

BALIPARA FOUNDATION

Assam • India

12TH

EASTERN HIMALAYAN
NATURENOMICS™ FORUM

— Guwahati, Assam, India —

26th - 27th November 2024

Join us on a
Transformative Journey for

THE FUTURE OF THE
THIRD POLE
&
HIMSAGAR

(Eastern Himalaya)

**Recommendations
Report 2024**



16
Countries



1000
Youth



100
Speakers



800
Attendees



The **12th edition of the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum** marks a decade of dedication to preserving and nurturing the Eastern Himalayan region. This year's theme, "The Third Pole and The Future of Himsagar" builds on a legacy of impactful initiatives uniting ecology and economy.

Evolving from an annual event into a dynamic platform, the forum has hosted over 60 regional forums and many international dialogues. It has empowered communities, fostered regional collaboration and addressed critical conservation challenges, including habitat restoration, community-driven initiatives and transboundary resource management.

This journey thrives on the unwavering support of partners and community members, driving transformative change and building resilient ecosystems for a sustainable future in the Eastern Himalaya.

<https://youtu.be/ZPagbtpQsDo>



Insights for Transformative Action:

Climate Risks and Economic Planning:

Economic actions and plans must integrate climate risks, acknowledging their profound impact on every sector, ensuring long-term resilience and sustainability in investments.

Collaboration for Biodiversity:

Effective biodiversity conservation requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, particularly between corporates, governments, and local communities, to ensure collective, systemic action at a landscape level.

Decolonizing Knowledge Systems:

Indigenous knowledge, built on centuries of socio-ecological understanding, should be integrated into policy-making. Incorporating it into civil service training will foster cooperation and strengthen community-centered approaches.

Ecosystem-Centric Carbon Financing:

A holistic, ecosystem-based approach to carbon financing is crucial, especially in efforts like REDD+ and decarbonizing systems, ensuring long-term environmental sustainability.

Forest Policies for the North East:

Forests in the North East should be considered vital food systems, with governance rooted in local commons-based practices. Policies should leverage existing regional frameworks for effective management.

Conserving the Asian Elephant:

A landscape-level conservation strategy for Asian Elephants, addressing factors like human behavior and habitat restoration, is critical. Focusing on traditional elephant food sources rather than crops like rice or bananas will enhance habitat sustainability.



Learnings on the Third Pole and the Eastern Himalaya

Integrated Conservation and Development:

The unique ecological and cultural importance of the Third Pole and Eastern Himalaya calls for a holistic approach that balances conservation with community-driven sustainable development.

Empowering Local Communities:

Efforts must focus on preserving fragile ecosystems while empowering local communities through sustainable livelihoods and governance, leveraging traditional knowledge systems.

Regional Cooperation for Environmental Challenges:

Cross-border environmental challenges in the Third Pole require regional collaboration and shared knowledge frameworks to address issues like climate change and ecosystem degradation.

Restoration and Sustainable Resource Management:

Climate resilience in the Eastern Himalaya depends on the restoration of degraded landscapes and the sustainable management of water resources, ensuring that community and ecosystem.

Partnerships for Awareness and Action:

Building strong partnerships between corporates, governments, and civil society is crucial for raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and fostering innovative solutions to address environmental challenges in both regions.

Addressing Urgent Environmental Threats:

Escalating issues such as human-wildlife conflict, deforestation, glacier melting, and unregulated urbanization require urgent, coordinated interventions and long-term policy commitments to safeguard both biodiversity and local livelihoods.

These insights emphasize the critical need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, community empowerment, and ecosystem restoration in addressing the environmental challenges facing the Third Pole and Eastern Himalaya.



SESSION I

Leadership Address: The Significance of The Third Pole and The Eastern Himalaya

Keynote Address:

Kaizad M. Bharucha

Deputy Managing Director, HDFC Bank, India



“This is the region that is most likely not to have climate resilient homes, nor access to insurance or pensions, and are more vulnerable to health hazards.....the cost of inaction far outweighs cost of action.”

– Kaizad M. Barucha

<https://youtu.be/-CMusGAfKnw>

Overview of the Session:

The session highlighted the Eastern Himalaya as a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot, emphasizing its ecological sensitivity, rich natural resources, and cultural significance. Discussions revolved around the region's endemic species, vital ecosystem services, and the integral role forests play in local

Dr. Sarala Khaling

Regional Director, ATREE, India

In Conversation with:

Sourav Roy

CEO, Tata Steel Foundation, India

Lobsang Sangay

Senior Visiting Fellow, Harvard Law School, USA

Usha Lachungpa

Retd. Principal Chief Research Officer, Sikkim State Forest Department, India

Lord Nicholas Stern

IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at the London School of Economics, UK (Virtual)

Rohit Jawa

Managing Director and CEO of Hindustan Unilever Limited, India (Virtual)

livelihoods. Climate change emerged as a central theme, with speakers underlining its socioeconomic impacts, particularly in vulnerable communities. Experts called for regional cooperation, innovative financial mechanisms, and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge to address climate challenges and foster sustainable development.



<https://youtu.be/2v-jkHylarE>

Challenges identified:

The Eastern Himalaya faces significant climate vulnerabilities, with melting glaciers, erratic weather patterns, and biodiversity losses displacing communities and threatening food security. Climate-induced disasters such as floods and landslides further strain regional resources, exacerbating the challenges faced by already vulnerable populations. These disruptions not only destabilize livelihoods but also hinder efforts to create resilient ecosystems capable of withstanding climate change impacts.

Unsustainable resource use adds to the region's woes, as mining

and hydroelectric projects disrupt ecosystems, fragment forests, and threaten critical species corridors. Urbanization and habitat degradation contribute to a loss of genetic diversity and ecological balance. Geopolitical tensions between neighbouring countries further complicate transboundary conservation efforts, while delayed climate adaptation strategies risk escalating ecological and economic consequences. Lord Nicholas Stern emphasized the urgent need for proactive measures to address these challenges, as the cost of inaction will only grow over time.



Key recommendations:

- ❖ **Integrate Indigenous Knowledge:** Leverage traditional farming practices, such as agroforestry and community-based resource management, to complement formal conservation strategies.
- ❖ **Innovative Economic Strategies:** Implement carbon pricing, sustainable financing models, and climate adaptation metrics into regional policies.
- ❖ **Strengthen Regional Cooperation:**
 - Develop cross-border governance models and collaborative funding mechanisms to address shared ecological and climate challenges.
 - Enhance data-sharing frameworks to monitor and manage climate impacts collectively.
- ❖ **Science-Policy Linkages:** Foster partnerships between governments, private sectors, and research institutions to drive actionable outcomes.

Setting the Context: Leadership Address

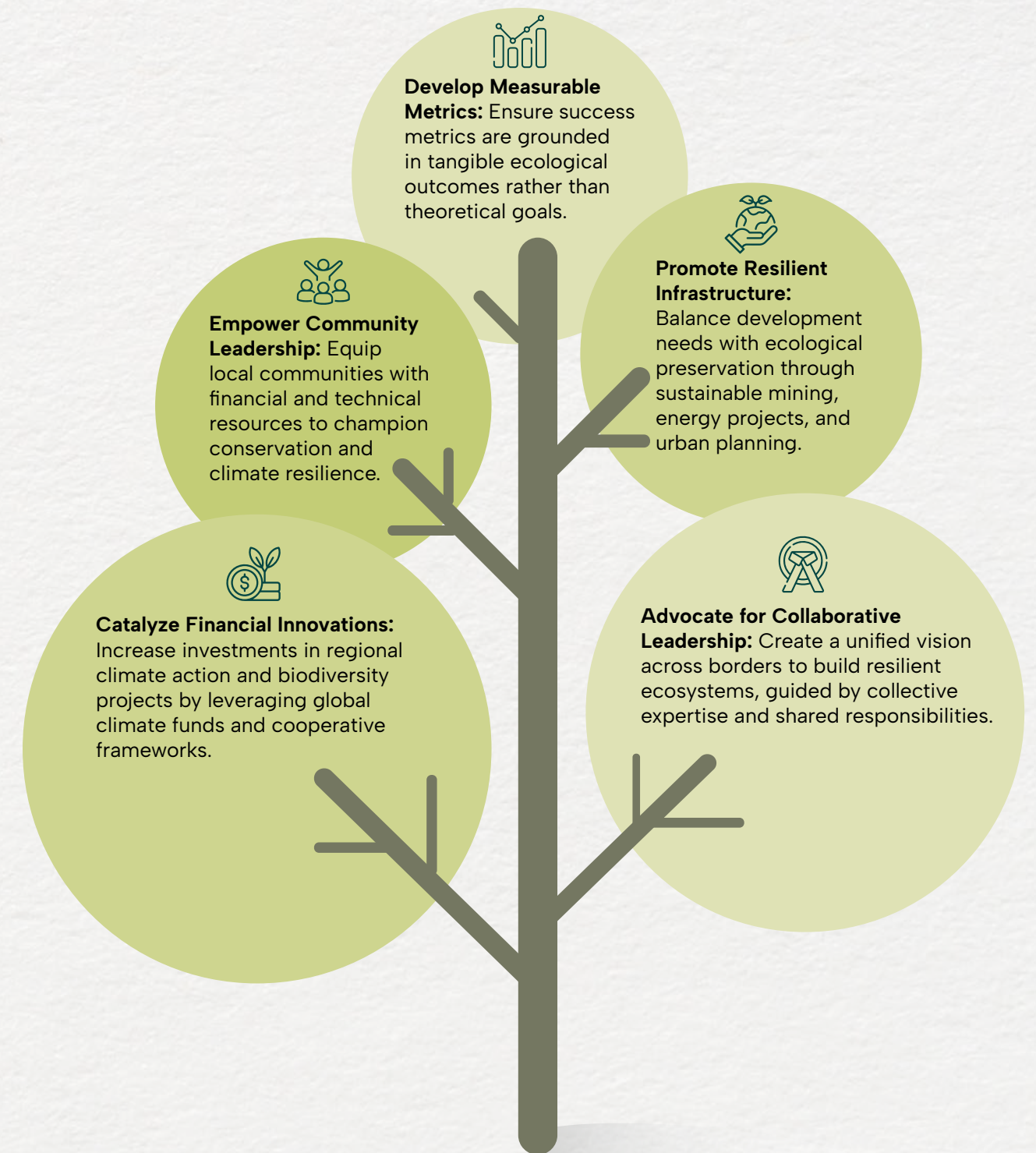


“There is a strong sense of identity as far as conservation is concerned. A lot of indigenous communities trace their identity and genealogy back to nature.”

– Sourav Roy
CEO, Tata Steel Foundation, India

<https://youtu.be/D-gBm5CDOw>

Critical Actions for the Future



The discussion emphasized the need for a holistic approach to tackle the challenges of the Eastern Himalaya, blending science, policy, and community engagement to ensure the region's ecological and socioeconomic resilience. It highlighted the importance of collaborative

leadership, robust science-policy integration, innovative financial solutions, and the fusion of traditional ecological knowledge with modern technological advancements to drive impactful and sustainable outcomes.

SESSION II

Leadership Address: Evangelizing the Third Pole

Speakers:

Lt. Gen. Arun Kumar Sahni
Director General, Club of Rome

In Conversation with:

Her Royal Highness Queen Diambi Kabatusuila
Elikia Hope Foundation, Democratic Republic of Congo

Dr. Vibha Dhawan
Director General, TERI, India

Jani Viswanath (Ph.D.)
Founder, Healing Lives, India

Ruma Devi
Social Worker and Entrepreneur, India

Dia Mirza
Eco Investor and Goodwill Ambassador, United Nations Environment Programme, India (Virtual)

Runa Khan
Founder, Friendship NGO, Bangladesh (Virtual)

Overview of the Session:

The session delved into the critical environmental challenges faced by “The Third Pole,” home to one-third of South Asia’s forests and a reservoir of glacial ice crucial for biodiversity and climate regulation. Speakers addressed the impacts of climate change, including glacial melting, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity, while also discussing innovative climate solutions, regional collaborations, and community-driven restoration strategies. The session highlighted the urgency of sustainable development and equity-driven models as alternatives to conventional approaches.



Challenges identified:

The Third Pole is witnessing the alarming impacts of climate change, with a 1.3°C rise in temperature accelerating glacial melting, desertification, and biodiversity loss. The IPCC projects a 20–30% reduction in glacier volume by 2100, threatening water security for over 1.9 billion people dependent on Himalayan river basins. These challenges are compounded by geopolitical tensions among neighboring nations, which hinder effective cross-border climate solutions and shared governance. Weak regional environmental policies further exacerbate the lack of collaborative restoration efforts, leaving the region ill-prepared to address these crises.

Additionally, unsustainable resource use driven by exploitative practices

and short-term economic growth continues to undermine ecological balance. Western development paradigms, resource extraction, and poorly planned net-zero strategies with unintended carbon trade-offs exacerbate habitat destruction and biodiversity loss. Vulnerable ecosystems like the Sundarbans face rising sea levels and deforestation, endangering mangroves that act as vital climate buffers. Displaced communities bear the brunt of floods, landslides, and resource scarcity, amplifying their socioeconomic vulnerabilities and highlighting the urgency for inclusive and sustainable climate action.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Strengthen Regional Frameworks:**
 - Develop robust cross-border governance models to foster collaboration among countries like Myanmar, China, India, and Afghanistan.
 - Leverage international agreements to implement shared climate strategies.
- ◆ **Elevate Community Participation:**
 - Recognize local communities as key agents of change by integrating indigenous knowledge into restoration and climate resilience efforts.
 - Scale up initiatives like those led by the Friendship NGO, which impact 7.5 million people annually through poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and gender equity.
- ◆ **Reframe Sustainability Paradigms:**
 - Shift from exploitative development models to equity-driven, sustainable practices, as emphasized by Queen Diambi Kabatusuila.
 - Focus on restoring ecosystems like mangroves to safeguard biodiversity and protect vulnerable populations.
- ◆ **Innovative Climate Solutions:**
 - Adopt holistic approaches, balancing ecological restoration with sustainable economic strategies, as highlighted by the Green India 2047 Report.
 - Address trade-offs in net-zero strategies by designing low-impact solutions tailored to regional ecosystems.



Critical Actions for the Future:



Regional Collaboration and Shared Governance:

- Forge partnerships between nations to promote resilience through joint climate actions and data-sharing frameworks.
- Prioritize inclusive policies that address geopolitical barriers and equitable resource-sharing.



Empower Communities for Restoration:

- Encourage community-led conservation initiatives to restore biodiversity-rich ecosystems like mangroves and forests.
- Invest in education and skill-building programs for communities, enhancing their capacity to act as stewards of nature.



Focus on Ecosystem-Based Solutions:

- Protect ecosystems like the Sundarbans, which act as natural buffers against climate disruptions, by implementing sustainable management practices.
- Scale up restoration projects aligned with local and global biodiversity goals.



Innovative and Equity-Based Climate Planning:

- Transition to long-term strategies grounded in equity, sustainability, and shared knowledge.
- Develop financial mechanisms to incentivize regional resilience, ensuring solutions account for ecological and socioeconomic impacts.



The session highlighted the urgent need for collaborative leadership, innovative climate solutions, and community-driven action to address the interconnected challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss in the Eastern Himalaya. By leveraging traditional knowledge, strengthening regional frameworks, and adopting sustainable development models, the region can ensure a resilient future for its ecosystems and communities.

“We must stop relying solely on outdated paradigms and instead adopt courageous, innovative solutions grounded in equity and shared knowledge.”

– Queen Diambi

SESSION III

Valuing Natural Assets and Biodiversity: Integrating ESG Principles for Sustainable Outcomes

Anuj Sharma
Founder, Alsisar Impact, India

In Conversation with:

Sashidhar Vempala
Chief Sustainability Officer, Hindustan Unilever Limited, India

Spencer Low
Regional Sustainability Head, Google, Singapore

Nusrat Pathan
Head CSR, HDFC Bank Limited, India

Abhejit Agarwal
Head – Sustainability & CSR, Axis Bank Limited, India

Jessica Cheam
Founder, Eco-Business, Singapore (Virtual)

Ping Manongdo
Country Director, Eco Business, Philippines (Virtual)

Overview of the Session:

This session focused on the integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into corporate strategies to ensure sustainability while addressing risks related to climate change, biodiversity, and economic activation. It focused on the crucial role of partnerships, green finance, and climate risk integration in driving sustainable development. Panelists from financial institutions and corporations discussed how cross-sector collaboration, consumer engagement, and innovative financial solutions like green finance are key to addressing environmental challenges. Highlighting the need to incorporate biodiversity considerations into CSR strategies, the session underscored the importance of taking a holistic approach to sustainability that includes both environmental protection and community well-being.



Challenges identified:

The session identified several key challenges to achieving sustainability goals. One significant issue was the difficulty in incorporating biodiversity into CSR strategies, particularly due to ecosystem uncertainties and the complexities of balancing economic development with ecological preservation. Additionally, the lack of widespread partnerships and

collaborations between private corporations and financial institutions hampers efforts to scale sustainability initiatives. Financial institutions also highlighted the challenges in integrating climate risks into decision-making, emphasizing the need for more advanced climate risk modeling to guide strategic planning.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Strengthen Collaborative Partnerships:** Financial institutions and corporations should work towards building stronger cross-sector partnerships to scale up sustainability efforts.
- ◆ **Focus on Green Finance:** Green finance should be prioritized as it offers an essential mechanism for supporting the transition to a sustainable economy. Institutions must ensure its inclusiveness and scalability.
- ◆ **Address Climate Risk through Innovative Solutions:** Climate risk analysis should be integrated into core business strategies, with financial institutions leading the way in adopting solutions to mitigate climate change impacts.
- ◆ **Incorporate Biodiversity into Economic Strategies:** CSR strategies must focus on integrating biodiversity preservation with economic development, addressing ecosystem degradation while also generating income.
- ◆ **Increase Consumer Education & Engagement:** As consumer choices play a critical role in sustainability, educating the public about sustainable practices is essential to fostering widespread, grassroots action.



Critical Actions for the Future:



Develop Multi-Stakeholder Platforms:

Create and strengthen platforms for collaboration between governments, financial institutions, private corporations, and NGOs to share knowledge, resources, and solutions. These partnerships are essential for scaling up sustainability efforts and fostering collective action.



Promote Policy Integration for Sustainability:

Advocate for policy frameworks that integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into business practices. Governments should incentivize and support green finance and sustainable investments to drive change across industries.



Enhance Climate Risk Modeling Tools:

Financial institutions and businesses must invest in more robust climate risk modeling tools to better assess long-term risks and opportunities. This will enable them to make informed decisions that align with both business growth and environmental resilience.



Invest in Green Finance Mechanisms:

Expand green finance options, including green bonds, sustainable investment funds, and low-carbon technologies. Ensure that these financial products are accessible to a broad range of stakeholders, from local communities to large corporations, to foster widespread adoption.



Scale-up Biodiversity Initiatives:

Make biodiversity preservation a central component of corporate sustainability strategies. Financial institutions and businesses should actively support biodiversity conservation projects that also provide economic opportunities for local communities, integrating ecological health with economic growth.



Foster Consumer-Led Sustainability Movements:

Engage with consumers through education and awareness campaigns, encouraging them to make sustainable choices. This can be achieved through product transparency, sustainability certifications, and information sharing to empower informed decisions.



Incorporate Circular Economy Models:

Businesses should adopt circular economy principles to reduce waste, optimize resource use, and extend the lifecycle of products. This will not only address environmental challenges but also open up new economic opportunities and reduce operational costs.



Strengthen Data and Impact Monitoring:

Build and expand systems to measure and monitor the environmental and social impacts of sustainability initiatives. Transparent reporting will be key to ensuring accountability and driving further improvements in sustainability efforts.

This session focused on valuing natural assets and biodiversity through ESG principles. Corporate leaders and financial institutions discussed innovative strategies like green finance, climate risk modelling, and cross-sector collaborations for sustainable outcomes. It emphasized the need for an interconnected approach, combining partnerships, technology, and financial commitment to address environmental challenges and drive collective action.

SESSION IV

Youth Corner

Conversations on Empowering Youth and Women: Inspiring Success Stories

Ruma Devi

Social Worker and Entrepreneur, India

Bornali Borooah Chakravorty

Operations Centre Manager, Tata Strive, India

In Conversation with:

Self Help Groups

Sonitpur District, Assam

Community Women Leaders of Mishing

Garo, Nepali and Bodo Communities

Overview of the Session:

The session highlighted transformative efforts in empowering women and youth through entrepreneurship, skill development, and community-based initiatives. Ruma Devi's journey from traditional embroidery to leading the Gramin Vikas Evam Chetna Sansthan has empowered approximately 30,000 women across 75 villages in Rajasthan, offering financial independence and employment opportunities. Her work has extended into the global fashion industry through collaborations with renowned designers and participation in international events, earning her prestigious honors like the Nari Shakti Puraskar. Tata Strive, managed by Tata Trusts, focuses on youth empowerment through skill-building programs, bridging the gap between education and industry needs while promoting financial inclusion and personal growth. Similarly, the women-led self-help groups (SHGs) in Sonitpur District, Assam, support tribal communities like the Mishing, Garo, Nepali, and Bodo through microfinance opportunities, entrepreneurial ventures, and local handicraft promotion, fostering sustainable community development.



Challenges identified:

- **Economic Inequality:** Women and youth in marginalized communities face limited access to financial resources, education, and employment opportunities.
- **Skill Gaps:** A lack of alignment between traditional skills and modern industry requirements hampers sustainable economic growth.
- **Market Access:** Artisans and SHGs struggle with limited access to national and international markets, reducing the impact of their products.
- **Sustainability Issues:** Many community-based initiatives face challenges in achieving long-term financial and operational sustainability.
- **Social Barriers:** Deep-rooted gender and cultural biases hinder women's and youth's active participation in economic and social initiatives.

Key recommendations:

- ❖ **Skill Development and Training:** Expand programs that integrate traditional skills with modern industry demands, ensuring employability and economic resilience.
- ❖ **Market Linkages:** Strengthen connections between artisans, SHGs, and markets through e-commerce platforms, partnerships, and trade fairs.
- ❖ **Access to Finance:** Enhance microfinance opportunities and provide financial literacy training to empower women and youth in entrepreneurship.
- ❖ **Sustainability Models:** Promote models that focus on self-sufficiency and scalability for community-based initiatives, such as SHGs and cooperative ventures.
- ❖ **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct community-based campaigns to address gender and cultural barriers, encouraging greater participation in skill-building and entrepreneurship programs.



Snippers from the Youth Corner



SESSION V

Crisis at the Source: Addressing Watershed Management and Water Security

Speakers:

Dr. Fawzia Tarannum
Co-Founder of WforW
Foundation, India

In Conversation with:

Anant Singh
Head of Agriculture at Tata Steel Foundation, India

Dr. Eklabya Sharma
Strategic Advisor and Senior Fellow at ATREE

Vishwa Bandhu Bhattacharya
Director of Sustainability at Tata Consumer
Products Limited, India

Dr. Dhrupad Choudhury
Senior Advisor at The Indigenous Partnership
for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty
(TIP), Rome

M. Karunkar Reddy
Founder, Igniting Minds, India



“An important aspect we need to address is “decolonization” of knowledge. We need to shed off western thinking and give equal importance and respect to indigenous knowledge and intercultural knowledge generation.

– Dr. Dhrupad Choudhury



Challenges identified:

The panelists identified several critical challenges contributing to the ongoing water security crisis. Climate change has significantly altered rainfall patterns, accelerated glacier melt, and disrupted seasonal water flows, which in turn threatens traditional methods of water management. Unplanned urban development and agricultural expansion have further exacerbated the issue by destroying natural watershed systems, impeding their ability to effectively regulate water cycles. The excessive extraction of groundwater for agricultural and industrial purposes has led to severe depletion of water resources, making it increasingly difficult to maintain adequate supplies of clean drinking water.

Deforestation and habitat degradation have also impaired watersheds' capacity to retain and filter rainfall, resulting in heightened flood and drought occurrences. Moreover, the lack of coordination across sectors such as agriculture, industry, and urban planning has hindered the development of sustainable and integrated water resource management policies. Finally, despite the presence of watershed management projects, these initiatives often face challenges like inadequate funding, weak institutional frameworks, and delayed policy responses, making effective implementation a significant hurdle.



Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Strengthening Integrated Watershed Management (IWM):** Establish multi-sectoral approaches involving government agencies, NGOs, corporate actors, and local communities to enhance coordination and ensure equitable distribution and conservation of resources.
- ◆ **Promoting Community-Led Restoration Initiatives:** Encourage local participation in reforestation, rainwater harvesting, and the restoration of degraded landscapes, with a focus on gender inclusion and the empowerment of women in leadership and decision-making.
- ◆ **Adopting Technological Innovations:** Leverage technologies such as remote sensing, hydrological modeling, and data analytics to improve watershed monitoring and predict environmental shifts.
- ◆ **Harnessing Private Sector Partnerships:** Facilitate collaboration between industries and communities to mobilize resources for large-scale watershed restoration initiatives.
- ◆ **Policy Reform & Adequate Funding:** Governments must prioritize funding for watershed restoration and water resource management programs, creating incentives for private participation while adapting policies to climate variability.
- ◆ **Revisiting Indigenous Practices & Local Knowledge Systems:** Integrate traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific methods to strengthen watershed management approaches. Indigenous communities must be empowered and included in these strategies.
- ◆ **Education & Capacity Building:** Build awareness and create educational campaigns targeting the younger population to foster sustainable water use and watershed management practices.



Critical Actions for the Future:

To address the water security crisis and improve watershed management in the future, the following actions are critical:

Implement Integrated Approaches:

Strengthen collaboration between government agencies, the private sector, and local communities to ensure sustainable water resource management and equitable distribution.

Enhance Technological Capacity:

Invest in advanced monitoring systems, predictive tools, and data-driven approaches to better understand and manage water resources in real-time.

Increase Funding and Policy Support:

Allocate more resources for watershed restoration and water management programs, ensuring effective policy implementation and long-term sustainability.

Empower Local Communities:

Focus on community-driven restoration programs and empower indigenous knowledge systems to contribute to effective watershed management.

Promote Education and Advocacy:

Foster education on water conservation and sustainability, equipping future generations with the tools and knowledge to engage in responsible water practices.

The session successfully highlighted the complex challenges of water security in the Eastern Himalayan region, advocating for a collaborative approach combining scientific innovation, community involvement, private sector contributions, and strong policy frameworks. Immediate action, guided by these recommendations, will be essential to mitigate the ongoing crisis and ensure long-term water security for vulnerable populations in the region.

SESSION VI

Youth Corner: Bridging Generations for Climate Action: **Youth Leadership in Conservation**

Speakers:

Joydip Kundu

Founder of the Society for Heritage and Ecological Research, India

Suchandra Kundu

Founder of the Society for Heritage and Ecological Research, India

Sashidhar Vempala

Chief Sustainability Officer at Hindustan Unilever Limited, India

Bittu Sahgal

Editor, Sanctuary Nature Foundation

In Conversation with:

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati, Assam

Cotton University, Assam

Gauhati University, Assam

Sanskriti The Gurukul, Guwahati

Royal Global University, Assam

Overview of the Session:

This session featured an engaging discussion centered on youth leadership, heritage conservation, ecological sustainability, and climate change. The session brought together youth leaders and sustainability experts for a dynamic exchange of ideas. Key speakers included Joydip Kundu and Suchandra Kundu, Founders of the Society for Heritage and Ecological Research; Sashidhar Vempala, Chief Sustainability Officer at Hindustan Unilever Limited; and representatives from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Assam Forest School, and Royal Global University.

Discussions revolved around the ecological significance of the Sunderbans, intergenerational collaboration, climate change mitigation, and leveraging cultural wisdom for environmental sustainability. The session highlighted the role of youth in leading climate action, utilizing both traditional ecological knowledge and modern technological solutions.



Challenges identified:

The Sunderbans, a vital ecological region, faces mounting threats due to rising water levels and disrupted climate patterns caused by glacial melting in the Himalayan region, worsened by inadequate climate management. This challenge is compounded by a disconnect between generations, with younger groups ("Baccha Party") often focusing on innovation and older generations ("Buddha Party") holding valuable traditional ecological knowledge—an untapped synergy that could drive impactful solutions. The lack of ecological education further








limits the youth's understanding of the intricate links between cultural heritage, biodiversity, and climate change, slowing the momentum of environmental advocacy and grassroots initiatives. Conservation strategies, such as Bagh Bon and wildlife reserve creation, remain underutilized and inadequately enforced, leaving critical ecosystems vulnerable. Additionally, the insufficient integration of technology into climate monitoring, renewable energy solutions, and waste management hinders the development of effective, scalable solutions to pressing environmental challenges.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Facilitate Intergenerational Collaboration:** Develop platforms that encourage dialogue between generations, enabling the transfer of traditional wisdom alongside the adoption of innovative solutions.
- ◆ **Strengthen Youth-Centric Ecological Education:** Incorporate ecological literacy into school and university curriculums, emphasizing climate change, conservation, and sustainable practices. Collaboration between educational institutions and NGOs can drive these efforts.
- ◆ **Promote Ecosystem Rest and Regeneration:** Encourage strategies like afforestation, ecosystem-based adaptations, and protected green spaces to allow natural ecosystems to recover and thrive.
- ◆ **Expand Conservation Policies:** Strengthen and expand policies like Bagh Bon, focusing on wildlife reserve creation and the protection of biodiversity hotspots.
- ◆ **Integrate Technology into Conservation Efforts:** Leverage technology for monitoring climate impacts, analyzing environmental data, and promoting renewable energy solutions. Youth leadership in these areas is critical.
- ◆ **Empower Grassroots Movements:** Support community-driven sustainability initiatives that focus on localized solutions, such as rainwater harvesting, tree planting, and community forest management.
- ◆ **Education & Capacity Building:** Build awareness and create educational campaigns targeting the younger population to foster sustainable water use and watershed management practices.



Critical Actions for the Future:

- **Invest in Educational Programs:**
Develop specialized educational modules for youth to foster a deeper understanding of the Sunderbans' ecological importance, climate change mitigation strategies, and cultural heritage preservation.
- **Establish Youth Leadership Platforms:**
Create dedicated platforms to engage and empower young leaders to participate in policy-making, community mobilization, and conservation initiatives.
- **Strengthen Policy Frameworks:**
Collaborate with governments and NGOs to strengthen conservation policies, ensuring adequate resources and enforcement mechanisms for initiatives like Bagh Bon.
- **Promote Technological Innovation:**
Encourage the use of technology for solutions like climate prediction tools, renewable energy systems, and waste reduction programs. Partnerships with technology firms can accelerate these efforts.
- **Foster Intergenerational Programs:**
Implement mentorship programs where older generations share traditional ecological knowledge with youth, blending heritage wisdom with modern scientific approaches.
- **Expand Grassroots Initiatives:**
Support grassroots movements by providing funding, training, and resources for community-led conservation projects. This includes promoting eco-friendly practices, local entrepreneurship, and sustainability projects.
- **Incorporate Circular Economy Models:**
Advocate for Nature's Rest Periods: Integrate the concept of ecological rest into conservation policies, allowing overexploited ecosystems time to regenerate and recover naturally.

The session emphasized that the synergy between youth innovation and traditional ecological knowledge is pivotal for building resilient and sustainable communities. By integrating intergenerational collaboration, ecological education, and technological innovation, the future of environmental sustainability can be reimagined with youth at the forefront.

The session highlighted the importance of combining traditional ecological wisdom with modern technological innovations, emphasizing the survival of the Sunderbans and policies like Bagh Bon for sustainable conservation. It

underscored the need for collaboration between the youth and older generations to address climate change and environmental degradation.

By integrating education, technology, and intergenerational dialogue, the session demonstrated that youth-driven solutions, rooted in ecological literacy, offer a practical roadmap for a sustainable future. The conversation reinforced that the synergy between innovative youth and traditional stewardship is key to building resilient, sustainable communities and advancing environmental sustainability.

SESSION VII

Decarbonising the Future – Enabling Energy Transition

Dr. Divya Sharma

Executive Director, Climate Group,
India

In Conversation with:

Anil Chaudhry

Advisor, Independent Board Director,
and Former Managing Director & CEO,
Schneider Electric, India

Deepak Sharma

Zone President, Managing Director & CEO,
Schneider Electric, India

Ashwini Kumar Patil

Chief-O&M, Tata Power Renewables, India

Bhaskar Jyoti Phukan

Managing Director, Numaligarh Refinery Limited



“Focusing solely on carbon dioxide is not the solution. We need a holistic approach to tackle the climate crisis”

— Bhaskar Jyoti Phukan

Overview of the Session:

This discussion explored technological advancements, policy responses and innovation pathways that could aid India's transition to cleaner energy while balancing its growth objectives. Through dynamic discussions, the session outlined the various strategies that would contribute to India's energy transition and its climate goals, with an emphasis on decarbonization, technological innovation, and intergenerational solutions.



Challenges identified:

The panelists highlighted several challenges in India's energy transition. One of the key issues is balancing energy consumption with economic growth, as energy is essential for development, but sustainability must not be compromised. Additionally, while hydrogen presents a promising solution to reduce emissions, its long-term viability is uncertain due to challenges in scaling technology and production efficiency. The renewable energy sector also faces a shortage of skilled technicians, despite an oversupply of engineers, hindering infrastructure deployment. Furthermore, the vast forest resources in North East India, though potential sources for solar and wind

energy, require careful management to avoid environmental degradation.

Other significant challenges include the low survival rates of afforestation efforts, which highlight the need for more effective and large-scale planting strategies, as well as improved climate adaptation practices. Despite an increase in funding for climate adaptation, financial sustainability remains an issue, with insufficient long-term financing for large-scale decarbonization projects. Addressing these challenges will require a multi-faceted approach involving technological innovation, policy reforms, and substantial investments in human capital and infrastructure.

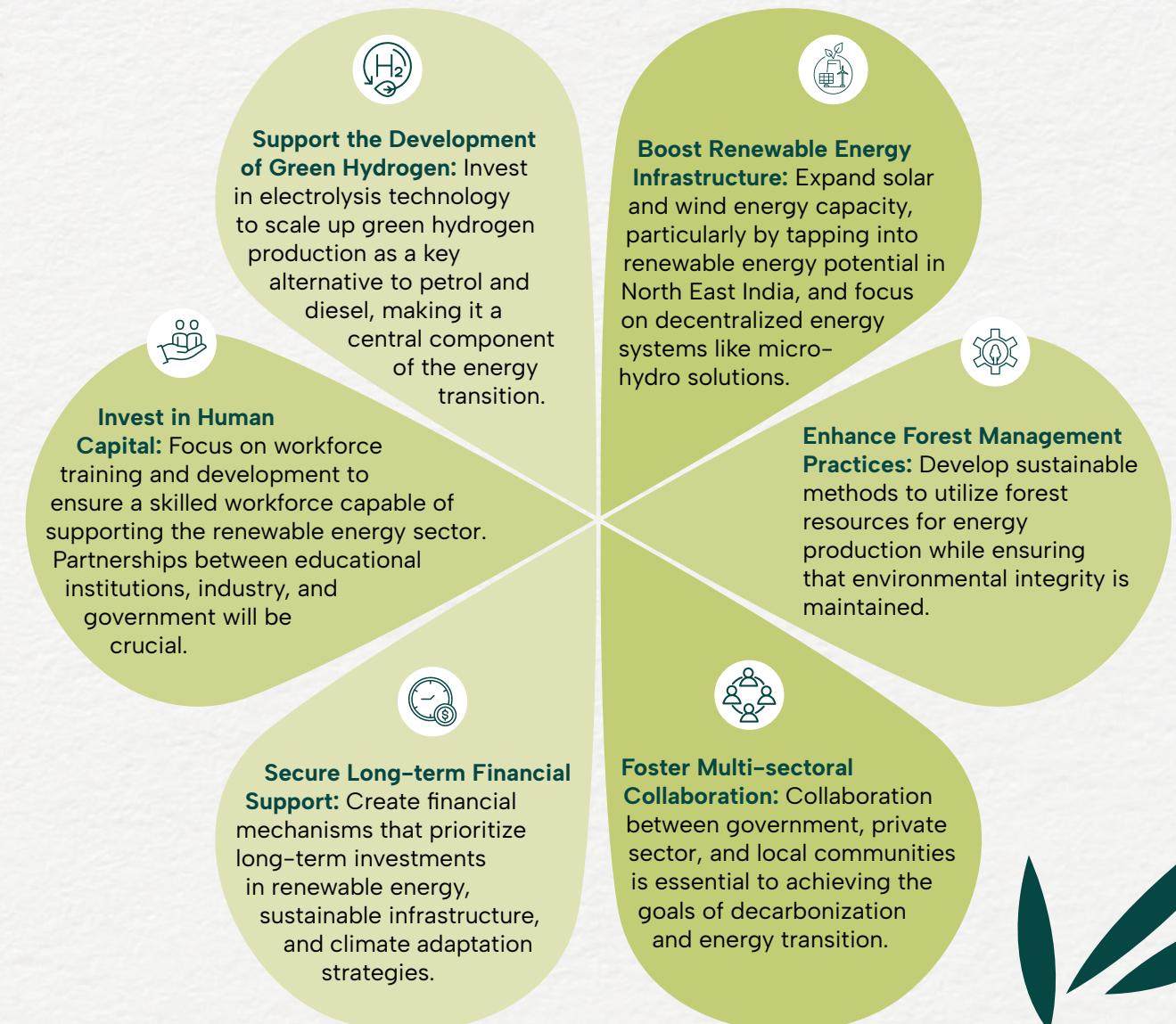
Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Embrace Smart and Sustainable Energy Solutions:** Technologies should prioritize energy efficiency and productivity. For instance, transitioning to energy-efficient smart homes, avoiding wasteful energy consumption, and ensuring that technological advancements are aligned with national growth objectives.
- ◆ **Invest in Hydrogen and Renewable Energy:** Support the development of hydrogen-based technologies and renewable energy projects, particularly solar, wind, and micro-hydro solutions, to transition towards a low-carbon economy.
- ◆ **Increase Workforce Development:** Establish training programs and educational initiatives to bridge the skills gap in the renewable energy sector. Creating accessible networks for solar panel distribution and installation should also be prioritized.
- ◆ **Sustainable Forest Resource Utilization:** Strategically harness forest resources in North East India for renewable energy production while ensuring environmental conservation and sustainable land management practices.
- ◆ **Scale Up Afforestation Programs:** Invest in larger, more effective afforestation projects with improved survival rates and community-based conservation efforts to restore ecosystems and contribute to carbon sequestration.
- ◆ **Enhance Funding for Climate Action:** Governments and the private sector should create sustainable financial mechanisms to support climate adaptation and the large-scale adoption of clean energy technologies.



Critical Actions for the Future:

To enable India's energy transition and meet its climate goals, the following critical actions should be taken:



The session underscored the importance of a comprehensive approach for India to accelerate its decarbonization efforts and secure a sustainable energy future. This approach must integrate technological innovation, workforce development, policy reform, and community engagement. The speakers highlighted that achieving this goal requires coordinated efforts across sectors—government policies, technological advancements, private sector investment, and

grassroots involvement. By focusing on hydrogen, solar, wind, bio-diesel, and other low-carbon solutions, alongside the development of skilled human resources and robust renewable energy infrastructure, India can pave the way for effective climate action and energy independence. With significant investments and policy alignment, India can lead global efforts in sustainable development while addressing its unique economic and ecological challenges.

SESSION VIII

30X30 –This house believes that Community Conserved Areas are the Future of Biodiversity in the Eastern Himalaya

Dr. Pranab J. Patar

Secretary, TERI Alumni Association

In Conversation with:

Rituraj Phukan

Founder, Indigenous People's Climate Justice Forum, India

Dr. J.V Sharma, IFS

Senior Director, Water Waste and Natural Resources, TERI, India

Rajeev KG

Senior General Manager, R&D, Bought Coffee and Diversification, Tata Consumers Products Limited, India

Dr. Usha Lachungpa

Retd. Principal Chief Research Officer, Sikkim State Forest Department, India

Overview of the Session:

This discussion focused on the critical role of community-led conservation in safeguarding biodiversity in the region. The discussion explored various aspects of Community Conserved Areas (CCAs), innovative funding models such as carbon credits, and alternative conservation strategies. Experts and practitioners highlighted the socio-economic and environmental benefits of CCAs, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by communities in the Eastern Himalaya. The session underscored the importance of combining traditional conservation practices with modern financing mechanisms to ensure sustainable biodiversity preservation.



Challenges identified:

The session highlighted several challenges faced by community-conserved areas (CCAs) in the Eastern Himalaya. One major issue is the ongoing threats to biodiversity, including deforestation, water stress, and the adverse impacts of climate change, all of which undermine conservation efforts in this ecologically sensitive region. Additionally, local communities often struggle with financial barriers, lacking the resources necessary to implement and sustain effective conservation initiatives. This financial gap limits their capacity to manage and protect these areas, despite the importance of CCAs in preserving biodiversity. There is also a significant need for stronger institutional mechanisms that can ensure the fair distribution of carbon credit revenues and other financial benefits among local communities.

Another challenge lies in the integration of traditional conservation methods with modern approaches, such as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECM). Combining these strategies to create a more holistic, community-driven conservation framework remains difficult. Furthermore, while carbon credit models have emerged as promising financial mechanisms for conservation, their long-term sustainability and scalability are uncertain. These models require continuous investment, monitoring, and support to remain viable, and they still face challenges in terms of their broader applicability and long-term impact. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring the future success of community-led conservation in the region.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Strengthening Community Conservation Models:** There is a need to further promote and support CCAs as key mechanisms for biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Himalaya, recognizing the traditional knowledge and practices of local communities.
- ◆ **Expanding Carbon Credit Financing Models:** Building on successful carbon credit initiatives, the session recommended scaling up these models to ensure broader participation from local communities and increase financial support for conservation activities.
- ◆ **Enhancing Institutional Support:** It was emphasized that local and district-level institutional mechanisms, such as the CCA federation, play a pivotal role in ensuring transparency, revenue distribution, and community empowerment. Strengthening these structures will enhance their effectiveness in managing conservation efforts.
- ◆ **Adopting OECM Models:** The session recommended exploring the OECM framework as a flexible, community-based approach to complement traditional conservation strategies and address gaps in biodiversity protection.
- ◆ **Leveraging Technology and Monitoring Systems:** To ensure the long-term success of conservation efforts, the use of technology for monitoring biodiversity, assessing carbon credits, and tracking the impact of conservation activities was recommended.



Critical Actions for the Future:

Increasing Investment in Nature-Based Solutions:

Governments, investors, and NGOs must collaborate to increase investment in carbon credit programs and other nature-based solutions, ensuring that 75% of revenues are directed to local communities for sustainable development.

Policy Support for Integrated Conservation Models:

Policymakers must design and implement policies that promote the integration of traditional conservation methods with modern models like OECMs to address diverse ecological challenges in the region.

Scaling up Community Conservation Areas:

There is an urgent need to expand the network of CCAs across the Eastern Himalaya, supported by policy reforms, financial mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives for local communities.

Strengthening Cross-Sectoral Partnerships:

Effective collaboration between governments, investors, local communities, and civil society organizations is essential to create a robust, multi-stakeholder approach to conservation that balances ecological preservation with community development.

Building Capacity and Expertise:

Training programs for local communities on carbon credit mechanisms, biodiversity monitoring, and sustainable resource management should be prioritized to enhance their ability to manage CCAs effectively and engage in climate mitigation strategies.

The discussion emphasized that community conserved areas could serve as the linchpin for achieving biodiversity goals in the Eastern Himalayan region, ensuring both ecological preservation and community resilience. Moreover,

combining traditional methods with innovative financial mechanisms and institutional frameworks could strengthen conservation strategies and economic empowerment.



SESSION IX

Youth Corner

Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Future: **Heritage, Action, and Ecological Balance**

Bittu Sahgal

Editor, Sanctuary Nature Foundation

Anuj Sharma

Founder, Alsisar Impact, India

In Conversation with:

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati

Royal Global University

Cotton University, Assam

Gauhati University, Assam

Sanskriti The Gurukul, Guwahati

Overview of the Session:

The session focused on youth involvement in environmental conservation, featuring insights from Bittu Sahgal, Anuj Sharma, and Ravi Singh. The discussion explored humanity's role in ecological sustainability, the significance of heritage, and actionable strategies for fostering a sustainable future. Bittu Sahgal emphasized the self-repairing nature of the planet, Ravi Singh stressed the importance of preserving cultural and natural heritage, and Anuj Sharma highlighted the urgency of addressing pollution and the critical role of women in ecological balance.



Challenges identified:

The session highlighted several challenges that hinder effective environmental conservation. Rising human-induced pollution continues to be a significant threat, disrupting ecosystems and exacerbating the climate crisis. Compounding this issue is the growing disconnection between humanity and nature, where a lack of understanding about the interdependent relationship between humans and the environment leads to unsustainable practices. Furthermore, limited awareness, especially regarding ecological sustainability, has slowed meaningful action.

The absence of strong adult literacy programs that focus on environmental education is one key barrier to building this awareness. Additionally, economic systems that prioritize profit over sustainability create a misalignment with ecological goals, further exacerbating the degradation of natural systems. These challenges call for a unified, concerted effort to reshape societal norms and practices toward more sustainable and harmonious environmental stewardship.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Strengthen Human-Nature Partnerships:** Advocate for practices that harmonize human actions with ecological principles, ensuring sustainability.
- ◆ **Promote Adult Literacy Programs:** Focus on developing literacy initiatives to spread awareness about ecological sustainability and foster active participation.
- ◆ **Leverage Women's Strengths:** Involve women in leadership roles, recognizing their unique long-term perspectives for implementing sustainable strategies.
- ◆ **Allow Natural Healing:** Encourage minimal human interference, allowing ecosystems to heal and self-repair over time.

Critical Actions for the Future:



The session highlighted the need for humility, cooperation, and intergenerational responsibility to address environmental challenges. Emphasizing education and the active involvement of youth and women as changemakers, the session called for a strategic shift towards ecological harmony. By leveraging human-nature partnerships, promoting awareness through adult literacy programs, and empowering women in leadership, the path to sustainability can be paved. Additionally, adopting a “do nothing” approach at times, allowing ecosystems to heal, was seen as essential for long-term ecological restoration.

In conclusion, the session underscored the urgent need for a collaborative approach to environmental conservation, emphasizing the roles of youth, women, and education in driving sustainable change. By aligning human actions with nature, fostering ecological literacy, and minimizing human interference to allow ecosystems to heal, we can work toward a more balanced and resilient future. The insights shared by the speakers highlighted the importance of humility, cooperation, and long-term vision, offering a roadmap for creating a sustainable world where humanity and nature coexist harmoniously.



SESSION X

Media and Conservation Shaping Public Perception and Policy

Speakers:

Bittu Sahgal
Editor, Sanctuary Nature Foundation, India

In Conversation with:

Mrinal Talukdar
Author, Senior Journalist and Editor, India

Sushmita Goswami
President, Guwahati Press Club, India

Barasha Das
Independent Journalist, India

Overview of the Session:

The session explored the role of media in influencing public discourse and decision-making, with a particular focus on the power of journalism in shaping environmental and developmental issues. Discussions covered a wide range of topics, including the impact of media on public perception, the potential of decentralized electricity solutions in the Eastern Himalaya, the economic implications of dam construction, and the ethical challenges faced by journalists in their profession. The session also examined the responsibility of journalists in holding decision-makers accountable and the personal toll of balancing truth with community interests.



Challenges identified:

Several challenges emerged from the discussion, particularly regarding the role of media in influencing decisions. One key challenge was the overwhelming influence of media, with concerns that it may be given too much importance in shaping public opinion and policy decisions. In terms of energy, decentralized electricity solutions, such as traditional watermills in Arunachal Pradesh, faced limitations due to their scarcity and the difficulty of scaling these solutions. The economic impact of dam construction was also highlighted,

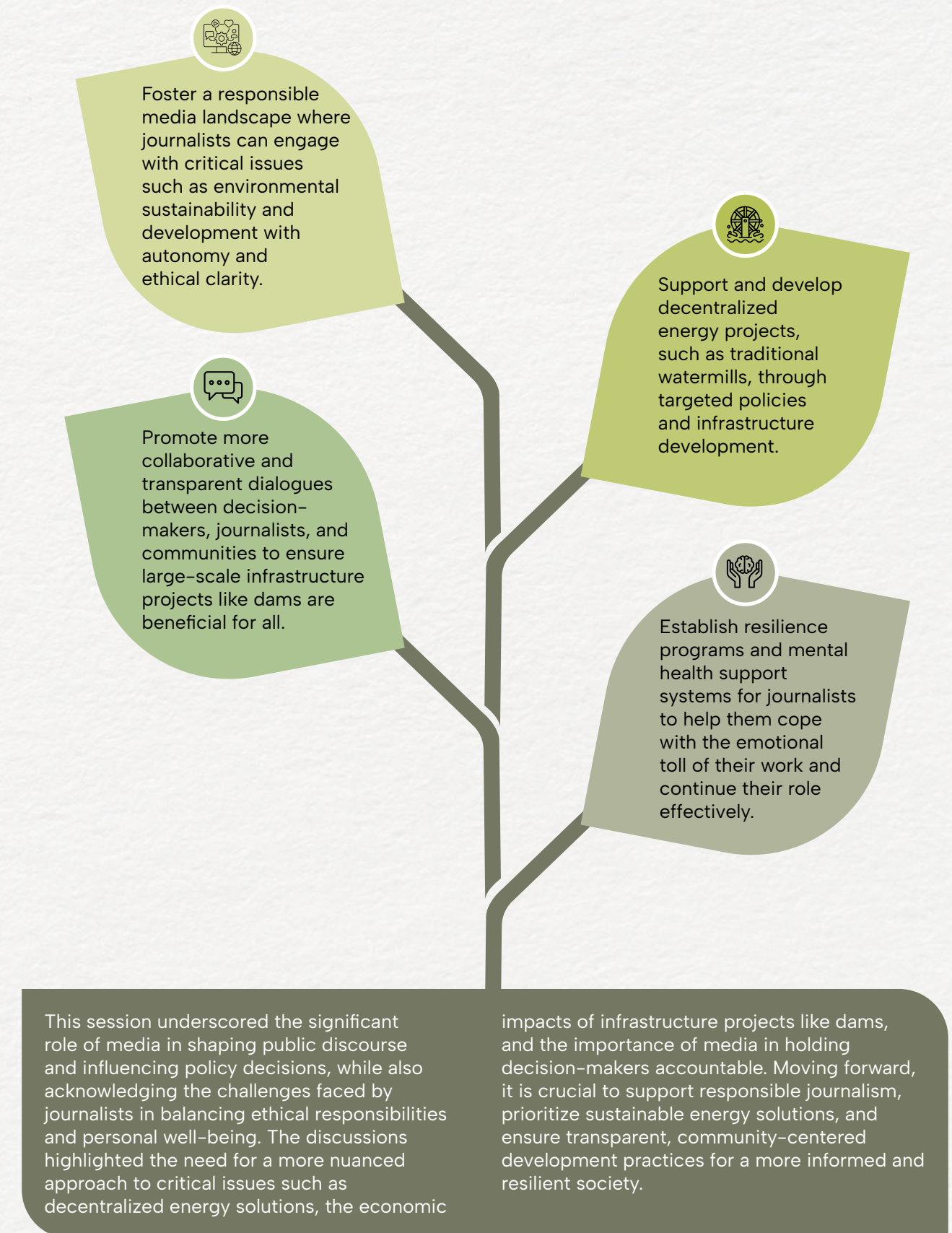
acknowledging the complex trade-offs between economic development and environmental sustainability. Journalists also face significant challenges in holding decision-makers accountable, particularly when navigating the pressures of mainstream media narratives and personal ethics. Additionally, the emotional stress and ethical dilemmas of journalism were discussed, where professionals often have to weigh their personal views against the broader needs of the community and the state.

Key recommendations:

- Media outlets should prioritize balanced and accurate reporting to provide the public with comprehensive, factual information, fostering informed decision-making.
- Encourage further investment in decentralized electricity solutions, such as traditional watermills, particularly in remote regions like Arunachal Pradesh.
- Facilitate transparent and open discussions about the economic and environmental costs of dam construction to better assess their long-term impact.
- Strengthen the support for journalists to uphold ethical standards while holding decision-makers accountable, ensuring media independence and the protection of journalistic freedoms.
- Prioritize the mental health and well-being of journalists, providing support to manage the emotional stress associated with their profession.



Critical Actions for the Future:



SESSION XI

Innovative Predictive Modeling: Enhancing Forest Ecosystem Management with Technology

A Close Door Workshop on Technology & Conservation

In collaboration with:



Speakers:

Spencer Low

Regional Head of Sustainability, Google, Singapore

Anuj Sharma

Founder, Alsisar Impact, India

Vasumathi Srikanth

PRISM Institute, Canada

Shrikant Mangalam

PRISM Institute, Canada

Alok Talekar

Software Engineer, Google Deep Mind, India
(Virtual)

Overview of the Session:

The session explored the role of advanced tools like satellite remote sensing and data analytics in optimizing forest conservation efforts. It emphasized leveraging technology to empower indigenous communities, promote sustainable practices, and address global ecological challenges.

Discussions focused on integrating data-driven solutions with on-ground efforts to monitor forest health, predict ecological trends, and build ecosystem resilience. It highlighted how innovation can bridge the gap between conservation science and practical implementation for a sustainable future.

The session offered discussions and presentations focusing on innovative technologies, community integration, and sustainability models toward forest conservation and ecosystem management.



Challenges identified:

The session highlighted several key challenges in integrating innovative predictive modeling into forest ecosystem management and community conservation efforts:

Low Data Literacy Among Marginalized Communities: Many isolated and rural communities lack the necessary skills and knowledge to fully engage with technological tools, limiting their participation in conservation initiatives.

Lack of Ground-level Technological Tools: Despite the availability of advanced technologies, there is a significant gap in the deployment of tools at the grassroots level, limiting their impact on forest ecosystem management.

Data Rights and Protection of Local Communities: A key concern raised was the need to protect the data rights of local

communities to prevent exploitation, as many fear that their data could be used without tangible benefits.

Bias in Data Models: The integration of indigenous knowledge into technological platforms remains a challenge, as conventional models sometimes exclude or misinterpret local ecological knowledge, leading to biased solutions.

Interconnected Risks Across Multiple SDGs: There is a need for technological platforms to address interconnected risks (e.g., climate change, food security, gender equality) simultaneously, which requires a multi-dimensional approach to modeling.

Key recommendations:






The session produced several critical recommendations for advancing forest ecosystem management using innovative technologies:

- ◆ **Enhance Data Literacy:** Programs to improve data literacy in marginalized communities to enable their active participation in conservation planning and decision-making.
- ◆ **Address Data Rights and Ethical Use of Information:** Inform communities about their rights regarding data usage, ensuring ethical practices and mutual benefits in data collection and utilization.
- ◆ **Adopt Predictive Modeling Across SDGs:** Encourage the use of predictive modeling platforms that address multiple interconnected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as climate, food security, gender equality, and health simultaneously.
- ◆ **Strengthen Collaborative Tech Partnerships:** Foster collaboration between tech companies, NGOs, governments, and local communities to implement innovative technologies and sustainable conservation strategies.
- ◆ **Integrate Indigenous Knowledge:** Ensure that local and indigenous knowledge is integrated into technological platforms to avoid exclusion and bias, providing more holistic and effective conservation solutions.
- ◆ **Empower Communities through Technology:** Build technological tools and models that allow local communities to take ownership of conservation efforts and become active agents in ecosystem management.



Critical Actions for the Future/Next Steps:

The session concluded with a set of actionable steps to ensure the successful implementation of innovative technologies in forest ecosystem management:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
|  Develop Community Literacy Programs:
Implement training initiatives that focus on technological tools, data rights, and digital literacy for communities to ensure they can fully participate in conservation efforts. |  Establish Cross-sectoral Collaborations:
Strengthen partnerships between tech companies, local NGOs, governments, and community organizations to deploy innovative technologies that address conservation challenges. |  Pilot Predictive Modeling Tools:
Deploy pilot studies and models of predictive technology in target regions such as Assam, Nagaland, and Ladakh to assess their effectiveness in forest management and community engagement. |
|  Create Monitoring Mechanisms:
Establish robust monitoring systems and feedback loops to evaluate the success of implemented models, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation based on ground realities. |  Scale Up Successful Models:
Expand successful pilot models to broader regions, ensuring that local communities are integrated into the planning and implementation process for long-term sustainability. | |

The session highlighted a multi-sectoral collaboration approach using innovative technology, socioeconomic models, and predictive risk modelling to strengthen forest ecosystem management and conservation. Insights from organizations like Google, PRISM Institute, and Alsisar Impact paved the way for innovative solutions focusing on data literacy, technological equity, and community involvement.

The session reinforced that interconnected risks and technological solutions could serve as a roadmap for advancing ecosystem conservation while creating equitable opportunities for vulnerable communities.



SESSION XII

Narratives of The Deepor Beel

Speakers:

Arghadeep Barua
Storyteller, India

Gaurav Talukdar
Storyteller, India

Siddharth Rasaily
The Midway Journey, India

In conversation with:

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati

Sanskriti The Gurukul, Guwahati

Royal Global University, Guwahati

Gauhati University

Overview of the Session:

The session explored the environmental challenges faced by Deepor Beel, Assam, using storytelling methods like short films and skits to emphasize the adverse effects of illegal encroachment and waste dumping on the ecosystem, particularly wildlife. The speakers called for proactive youth

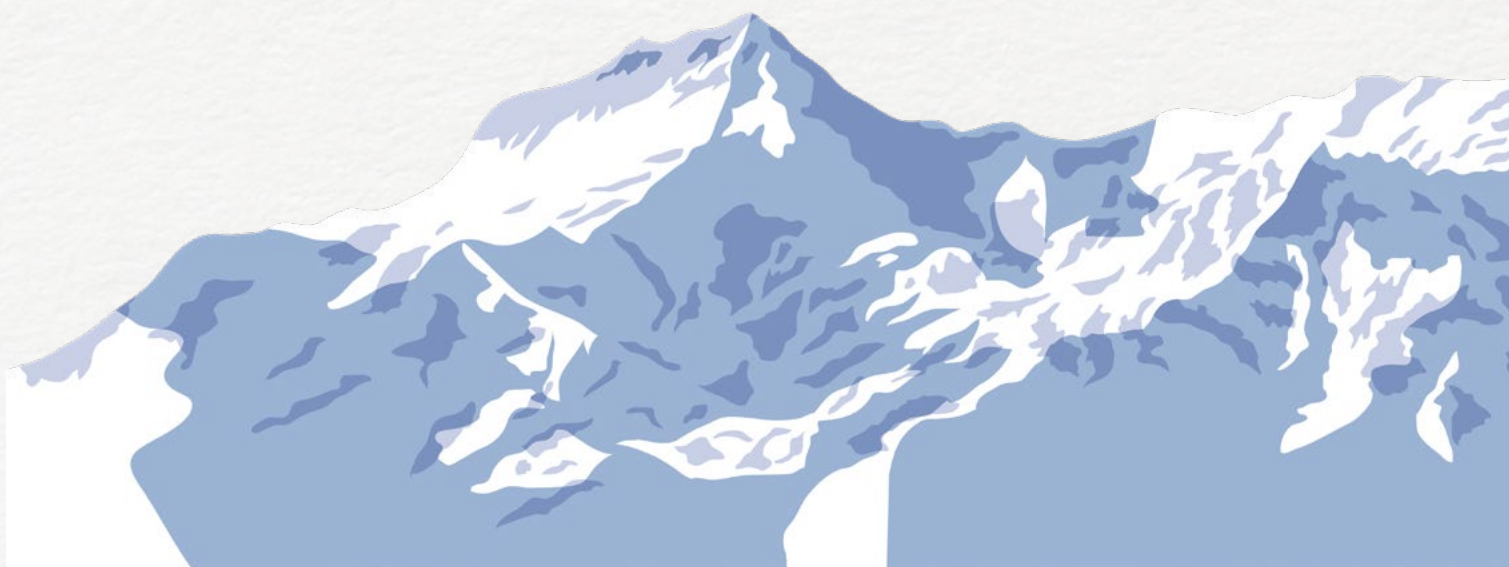
involvement in tackling these issues and promoting sustainable practices to safeguard the environment. Through creative mediums, they illustrated the pressing need for collective action and responsible community engagement in protecting Deepor Beel.



Challenges identified:

Illegal encroachment and waste dumping were identified as major disruptors of the ecosystem, causing significant harm to wildlife and natural habitats at Deepor Beel. The session highlighted the limited involvement of youth in environmental movements, reducing the momentum for change. Another key challenge

was the lack of public participation in development initiatives, which often led to ineffective solutions. Moreover, there were significant gaps in awareness and empathy regarding sustainable practices within the community, hindering meaningful progress toward conservation.



Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Youth Mobilization:** Encourage youth-led movements and campaigns focused on addressing illegal encroachment and pollution at Deepor Beel, leveraging their adaptability and open-mindedness for radical change.
- ◆ **Engagement Policies:** Develop frameworks that ensure public involvement in all development projects related to Deepor Beel to make efforts more inclusive and impactful.
- ◆ **Educational Initiatives:** Launch programs that teach mindfulness, sustainable practices, and empathy for nature, particularly targeting youth and educational institutions.
- ◆ **Empathy-Driven Advocacy:** Promote narratives and communication strategies that foster compassion for ecosystems, encouraging long-term commitment to conservation efforts.



Critical Actions for the Future:

The session emphasized the importance of youth leadership in driving change and the need for public engagement in environmental initiatives. To address the ecological challenges at Deepor Beel, it is crucial to establish policies that integrate community participation, increase awareness of

sustainable practices, and promote empathy-driven advocacy. Collaborative efforts, along with youth mobilization and education, will be key to ensuring the long-term protection and restoration of the Deepor Beel ecosystem.



SESSION XIII

How Are Our Communities Waking up to Ecological Challenges

In collaboration with:

TATA STEEL FOUNDATION

Speakers:

Nishant Andrews

Communications Manager, Tata Steel Foundation, India

In Conversation with:

Rabindranath Sahu

Community Resource Person (Flora and Fauna Conservation Project), Tata Steel Foundation

Morningstar Khongthaw

The Living Bridge Foundation, India

Munmuni Payeng

Mishing Community, Assam, India

Nyonu Wangcha

President, Women Wing, Longding Community

Overview of the Session:

This session highlighted the role of traditional knowledge and community-led initiatives in addressing ecological and social challenges. Discussions focused on the challenges faced by tribal communities, efforts in biodiversity conservation, and the potential of eco-tourism and rewilding to drive sustainable development. Women's leadership and the integration of traditional wisdom with modern conservation strategies emerged as critical themes.



Challenges identified:

Tribal communities face significant challenges in their efforts toward conservation and sustainable development. Deforestation and habitat loss, primarily driven by Zhoom cultivation and other unsustainable practices, have led to widespread biodiversity decline. Water scarcity is another critical issue, as natural water sources are diminishing due to deforestation and unsustainable agricultural practices, directly impacting communities reliant on these resources. Additionally, a lack of awareness about

biodiversity protection has resulted in harmful practices, such as the consumption of endangered species like turtle eggs in Odisha. Limited access to sustainable energy solutions further exacerbates these challenges, leaving many communities dependent on environmentally damaging alternatives. Lastly, mobilizing tribal communities for conservation efforts is often hindered by the absence of practical and culturally sensitive approaches that align with their traditional wisdom and everyday realities.

Key topics included:

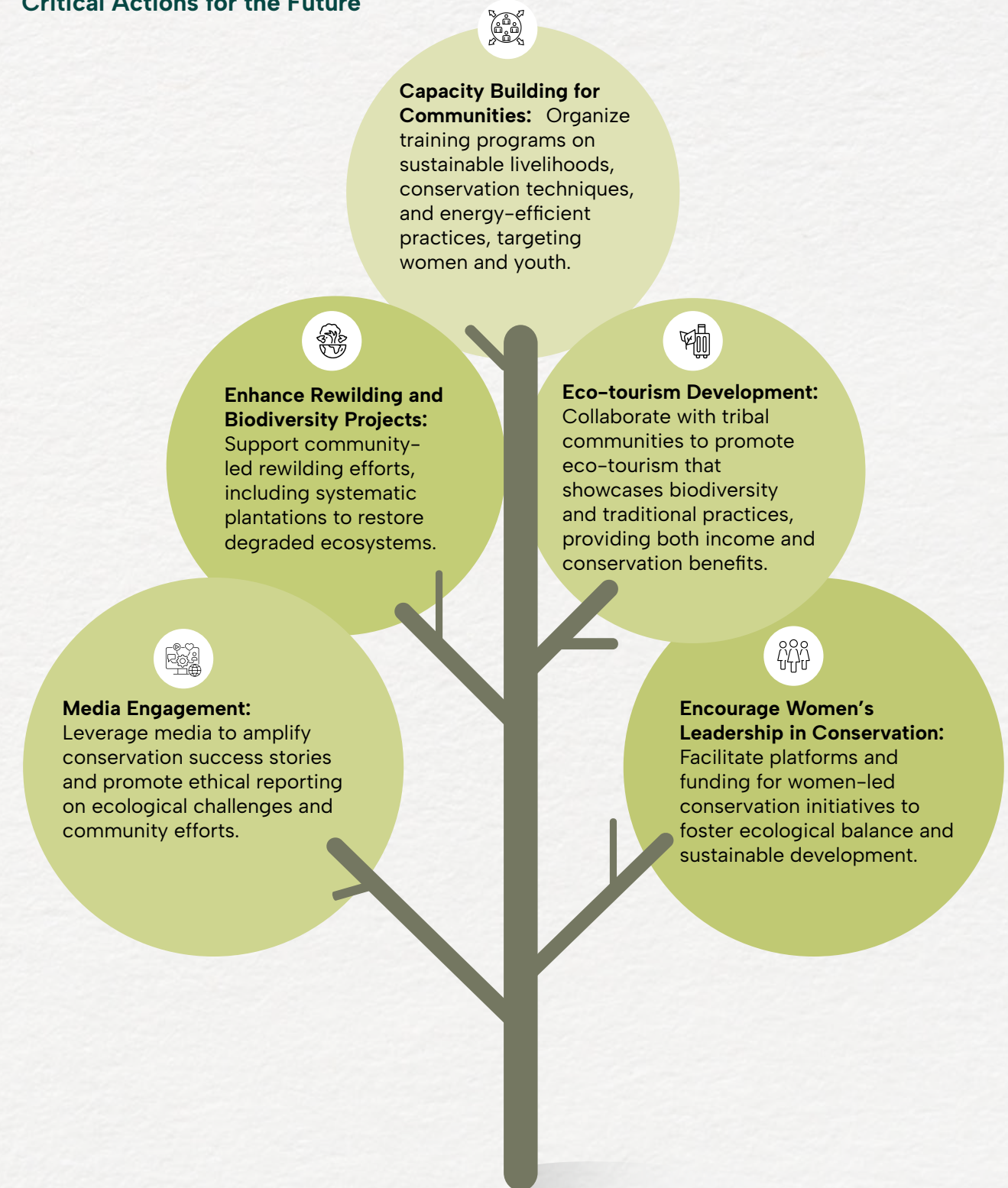
- Mobilizing communities through traditional practices.
- Addressing deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity.
- Promoting eco-tourism and conservation awareness.
- Shifting to sustainable livelihoods, particularly through women-led initiatives.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Promote Traditional Knowledge Integration:** Develop community programs that combine traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation strategies to address biodiversity loss and deforestation.
- ◆ **Strengthen Localized Solutions:** Implement decentralized energy solutions, such as refurbishing traditional watermills, to reduce reliance on centralized systems and enhance community resilience.
- ◆ **Expand Eco-tourism Opportunities:** Design eco-tourism models that integrate biodiversity conservation with cultural heritage, creating sustainable livelihoods and raising awareness about conservation.
- ◆ **Empower Women in Sustainable Practices:** Support women-led shifts from environmentally harmful practices like Zhoom cultivation to sustainable alternatives, such as agroforestry and handloom weaving.
- ◆ **Awareness Campaigns for Endangered Species Conservation:** Launch educational campaigns to reduce the exploitation of endangered species and encourage sustainable practices within communities.



Critical Actions for the Future



This session reinforced the importance of community-driven conservation efforts, emphasizing how traditional wisdom, women's

leadership, and eco-tourism can contribute to sustainable livelihoods while addressing critical ecological challenges.

SESSION XIV

Communities Speak: Voices of the Communities Screening of Gorai Phakri

This session aimed to amplify the voices of diverse communities in the region by discussing their unique cultural narratives, challenges, and contributions. The screening of Gorai Phakri served as a focal point to highlight themes of cultural heritage, identity, and shared experiences among marginalized groups.

Community Speakers from:

- Bodo Community
- Garo Community
- Adivasi Community
- Mising Community
- Wancho Community
- Nyishi Community
- Rajbongshi Community
- Nepali Community
- Monpa Community
- Sumi Community
- Yimchunger Community
- Sherdukpen Community



About Gorai Phakri:

Gorai Phakri offered a profound insights into the socio-cultural fabric of Northeast India, focusing on the intricate themes of cultural identity, inter-community conflicts, and historical struggles. The film highlights the challenges communities face in preserving their cultural traditions in the face of modernity, emphasizing the delicate balance between tradition and contemporary influences.

It also sheds light on the complexities of inter-community relationships, particularly the

tensions and bonds formed through migration, displacement, and integration, calling for dialogue and unity in addressing these issues.

Moreover, the film explores the historical and socio economic struggles, such as land rights, inequality, and political instability, that have shaped these communities, encouraging viewers to recognize the deep-rooted impacts of these challenges. It underscores the importance of ethnic identity, language, and shared cultural

narratives in fostering community cohesion, highlighting the value of understanding and embracing the region's diverse identities. The screening served as a powerful reminder of the

resilience and adaptability of these communities, urging reflection on the need for empathy, awareness, and collective action to address their ongoing struggles.



Challenges identified:

The discussion highlighted several pressing challenges faced by the communities portrayed in the film. One of the key issues was the representation of these communities in media, particularly how their struggles, histories, and achievements are depicted. There was also a focus on the socio-political and environmental challenges these communities are grappling with, as they strive for resilience amidst adversity. Political conflicts, limited access to education, and the scarcity

of employment opportunities were identified as significant barriers. The preservation of languages and traditions in the face of modernization posed another challenge, with communities struggling to maintain their cultural identities. Additionally, there were concerns about the balance between cultural preservation and embracing new opportunities, as well as the overarching issue of land rights and community displacement.

Key Recommendations:

To address these challenges, several recommendations emerged from the discussion. A key suggestion was to improve the representation of these communities in the media, ensuring their struggles and achievements are portrayed authentically. The importance of fostering resilience through community-based initiatives was emphasized, with an emphasis on collaboration and shared learning. Participants also recommended creating more opportunities

for education and employment within these communities to mitigate poverty and promote socio-economic growth. In terms of cultural preservation, there was a call for finding a balance between maintaining traditional practices and embracing modernization, ensuring that cultural identities are not lost. Finally, cooperative efforts were encouraged to tackle land issues, poverty, and the lack of infrastructure, focusing on collective development for sustainable progress.

27th November 2024

SESSION I

Leadership Address: Valuing the Himsagar

Setting the Context : Leadership Address

Chanakya Chaudhary

Vice President, Corporate Services, Tata Steel and Director, Tata Steel Foundation, India Limited, India

https://youtu.be/4gPcWsN_hyl

Speakers:

Reva Malhotra

Communications Consultant, India

In Conversation with:

S. Ramadorai

Chairman, Axis Bank Foundation and Former Vice Chairman, Tata Consultancy Services

Chanakya Chaudhary

Vice President, Corporate Services, Tata Steel and Director, Tata Steel Foundation, India Limited, India

Ravi Singh

CEO, WWF India, India

Snigdha Singh

VP – Organisation Effectiveness, Culture and CSR, Tata Consumer Products Limited, India

Session Overview:

The session brought together leaders from diverse fields to discuss corporate social responsibility, biodiversity conservation, sustainable living, and the integration of local communities into development initiatives. Emphasis was placed on fostering sustainable resource management, leveraging resilient ecosystems like bamboo plantations, and empowering local talent to create meaningful socio-economic impacts. The discussion also highlighted the importance of effective communication strategies and the role of organizations in addressing global challenges with local solutions.



The knowledge we need is already within us, within our region. We don't need to look outside - we just need to recognize and value our own expertise.

– Chanakya Chaudhary



Challenges identified:

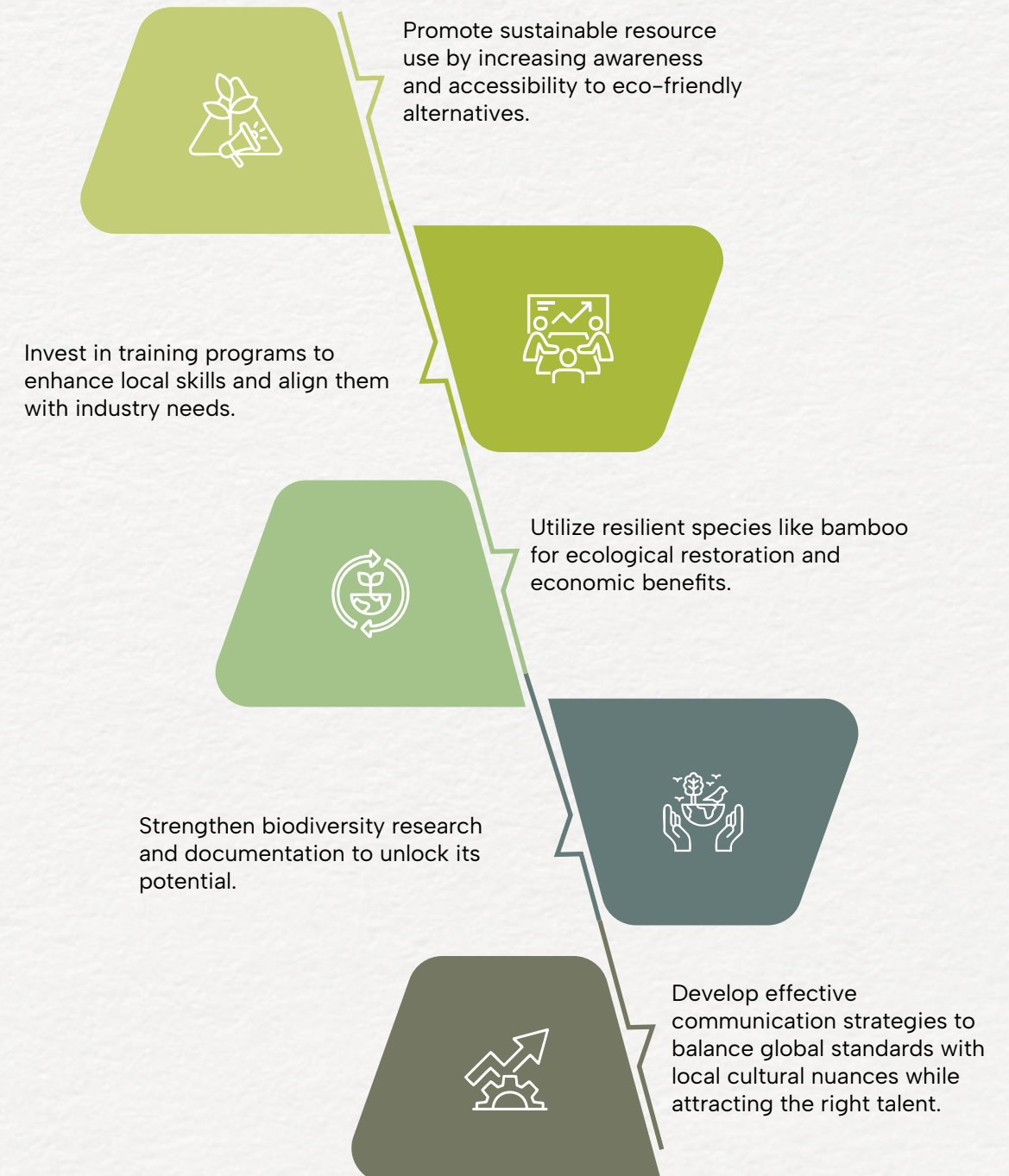
A significant concern was the over-reliance on natural resources, exacerbated by rising costs and limited availability, along with the insufficient adoption of sustainable living practices and eco-friendly alternatives. Another challenge centered around the recruitment and retention of skilled local individuals, compounded by the lack of adequate training opportunities to align community capabilities with industry demands. Additionally, the underutilization of resilient species such as bamboo, which holds immense potential for ecological restoration and economic growth, was emphasized, alongside the need for greater awareness and documentation of biodiversity benefits. The discussion also underscored gaps in identifying and onboarding the right talent to support organizational visions while managing the delicate balance between global standards and local cultural nuances.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Sustainable Practices:**
 - Advocate for the adoption of resource-efficient practices to reduce environmental impact.
 - Encourage innovation in cost-effective, eco-friendly solutions for industries and communities.
- ◆ **Empowering Local Communities:**
 - Strengthen community-oriented recruitment and skill-building programs to empower local youth.
 - Collaborate with academic institutions and NGOs to provide training and capacity-building initiatives.
- ◆ **Promoting Biodiversity and Bamboo Resilience:**
 - Scale up bamboo plantation programs as an ecological and economic asset in the Northeast.
 - Invest in biodiversity research and documentation to create knowledge-sharing platforms for conservation.
- ◆ **Strengthening Communication Strategies:**
 - Build agile corporate teams adept at managing cultural diversity while fostering local inclusion.
 - Develop strategic talent pipelines to align organizational goals with community aspirations.



Critical Actions for the Future



The session underscored the collective responsibility of corporations, communities, and individuals in fostering a future where

sustainable living, biodiversity, and local empowerment are central to global progress.

SESSION II

Balancing Economic Development and Conservation: Policy Perspectives

A closed door workshop on policy mapping

In collaboration with:



Participants:

Dr. Sarala Khaling

Regional Director, ATREE, India

Dr. Dipankar Saharia

Senior Director –Social Transformation & Strategic Alliance and Senior Director –Administrative Services & Regional Centres, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), India

Dr. Eklabya Sharma

Strategic Advisory and Senior Fellow, ATREE

Dr. Rathin Barman

Joint Director and Chief Strategy (North-east), Wildlife Institute of India, India

Dr. Shapna Medhi

Assistant Professor, Sonapur College, Assam

Dr. Amba Jamir

Policy and Development Strategist, Northeast, India

Dr. Fawzia Tarannum

Co-Founder, WforW Foundation, India

Dr. Dhruvad Choudhury

Senior Advisor, The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP), Rome

Dr. Dipankar Saharia

Senior Director – Social Transformation & Strategic Alliance and Senior Director – Administrative Services & Regional Centres, TERI, India

Workshop Context and Objectives:

The closed-door workshop served as a continuation of discussions initiated during a previous session in June, focused on addressing the intricate policy challenges concerning forest management in Northeast India. This session aimed to revisit, refine, and evaluate the recommendations from the earlier discussions to ensure their relevance and feasibility. The central objective was to explore the balance between economic development and conservation by analyzing policy mapping, integrating diverse knowledge systems, and addressing

governance and accountability challenges.

The workshop emphasized the necessity of breaking policy silos, fostering interdepartmental collaboration, and enhancing monitoring mechanisms to bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation. By adopting a multidimensional approach, the session sought to tackle the unique socio-economic and environmental challenges of the Northeast region and pave the way for actionable strategies.

Key Themes Discussed:

Multidimensional Policy Frameworks:

The participants underscored the need for policy frameworks that reflect the complex socio-economic and environmental realities of the Northeast. Given the region's diversity in governance systems, land ownership patterns, and Indigenous autonomy, policies must be tailored to the regional context. Fragmentation and overlap among governmental departments were identified as major barriers, prompting calls for high-level, integrated approaches that encourage collaboration across sectors.

Integration of Knowledge Systems:

A significant portion of the discussion revolved around the importance of blending traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge with scientific, socio-political, and economic insights. Such integration is crucial for designing effective and

inclusive policy frameworks. Traditional practices rooted in community-based forest management and sustainable resource use were recognized as valuable assets that can complement modern scientific approaches and ensure more holistic governance.

Governance and Accountability Mechanisms:

Participants highlighted the gaps in governance and accountability that hinder effective policy implementation. Issues such as limited capacity building for local administrative bodies, insufficient training for ground-level personnel, and inefficient monitoring systems were identified as critical challenges. Strengthening delivery mechanisms, ensuring measurable goals, and creating robust monitoring systems were deemed essential to improving policy outcomes.

Challenges identified:

The workshop identified several barriers to effective policy implementation. Policies often fail to deliver results due to weak delivery systems, fragmented government systems, and a lack of interdepartmental coordination. The absence of capacity-building initiatives for local bodies and ground-level

personnel further exacerbates these issues. Additionally, the complexity of regional governance, characterized by Indigenous autonomy and traditional forest management practices, poses challenges to policy uniformity and scalability.



Key Takeaways and Recommendations:

The workshop provided a roadmap to address the identified challenges and translate earlier recommendations into actionable strategies.

Building Region-Specific Policies: Policies must be contextualized to the unique socio-economic and environmental challenges of Northeast India. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge alongside scientific insights can create more inclusive and effective governance models.

Enhancing Knowledge System Integration: The integration of ecological science, sociology, and Indigenous practices was highlighted as a critical step toward achieving multidimensional policy approaches that address both conservation and economic development goals.

Strengthening Governance and Accountability: To bridge gaps in delivery mechanisms, participants recommended capacity-building initiatives, clear monitoring frameworks, and measurable targets to evaluate progress. Strengthening accountability at all levels of governance was emphasized as a means to ensure effective policy implementation.

Encouraging Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: The need for cohesive, high-level strategies to address policy silos and overlapping departmental efforts was a recurring theme. Cross-sectoral collaboration between government bodies, researchers, and stakeholders is crucial to overcoming fragmentation and ensuring integrated policy responses.



Future Actions:

The session concluded with plans to establish three thematic working groups focused on developing actionable insights in key areas:

Multidimensional policy frameworks that reduce fragmentation and foster regional integration.



Effective integration of traditional Indigenous knowledge and scientific approaches for informed environmental governance.

Strengthening governance mechanisms through capacity building, improved delivery systems, and robust monitoring processes.

These working groups will refine recommendations, identify gaps in current approaches, and propose practical strategies for implementation. The workshop marked a

significant step toward aligning conservation efforts with economic development goals in the Northeast, setting the stage for more collaborative and effective policymaking.



SESSION III

Redefining Waste Management

Keynote Leadership Address:

Ashish Parikh

Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, Diageo India

<https://youtu.be/ckFZikSKTck>

Speakers:

Ittisha Sarah

Director, Northeast Waste Collective, Arunachal Pradesh

In Conversation with:

Prashanth Venkatesh

Marketing Director and India Sustainability Head, Hindustan Unilever Limited, India

Ashish Parikh

Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, Diageo India

Aashish Kothawade

Urban Planner and Project Executive at the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), India

Overview of the Session:

The session “Redefining Waste Management” focused on corporate-led strategies to tackle India’s escalating waste management crisis. Industry leaders discussed innovative approaches to reducing plastic usage, improving recycling infrastructure, and fostering community awareness to drive sustainable practices. The conversation underscored the urgent need for collective action to address the environmental and social challenges posed by waste.



We should take sustainability as our duty to be driven by the whole spirit of progress - its our north star

– Ashish Parikh



Challenges identified:

India’s diverse cultural and geographical landscape poses unique challenges for waste management. High dependency on plastics, particularly complex multilayer packaging, hampers recycling efficiency. Limited household-level segregation of waste further exacerbates

the problem, while inadequate recycling infrastructure in both urban and rural areas restricts progress. Additionally, low public awareness about sustainable waste practices hinders widespread adoption of solutions.



Key recommendations:

The session emphasized the need for a multi-faceted approach to waste management. Corporations must lead the transition to eco-friendly practices, such as replacing multilayer packaging with recyclable monolayer alternatives and reducing plastic usage in production processes. Community engagement is vital, with awareness campaigns promoting proper waste segregation and recycling. The role of technology in creating a

circular economy was highlighted, including digital platforms to mobilize communities and support sustainable waste disposal. Additionally, funding innovations such as biofuels derived from agricultural waste and supporting startups in waste management were encouraged. Expanding initiatives like WASH to provide water recycling and sanitation facilities was identified as essential for long-term impact.



Critical Actions for the Future:

To address the challenges, it is critical to:



The session highlighted the crucial role of corporate leadership, technological innovation, and grassroots engagement in redefining waste management for a sustainable future.

SESSION IV

Preserving Habitats: The Key to Asian Elephants' Survival

Speakers:

Dr. Rathin Barman

Joint Director and Chief Strategy (North-east),
Wildlife Trust of India

In Conversation with:

Dr. Kushal KonwarSarma

Head of Department and Professor, Assam Agricultural
University, India

Himal Tewari

Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief CSR and
Sustainability, Tata Power

Smt. Pasupuleti Monica Kishore

IFS, DFO, Guwahati Wildlife Division, Govt. of Assam,
India

Dr. Chatchote Thitaram

Associate Professor In The Faculty Of Veterinary
Medicine, Chiang Mai University and Director, The
Elephant Reintroduction Foundation, Thailand

Overview of the Session:

This session brought together experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to deliberate on the critical challenges threatening Asian elephants. Discussions focused on habitat loss, human-elephant conflict, and the need for integrated conservation strategies that balance ecological preservation with socio-economic development. Insights were shared on alternative livelihoods, sustainable infrastructure, and international collaboration to mitigate human-elephant conflict and ensure long-term ecological balance.



<https://youtu.be/HUGtotRIT28>

Challenges identified:

- **Human-Elephant Conflict:** Increasing competition for space due to habitat loss and agricultural encroachment has intensified conflicts, leading to violence and fatalities for both humans and elephants.
- **Habitat Degradation:** Rapid land-use changes, deforestation, and climate change are shrinking elephant habitats, disrupting migration patterns and survival prospects.
- **Insufficient Awareness:** Limited understanding of the ecological importance of elephants and the consequences of habitat encroachment among local communities hampers conservation efforts.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Fragmented landscapes caused by infrastructure projects, such as roads and railways, disrupt migration routes and increase the risk of human-elephant interactions.
- **Lack of Policy Integration:** The absence of coordinated policies and structural mechanisms to address habitat preservation, conflict mitigation, and sustainable development hinders effective action.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Promote Education and Awareness:**
Launch community education campaigns to raise awareness about human–elephant conflict and the importance of habitat preservation. Encourage behavioral change through targeted programs, focusing on coexistence strategies.
- ◆ **Support Alternative Livelihoods:**
Introduce livelihood diversification programs to reduce dependency on land-intensive activities that encroach on elephant habitats. Provide financial and technical support to communities for eco-friendly enterprises.
- ◆ **Develop Sustainable Infrastructure:**
Implement linear infrastructures, such as elephant corridors and underpasses, to support safe migration and reduce habitat fragmentation.
- ◆ **Foster International Collaboration:**
Adopt best practices from successful conservation models, such as Thailand’s Elephant Reintroduction Foundation, to enhance habitat preservation and conflict resolution. Facilitate knowledge sharing between countries to address common challenges and scale up innovative solutions.
- ◆ **Strengthen Policy and Governance:**
Advocate for policies prioritizing habitat conservation, ecological restoration, and sustainable development. Establish structural mechanisms to monitor and mitigate human–elephant conflict through government, corporate, and community partnerships.



Critical Actions for the Future:

Expand Community Engagement:

- Build grassroots movements to promote coexistence and empower communities to take ownership of conservation efforts.
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to design and implement alternative livelihoods and educational programs.

Leverage Technology and Research:

- Use technology for real-time monitoring of elephant movements, habitat conditions, and conflict hotspots.
- Conduct research on climate change impacts on elephant habitats to guide adaptive conservation strategies.

Implement Sustainable Development Practices:

- Ensure all infrastructure projects in elephant habitats include environmental impact assessments and measures to minimize habitat disruption.
- Restore degraded habitats and connect fragmented landscapes through afforestation and land rehabilitation projects.

Scale Up Collaborative Efforts:

- Form alliances between governments, NGOs, corporates, and academic institutions to address habitat preservation at a regional and global level.
- Align conservation strategies with international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



This session emphasized the interconnectedness of habitat preservation, elephant survival, and sustainable development. The speakers highlighted that safeguarding Asian elephants requires not just isolated conservation efforts but a comprehensive,

multi-stakeholder approach that prioritizes ecological restoration, community engagement, and policy innovation. By addressing these challenges holistically, we can ensure a future where both humans and elephants thrive in harmony.

SESSION V

Agriculture and Beyond: Integrated Approaches to Land Management

Speakers:

Dr. Sunayana Sarkar

Assistant Professor, Mukesh Patel School of Technology Management and Engineering, NMIMS University, India

In Conversation with:

Madhuri Nanda

Director –South Asia, Rainforest Alliance

Anant Singh

Head, Agriculture, Tata Steel Foundation, India

Dr. Richard Milburn MBE

Lecturer –Environmental Security, Kings College, London, UK

Ashwinikumar Patil

Walwhan Renewable Energy Ltd. Chief (O&M), Head CR & Sustainability, Tata Power Renewable Energy

Overview of the Session:

This discussion brought together a diverse panel of experts to discuss strategies for managing land resources in a sustainable way. The session focused on balancing conservation efforts with the growing demands for development and land use. The panelists discussed various approaches to ensure land management supports both ecological preservation and socio-economic development, emphasizing the importance of integrating sustainable practices into land-use planning.



Challenges identified:

The panelists outlined several critical challenges that hinder effective land management in the Eastern Himalaya. First, rapid urbanization and infrastructure development are encroaching on critical ecosystems, threatening biodiversity and disrupting local agricultural systems. Second, unsustainable agricultural practices, such as overgrazing, excessive use of chemical fertilizers, and monocropping, are depleting soil health and causing land degradation. Third, deforestation continues to be a major issue, with

logging and land clearing for agriculture leading to soil erosion, loss of habitat, and reduced carbon sequestration. Furthermore, climate change exacerbates these challenges by altering weather patterns, causing more frequent and intense natural disasters, such as floods and droughts. Lastly, there is a lack of coordination between various stakeholders—government agencies, local communities, and industries—which leads to fragmented land-use policies that fail to address the interconnected nature of conservation and development.

Key recommendations:

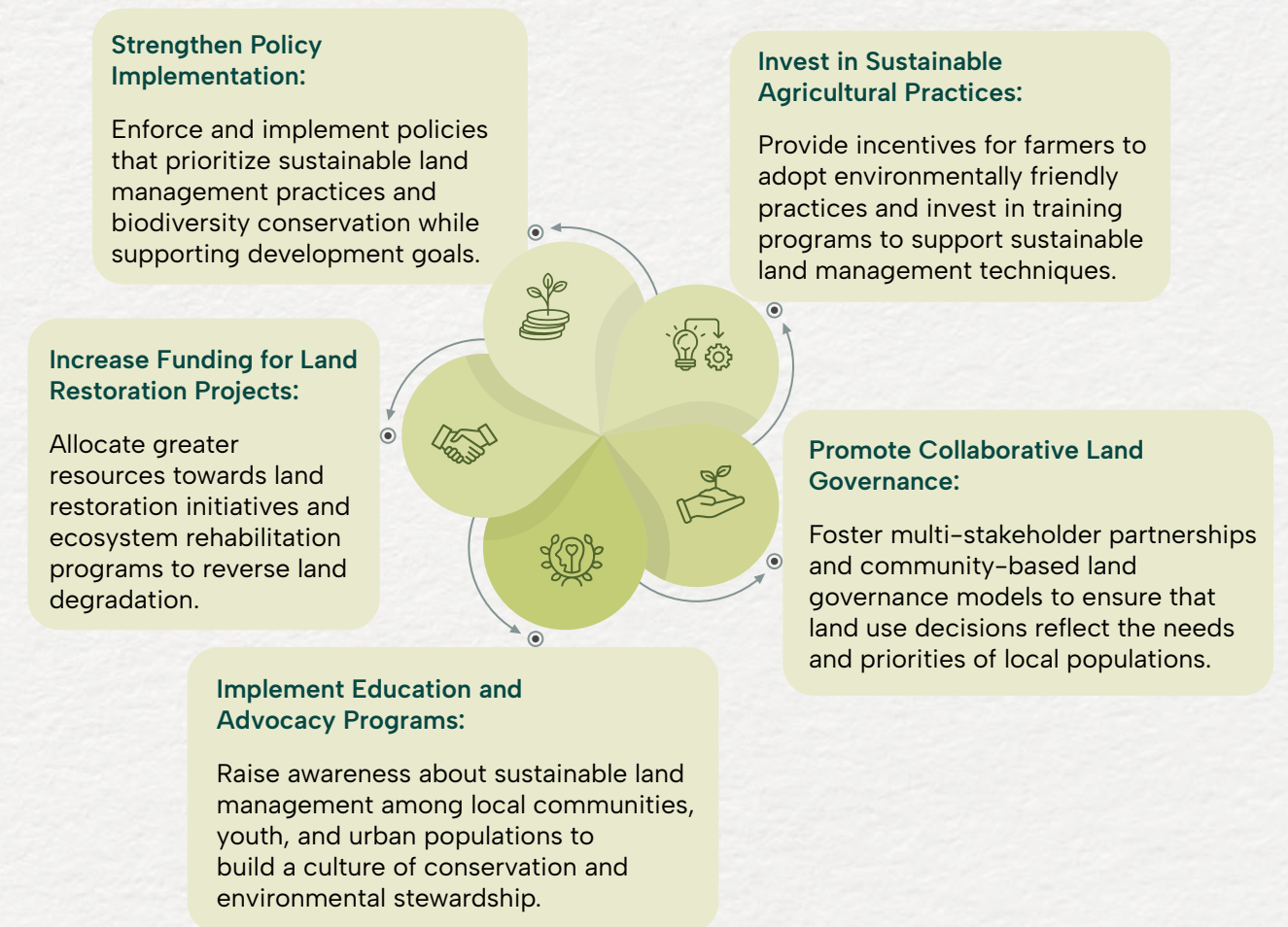
Based on the expert discussions, the following key recommendations were proposed:

- ◆ **Integrate Conservation into Land-Use Planning:** Develop policies that promote the integration of conservation priorities into land-use planning and development projects to ensure ecological balance.
- ◆ **Promote Sustainable Agriculture:** Encourage sustainable agricultural practices, including agroforestry, organic farming, and crop rotation, to enhance soil fertility, reduce land degradation, and increase resilience to climate change.
- ◆ **Support Community-Driven Conservation:** Strengthen local communities' role in land management, ensuring that conservation efforts align with their economic and social needs.
- ◆ **Enhance Coordination Among Stakeholders:** Facilitate collaboration between government, local communities, NGOs, and the private sector to create holistic land management policies.
- ◆ **Invest in Land Restoration Programs:** Implement large-scale restoration initiatives to rehabilitate degraded lands and restore ecosystems that provide critical services such as water regulation, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity conservation.
- ◆ **Policy Reform and Education:** Reform land-use policies to promote sustainability and provide education and training on sustainable land management practices for both rural and urban populations.
- ◆ **Adopt Technological Solutions:** Leverage technology, such as GIS mapping, remote sensing, and land-monitoring systems, to track land use and assess environmental impacts in real time.



Critical Actions for the Future:

To ensure sustainable land management in the future, the following actions are critical:



The session successfully highlighted the complex challenges of water security in the Eastern Himalayan region, advocating for a collaborative approach combining scientific innovation, community involvement, private sector contributions, and strong policy frameworks. Immediate action, guided by these recommendations, will be essential to mitigate the ongoing crisis and ensure long-term water security for vulnerable populations in the region.



SESSION VI

Livelihoods and Sustainable Development Models: **In the Context of Eastern Himalaya**

In collaboration with:



Speakers:

Dr. Rajesh Thadani

Chairman, CEDAR and Himmothan, India

Arun Pandhi

Founder & Managing Director, P-Green Solutions, India

Sanjay Singh

Executive Director, Centre for Microfinance & Livelihood, India

Kautillya Basumatary

General Manager, Centre for Microfinance & Livelihood, India

Dr. Preetish Kakoty

Research Fellow, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Dr Amba Jamir

Policy and Development Strategist, Northeast, India

A.C. Zonunmawia

Executive Director, Centre for Environment Protection (CEP), Mizoram

Ms. Sentimongla Kechuchar

Executive Director, NEIDA, Kohima

Overview of the Session:

This session brought together experts and thought leaders from diverse organizations to deliberate on livelihood opportunities, sustainable development strategies, and community engagement models tailored for the Eastern Himalayan region. Organized in collaboration with Northeast Initiative Development Agency (NEIDA) and Centre for Microfinance & Livelihood (CML), the session emphasized innovative, community-driven approaches for socioeconomic and environmental challenges. The speakers shared their expertise on climate resilience, financial inclusion, renewable energy, agroforestry, and participatory governance. The discussions highlighted the need for integrated and collaborative action to enhance rural livelihoods and build sustainable, resilient communities.



Challenges identified:

The Eastern Himalayan region faces significant challenges that hinder its socioeconomic and environmental progress. Climate vulnerability remains a critical issue, with communities disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, including natural disasters that threaten livelihoods dependent on agriculture, forestry, and water-based resources. Economic disparities persist, with widespread poverty and unemployment compounded by a lack of livelihood diversification, leaving rural households with limited income opportunities. Access to financial resources and literacy programs is another major barrier, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, who struggle to gain financial independence and participate meaningfully in the economy.

Environmental degradation, driven by unsustainable practices, has led to deforestation, soil erosion, and water scarcity, further exacerbating the challenges for rural communities. Additionally, there is a significant gap in skill development, with communities lacking the technical expertise and access to green technologies necessary for adopting sustainable practices. Weak implementation of governance and policy reforms has also contributed to regional inequalities, leaving many development challenges unaddressed. These interconnected issues underscore the urgency for comprehensive and collaborative approaches to create resilient and sustainable livelihoods in the region.

Key recommendations:

- ◆ **Promote Climate Resilience:** Develop and implement climate adaptation strategies to safeguard livelihoods in vulnerable sectors like agriculture, forestry, and water management.
- ◆ **Strengthen Financial Inclusion:** Expand microfinance programs and financial literacy initiatives, with a focus on empowering women through cooperatives and financial independence.
- ◆ **Foster Renewable Energy Solutions:** Support eco-friendly renewable energy projects to create green jobs, reduce dependence on traditional energy sources, and combat climate change.
- ◆ **Encourage Agroforestry Models:** Integrate agroforestry practices with livelihood programs to ensure sustainable use of resources, enhance biodiversity, and improve rural incomes.
- ◆ **Enhance Community Engagement:** Involve local communities in participatory governance and sustainable development initiatives for ownership and long-term impact.
- ◆ **Collaborative Partnerships:** Facilitate multi-sectoral collaborations between governments, corporate actors, civil society, and non-profits to design innovative, impactful development solutions.
- ◆ **Focus on Education and Skill Development:** Implement training programs aligned with green technologies and livelihood diversification to build capacity in rural communities.



Critical Actions for the Future

 Scaling Up Watershed Programs: Develop integrated watershed management programs to address water security and agricultural stability, as highlighted by Dr. Rajesh Thadani.	 Establish Green Business Hubs: Create platforms to support green startups and renewable energy initiatives, fostering entrepreneurship in rural areas, as emphasized by Arun Pandhi.	 Diversify Livelihoods: Invest in alternative livelihoods like agroforestry, small enterprises, and sustainable fisheries to reduce economic vulnerabilities, as proposed by multiple speakers.
 Policy Advocacy: Strengthen advocacy for inclusive governance, policy reforms, and regional planning to address inequalities and promote sustainable development, as discussed by Dr. Amba Jamir.	 Implement Education-Driven Interventions: Launch targeted education programs focusing on skill-building for women and youth, aligned with local needs and sustainable technologies.	 Strengthen Climate Resilience Research: Invest in research-based interventions for climate adaptation, particularly for mountainous and disaster-prone areas, as recommended by Dr. Preetish Kotoky.
 Scale Community-Based Conservation Models: Expand education, training, and community-led conservation programs to restore degraded ecosystems and create conservation-linked livelihoods, as advocated by A.C. Zonunmawia.	 Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Continue hosting sessions like this to foster dialogue and partnerships, building momentum for collective action toward sustainable development in the Eastern Himalayan region.	

This session underscored the urgency for integrated, community-driven development approaches to address the socio-economic and environmental challenges of the Eastern Himalaya. The diverse expertise and insights presented a roadmap for building resilient, sustainable communities while ensuring environmental conservation and economic growth.

EHNF 2024 X Universities

Universities participated:

Royal Global University, Assam



https://youtu.be/NFCJ5_ot-zA

Gauhati University, Assam



<https://youtu.be/M9Umclfgr20>

Cotton University, Assam



Learnings and Recommendations:

Youth as Change Agents:

The sessions highlighted the immense potential of young people in driving climate action, particularly in advocating for and safeguarding the Third Pole. Their energy and creativity were seen as key assets in addressing environmental challenges.

Integration of Science and Traditional Knowledge:

A significant learning was the need to blend scientific research with traditional knowledge systems to create resilient and adaptive solutions for the Third Pole. This approach was demonstrated through case studies and discussions with local communities.

Storytelling as a Conservation Tool:

Storytelling was emphasized as a powerful medium to evangelize the Third Pole's

significance and urgency. Youth participants were encouraged to use digital platforms, art, and creative media to raise awareness and inspire community action.

Social and Environmental Governance:

Businesses and governance models can no longer afford to separate economic growth from ecological and social responsibilities. Sustainable practices must be embedded into policy and business operations.

Collaborative Efforts Across Sectors:

Multi-stakeholder partnerships involving academic institutions, governments, businesses, and communities were highlighted as critical for meaningful and scalable conservation efforts.

Recommendations:

Youth Empowerment and Leadership:

- Establish dedicated platforms and leadership programs to involve youth in decision-making for climate and conservation initiatives.
- Create opportunities for youth-led startups and innovation in green businesses, particularly in eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, and waste management.

Strengthen University-Community Links:

- Encourage universities to partner with local communities on conservation projects, integrating students into real-world challenges through fieldwork and internships.
- Design and implement interdisciplinary courses focusing on sustainability, climate science, and policy-making.

Promote Digital Advocacy:

- Equip students with skills in digital storytelling, advocacy, and social media campaigning to amplify conservation messages and drive global attention to the Third Pole.

Incorporate Sustainability into Governance and Business:

- Advocate for policies that integrate environmental and social considerations into all aspects of governance and business operations.
- Develop frameworks for measuring the ecological impact of business activities, with youth participation in monitoring and evaluation.

Prioritize Climate Education:

- Ensure that climate education is embedded across academic curricula, emphasizing the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems.

12th Balipara Foundation Awards 2024

The 12th Balipara Foundation Awards has been instrumental in driving impactful conservation and community development initiatives. It has contributed to supporting 13 earth heroes who have restored over 10,000 trees, and preserved over 750 species. Additionally, the awards have

positively influenced the livelihoods of more than 1,100 individuals and facilitated the creation of over 35 publications, showcasing the profound synergy between human development and ecological balance.



The Rural Futures Rewilding Award

All Loktak Lake Area Fishermen Union – Manipur

Presented by – Dr Madhuri Nanda, Director, South Asia Rainforest Alliance.

<https://youtu.be/DzdNdtuPbIA>



The Rural Futures Rewilding Award

Pramod Kalita – Assam

Presented by – Dr Divya Sharma, Executive Director, Climate Group, India

https://youtu.be/pTJh_Pc6iLI



The Naturenomics Award

Hannah Debbarma – Tripura

Presented by – Spencer Low, Sustainability Head Asia, Google

<https://youtu.be/JpPUsX2Vkw0>



The Young Naturalist Award

Roshan Upadhyay – Arunachal Pradesh

Presented by – Mrs. Mala Ramadorai, Hindustani Classical and Carnatic vocalist

<https://youtu.be/tQI3LSfgrrg>



The Green Journalist Award

Sonam Pintso Sherpa – Sikkim

Presented by – Jani Viswanath, Film Producer and Founder of Healing Lives

<https://youtu.be/fjaQ-oIRXJc>



The Green Guru Award

Tokiho P. Awomi – Nagaland

Presented by – Ruma Devi, Indian traditional handicraft fashion designer and social worker.

<https://youtu.be/apVrXEfa2tl>



The Food for the Future Award

Hmangaihkimi – Mizoram

Presented by – Ashish Parikh, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, Diageo India

<https://youtu.be/qguSwvKpzAY>



The Forests Guards and Rangers Award

Chondu Dorji – Bhutan

Presented by – Kumkum Nongrum, Great Manager Institute

<https://youtu.be/IAj8Qk1hHMA>



The Forests Guards and Rangers Award

Kiba – Bhutan

Presented by – Kumkum Nongrum, Great Manager Institute

<https://youtu.be/IAj8Qk1hHMA>



Her Excellency Queen Diambi, Royal Queen of Congo

Her Royal Highness Queen Diambi Kabatusuila, Elikia Hope Foundation, Democratic Republic of Congo

Honoured by Sourav Roy, CEO of Tata Steel Foundation, India and Chanakya Chaudhary, Vice-president of Corporate Services at Tata Steel

<https://youtu.be/PdHggqPP3-0>



The Lifetime Service Award

Vishwanath Waikhom – Manipur

Presented by – His Excellency Eric Garcetti, Ambassador to the USA to India in the presence of Radhika Barthakur and Ranjit Barthakur, Founder Forester, Balipara Foundation.

<https://youtu.be/SvtYioZcOjQ>



The Rewilding The Eastern Himalayan Grant

Nanadisa Village in Dima Hasao, Assam

Presented by – Ranjit Barthakur, Founder Forester, Balipara Foundation.

<https://youtu.be/o9W0dvermqc>



The Special Recognition Award– Ecological Warriors

Joydip Kunu and Suchandra Kundu – Sundarbans, West Bengal

Presented by – Bittu Sahgal, Editor, Sanctuary Nature Foundation and Lobsang Sangay, Senior Visiting Fellow, Harvard Law School, USA

<https://youtu.be/zxiOhEm9qd0>



The Special Recognition Award– Future Leader in Wildlife Conservation

Nirmali Sharma – Assam

Presented by – Vaishnavi Prabhakaran, Head Sustainability, Tata Power, India

<https://youtu.be/ZE40KzYQZKI>



Celebrating TERI'S 50 years award

Dr. Vibha Dhawan, Director General, TERI, India

Presented by – Dr. Praveer Sinha, CEO & Managing Director, Tata Power; and Ranjit Barthakur, Founder Forester, Balipara Foundation.

<https://youtu.be/8kvFyDztDSg>

Media Coverage Summary



164 media releases

Print media coverage



20+

Television media coverage

Digital Reach


670.5 million


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Acknowledgment

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