

No Time to Waste

Investing together in our collective future

By Kanchan Kargwal.

The world is grappling with intensifying climate change — temperatures are rising, weather patterns are changing, and extreme events and natural disasters are becoming frequent.

We are in the climate decisive decade, and we must act now.

With another [Earth Day](#) today, we have an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with planet Earth — our home. Building upon the success of last year's widely appreciated campaign, the Earth Day 2023 theme 'Invest in our planet, protect our future' focusses on mobilising governments, institutions, businesses, and citizens to take responsibility and actively do their part.

Investing in our planet is not just about taking action to protect the environment and restore our natural ecosystems, but also about building a more resilient and equitable future for all. It also means supporting policies and initiatives that prioritise integrated development, environmental protection, and sustainability. Thus, investment in our planet should be seen holistically with the aim of achieving environmental, social, and economic well-being that is equitable.

This is especially true for our country. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report 'Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability', India, like many other developing countries, is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which is why it is crucial to take action now to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The efforts to combat climate change are already on in India. We have made significant climate commitments under the [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#), which include reducing the emissions intensity of India's gross domestic product (GDP) by 45% below 2005 levels by 2030, increasing the share of non-fossil fuels in the country's electricity production to 50% by 2030, and creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent or [CO₂e](#) through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. As these targets require significant investment in renewable energy and other low-carbon technologies, the government has launched several programmes and schemes in this area, such as the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme and the *Ujala* scheme.

Similarly, to fulfil the eight missions under the [National Action Plan on Climate Change](#), the government is directing investments towards various sectors for promoting solar, wind, and bio-energy generation and uptake, enhancing energy efficiency, and boosting sustainable agriculture.

But while these efforts are laudable, a broader outlook that embraces the socioeconomic fabric of India is needed to help its people deal effectively — and equitably — with the perils of climate change.

A significant proportion of India's population residing in [rural](#) areas lives [below the poverty line](#), making it more vulnerable to climate change impacts owing to the increased exposure and limited capacity to deal with climate variability and extremes. Moreover, due to a higher dependence on natural resources and narrower livelihood sources, the rural poor face an increased risk of livelihood loss from climate change. This scenario warrants investing in holistic programmes that go beyond simple poverty alleviation goals to generate significant green benefits in the form of stronger adaptive abilities and climate resilience.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is one such development scheme that is implemented across India. It aims at enhancing livelihood security of the rural poor by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment to households that demand work. Of the various development activities (called 'works') implemented under MGNREGS, the natural resource management or NRM-based works (like construction of water harvesting structures, irrigation canals, and plantation works) have — by virtue of their design — delivered substantial [climate co-benefits](#) (the additional climate-positive outcomes achieved because of the implementation of development programmes). They have increased the farm earnings of the beneficiaries and given them more livelihood options, enhancing their ability to deal with climate hazards such as droughts. They have also mitigated emissions by sequestering carbon through plantation works. These benefits will eventually improve the adaptive capacities of the rural poor and strengthen their climate resilience.

Thus, integrating climate considerations into development initiatives and taking a comprehensive approach to devising climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies can be mutually reinforcing, which can amplify the effectiveness of all such efforts and take India closer to meeting its climate commitments and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The author works in the Adaptation and Risk Analysis team of the Climate, Environment and Sustainability Sector at CSTEP.