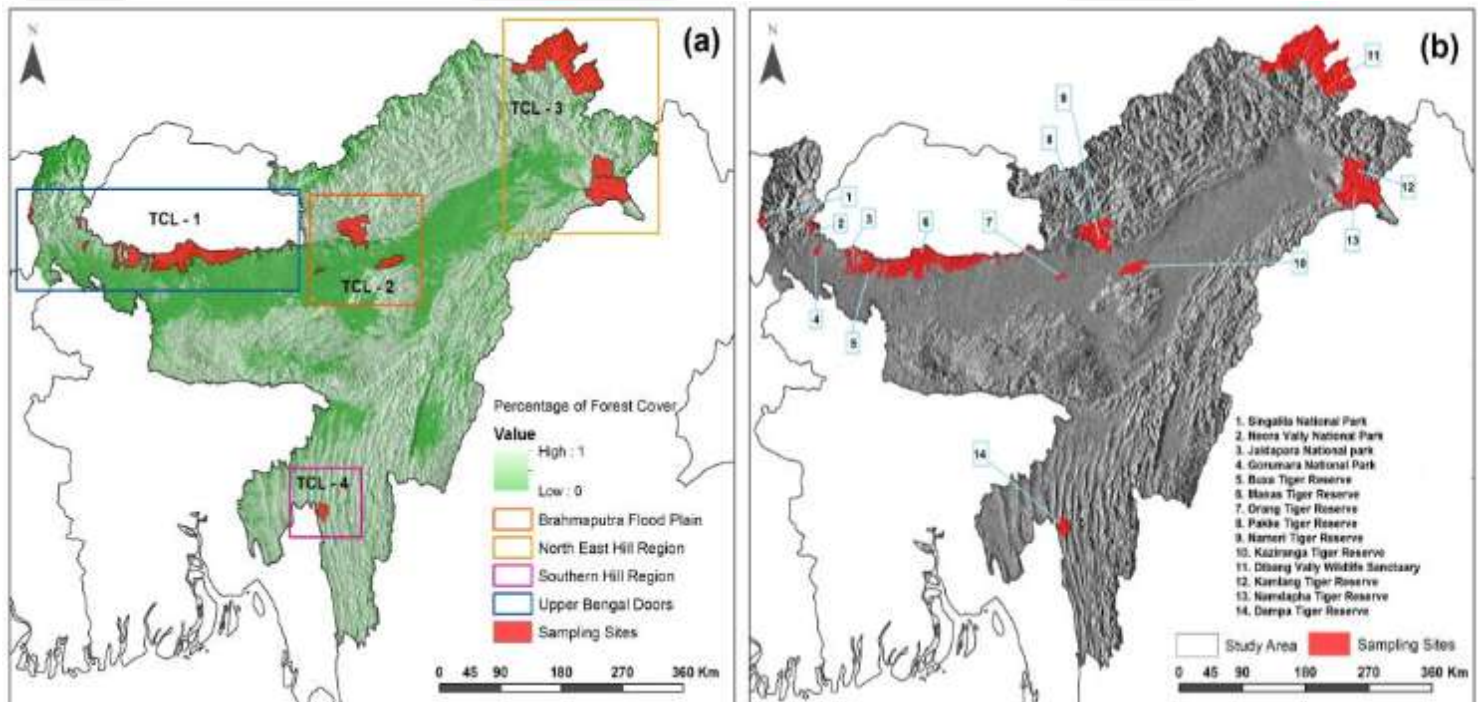
Aditya Vikram Gupta

**Assistant Manager
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TIGERS AT THE EDGE: GENES, LANDSCAPES AND COEXISTENCE IN NORTHEAST INDIA

Bishal Kumar Majhi, Mriganka Shekhar Sarkar and P. Anuradha Reddy

Northeast India occupies a special and irreplaceable place in the conservation story of Tigers. Situated at the crossroads of Eastern Himalaya and Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspots, this region supports an extraordinary range of habitats, from tropical moist evergreen forests and lowland rainforests to riverine grasslands, subtropical broadleaf forests, and rugged montane landscapes. These ecosystems once formed a more continuous tiger range. Today, however, tigers persist in scattered pockets across a region shaped by complex topography, fragmented habitats, expanding infrastructure and intensifying human pressure. In many parts of northeast India, protected areas are embedded within a mosaic of villages, plantations, shifting cultivation landscapes, and linear intrusions such as roads and railways. As a result, tiger conservation here is no longer only about protecting core habitats; it is equally about understanding movement, dispersal, and coexistence in landscapes where people and wildlife share space. While India has made global headlines for its tiger recovery, the northeast region remains one of the least studied tiger landscapes in the country. This knowledge gap is not merely academic; it directly limits conservation action. Without reliable data on population structure, genetic health, dispersal routes, and connectivity between habitats, it becomes difficult to identify which populations are viable, which are isolated, and where corridors must be safeguarded or restored. At the same time, human-wildlife conflict continues to shape conservation outcomes, influencing both local tolerance and carnivore survival. These challenges are not unique to tiger, but the tiger's ecological role as an apex predator makes it an ideal umbrella species: safeguarding tiger landscapes often benefits a wide range of biodiversity.



Map of northeast India showing four Tiger Conservation Landscapes (TCLs) and key protected areas.

Recognizing this need, a collaborative initiative between the CSIR – Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) and the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (NIHE), supported by SBIF CONSERW, has undertaken a landscape-scale project on “Landscape Ecology and Genetics of Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) in Northeast India.” This project is designed to generate an integrated regional understanding of tiger population genetics, habitat connectivity, and conflict dynamics across four Tiger Conservation Landscapes spanning the northern parts of West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram. Its core objective is to support science-backed conservation planning at the scale at which tigers actually survive: not as isolated populations within protected areas, but as networks of populations connected through dispersal corridors.

A key foundation for this work comes from our recent literature review and synthesis paper titled “Conservation strategies for mammals in data-deficient regions: Analysing research trends and identifying conservation priority areas,” (published in *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 2025) which highlights how the northeast is simultaneously one of India’s most important regions for mammals, and yet one of its most unevenly studied regions. The study documented that

What is a Tiger Conservation Landscape (TCL)?

A Tiger Conservation Landscape is a large, connected region that includes core tiger habitats (such as tiger reserves and national parks), along with surrounding forests, buffer zones, and corridors that allow tigers to disperse. Unlike a single protected area, a TCL recognizes that tigers survive within a wider landscape network. Conservation planning in TCLs, therefore, focuses on connectivity, corridor protection, and managing human pressures across the broader region, not only within park boundaries.

northeast India supports 269 mammalian species across 11 orders, including 48 threatened species and 13 endemic ones, emphasizing its global conservation significance. Importantly, the region’s mammalian fauna includes 212 small-bodied and 57 large-bodied species, illustrating both the exceptional richness of lesser-known taxa and the ecological importance of large-bodied mammals. While large-bodied mammals such as tigers, elephants, rhinos and other charismatic species are keystone and umbrella species whose conservation can safeguard entire ecosystems, the high representation of small-bodied mammals is equally important as these species support ecosystem functioning through roles like pollination, seed dispersal, pest regulation, and nutrient cycling. The same study also revealed a persistent imbalance in available scientific literature. By compiling 350 mammal-related publications from 1920 to 2023, we found that although research output has grown sharply in recent decades, particularly after 2010, majority of the studies still focus on biodiversity documentation and taxonomy. Carnivores and primates dominate taxonomic attention, while other small mammals remain under-represented despite comprising nearly 80% of the region’s mammal diversity. More critically, our review revealed that very few studies address landscape-scale ecology, functional connectivity, or molecular and genetic approaches, precisely the types of information required for long-term conservation planning in a fragmented and rapidly changing region. These gaps provide a strong scientific justification for integrated projects that combine genetics, landscape ecology, and spatial conservation planning.

How does scat DNA help study tigers?

Scat DNA analysis is a non-invasive method where genetic material is extracted from tiger faeces collected in forests. After species confirmation using tiger-specific genetic markers, samples can be genotyped to identify individual tigers and their sex, estimate minimum population size, and assess genetic diversity. When applied across multiple protected areas, non-invasive genetic analysis reveals gene flow and migration patterns, helping identify whether tiger populations are connected or isolated.

Perhaps the most direct conservation message from our synthesis is that northeast India’s conservation priorities extend far beyond protected areas. We identified 91,503 km² as core mammal conservation zones, yet only 8088 km² of this fall within the existing protected area network. The vast majority, i.e. 83,415 km², occur outside protected areas. This finding is particularly relevant for tiger conservation because it reinforces the need for landscape ecological analyses

that identify habitat quality, dispersal pathways, and functional corridors across the broader matrix of forests and human land use. In a region where tiger habitats are patchy and increasingly fragmented, conservation strategies must move beyond park boundaries and adopt corridor-focused planning at a regional scale.

For tigers, connectivity is not an abstract concept; it is essential for survival. Tigers require large areas, and their long-term persistence depends on dispersal and gene flow between populations. Where connectivity is disrupted, populations may become isolated, leading to loss of genetic diversity, increased inbreeding and reduced resilience. Genetics, therefore, becomes not just a research tool but a conservation necessity.

Genetic diversity represents a population's evolutionary potential, which includes the ability to adapt to disease outbreaks, environmental change and demographic fluctuations. In landscapes where tigers occur at low densities and in fragmented habitats, genetic studies can reveal whether populations are still exchanging individuals, whether corridors remain functional, and whether some populations are drifting toward isolation.

This project addresses these questions through a non-invasive genetic approach, combined with advanced remote sensing and landscape ecological analyses. Rather than relying solely on sightings or capture-based monitoring, the project uses scat DNA as a powerful source of information. Carnivore scats collected along forest trails and roads contain genetic material that can be used to confirm species identity, identify individuals and their sex, and estimate population structure and gene flow. This approach is especially valuable in northeast India, where dense forests and rugged terrain often limit direct detection. We conducted extensive surveys, over two years, across protected areas in northern parts of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh, and collected 625 samples, of which 571 were successfully identified to species level through DNA analysis. Results revealed a diverse carnivore community, with leopard and wild dog dominating detections, along with a strong representation of small felids such as leopard cat, Asian golden cat, clouded leopard, and marbled cat. We also confirmed tiger presence, demonstrating the continued persistence of the species in these landscapes, even where direct evidence is limited.

These early findings are significant for two reasons. First, they validate the effectiveness of non-invasive genetics for northeast India, where traditional monitoring approaches may be constrained. Second, they provide a foundation for the next analytical stage: moving from species identification to individual-level tiger genotyping. By genotyping tiger-positive samples using microsatellite markers, the project will generate unique individual tiger IDs, allowing estimation of minimum population size, genetic diversity, genetic differentiation among sub-populations, and detection of migrants. These analyses will be central to understanding whether tiger populations across northeast India function as isolated pockets or as a connected metapopulation.



From left to Right;
Bishal Kumar Majhi, P. Anuradha Reddy and Mriganka Shekhar Sarkar

However, genes alone cannot explain connectivity. Tigers can remain genetically connected only if they can actually move between forests, find safe cover, and cross human-dominated areas. In northeast India, this is becoming increasingly difficult because the landscape changes sharply over short distances; dense forests often give way to tea plantations, farmlands, villages, and roads. To understand how these real-world conditions shape tiger movement, the project combines genetic evidence with satellite-based mapping of forest cover, habitat fragmentation, vegetation condition, topography, and human pressures such as roads, railways, and settlements. Looking at these factors at different spatial scales, from local habitat patches to wider dispersal routes, will help identify where functional corridors still exist, where movement is likely to be blocked, and where bottlenecks threaten long-term connectivity. This information is essential for building a metapopulation-based conservation strategy for northeast India, where the survival of tigers will depend not only on protected areas but also on the health of the wider landscape between them.

What is a wildlife corridor, and why does it matter?

Scat DNA analysis is a non-invasive method where genetic material is extracted from tiger faeces collected in forests. After species confirmation using tiger-specific genetic markers, samples can be genotyped to identify individual tigers and their sex, estimate minimum population size, and assess genetic diversity. When applied across multiple protected areas, non-invasive genetic analysis reveals gene flow and migration patterns, helping identify whether tiger populations are connected or isolated.

combines official records, spatial modelling, and community-based surveys. Conflict incidence data are being compiled from Forest Department records and secondary sources, while questionnaire surveys in forest-fringe villages are being designed to understand local perceptions, seasonal patterns, and drivers of conflict. All community interactions are conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that respondents' identities and sensitive information are protected.

Equally central to tiger conservation in the northeast is the human dimension. As tiger habitats intersect human-dominated landscapes, conflict becomes a critical conservation driver. Livestock depredation, fear, and occasional human casualties can rapidly erode local tolerance and trigger retaliatory actions. For this reason, the project includes a structured conflict component that



Activities conducted under the scope of the project

The project team's conflict modelling capacity has already been strengthened through a major study on human–elephant conflict in Assam's Brahmaputra flood plain (published in Nature Scientific Reports, 2026). Using conflict records from 2010 to 2024, we developed a novel bidirectional modelling framework that separately assessed elephant victimization by humans and human victimization by elephants, and then combined them to identify overlapping high-risk zones. By applying a multi-scale ensemble framework of machine learning algorithms and by optimizing predictor scales, the study revealed strong seasonality in conflict, a sharp escalation after 2017, and distinct scale-dependent drivers for different conflict directions. Our study produced management-ready risk maps and a transferable decision-support approach that can inform interventions such as crop-switch advisories, early-warning systems, fencing audits, and corridor restoration. Although focused on elephants, this approach provides a strong analytical foundation for conflict mapping in tiger landscapes as well.

Beyond research and modelling, we recognize that conservation outcomes depend on people, and so awareness and outreach are integral components of our project. We conducted awareness programs across multiple tiger landscapes, for school students, teachers, and local stakeholders to strengthen their understanding of biodiversity, the ecological role of tigers and carnivores, and the importance of coexistence. Through interactive presentations, discussions, quizzes, and creative activities, our programs have emphasized “why tigers matter”, not only as an iconic species but also as an umbrella for forest ecosystems that support water security, climate regulation, and livelihoods. We have interacted with hundreds of students and teachers through these awareness activities, reflecting the project’s commitment to combine research excellence with conservation education and community engagement.

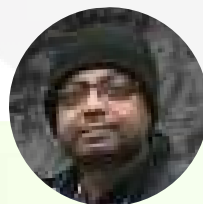
As the project moves forward, its scope will expand further across northeast India, scaling up sampling, genetic analyses, habitat modelling, corridor identification, and conflict hotspot mapping. The ultimate goal is to deliver a robust conservation framework for northeast India’s tiger landscapes, one that integrates genetics, ecology, and human dimensions, and that can guide management decisions at a regional scale. This is particularly important in scenarios where tiger populations recover within protected areas and disperse into surrounding landscapes, increasing both connectivity opportunities and conflict risk.

Anticipating these dynamics is essential for ensuring that recovery translates into long-term persistence rather than conflict-driven decline.

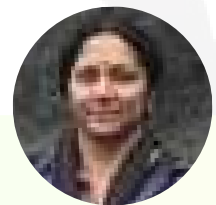
Northeast India stands at its conservation crossroads. It retains some of India’s most intact forest ecosystems and holds the potential to support a resilient tiger metapopulation. However, accelerating development, habitat fragmentation, and rising conflict pressures threaten to erode this potential. By combining non-invasive genetics, landscape ecology, and conflict science, and by complementing research with awareness and community engagement, this project represents a critical step toward redefining tiger conservation in the northeast. Ultimately, conserving tigers here is not only about protecting an iconic species. It is about sustaining living landscapes where forests, wildlife, and people can coexist, ensuring that northeast India remains a stronghold for biodiversity for generations to come.



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About the Authors

Mr. Bishal Kumar Majhi is Project Associate at the GBPNIE. He is currently pursuing his doctoral degree from Mizoram University, studying the effects of landscape and socio-religious factors on bird diversity. His research focuses on biodiversity conservation, ecological modeling, and landscape ornithology, using remote sensing and GIS, and on the study of mammals and birds across various ecosystems.

Dr. Mriganka Shekhar Sarkar is scientist at the G. B. Pant National Institute on Himalayan Environment. His research interests include landscape ecology, large carnivore conservation, species reintroduction, ecological connectivity, population genetics, environmental modelling, and the application of remote sensing and GIS for environmental sustainability assessments.

Dr. Anuradha Reddy is scientist at the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. Her research experience spans both ex-situ and in-situ conservation of endangered species. Her main research interests are landscape ecology and genetics of wild populations, and physiology and health of wild and captive animals.

Visits to Project sites



In Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA), 7 acres of dense forest was achieved using the Miyawaki method. The project was implemented by Enviro Creators Foundation which was visited by the Independent Director of SBI Foundation Shri Venkatesh Srinivasan along with officials from SBI Foundation on 17th February 2026.



Shri Swapan Dhar, MD & CEO, SBI Foundation along with Shri Girish Pati Tripathi, Mayor, Ayodhya Nagar Nigam, and Shri Guru Prasad Pandey, Assistant Municipal Commissioner, Ayodhya Nagar Nigam, inspected the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) set up under the project 'SBIF CONSERW: Waste No More in Ayodhya' On 12 March 2026, implemented by Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group (CHINTAN)



On 13 March 2026, Shri Swapan Dhar, MD & CEO, SBI Foundation along with representatives from the Varanasi Cantonment Board, the Indian Army, and SBI, inaugurated the 5 TPD Sanitation Park under the project 'SBIF CONSERW: Waste No More in Varanasi', implemented by Feedback Foundation Charitable Trust.

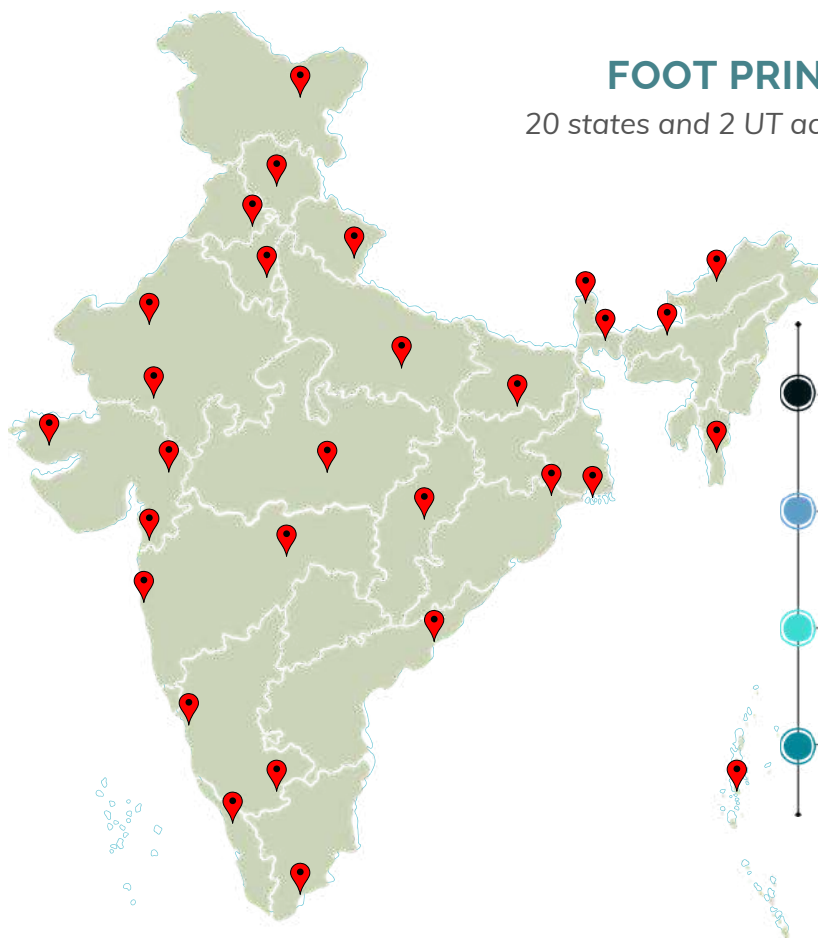


On 23rd March 2026, in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal for the Shri Swapan Dhar, MD & CEO, SBI Foundation met with the members of Mangrove Resource Centre for the project 'SBIF ARANYA: Mangrove Restoration in Sundarbans of South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal' implemented by Sabuj Sangha.

CONSERW Conclave & Launch of CONSERWation Story



On 18 March 2026, The third edition of the CONSERW quarterly digest, "The CONSERWation Story," was officially launched by Shri Swapan Dhar, MD & CEO of SBI Foundation, in the presence of esteemed members of the Foundation.



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20 states and 2 UT across India in collaboration with more than 60 NGO partners.



OTHER VERTICALS OF SBI FOUNDATION



Providing holistic support to young and underserved sportspersons



Mainstreaming Persons with Disabilities through a centralized support system



Making quality and inclusive education accessible for all children (ILM)



Making healthcare accessible and affordable for the most vulnerable sections of society



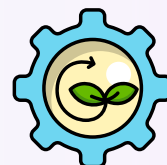
Enabling India's bright young minds to join hands with rural communities



Empowering the villages of India through integrated development initiatives



Empowering women, promoting women's rights, gender equality, and enhancing their roles in governance



Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program (LEAP)





RED PANDA
THE OFFICIAL MASCOT OF SBI FOUNDATION
Conserving Red Panda in Sikkim and West Bengal