

## **Eco-Mandates for a Climate-Resilient Democracy**

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Earth, home to over 8 billion species, saw record CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2023. The temperatures rose by 1.4 °C, close to the 1.5 °C cap of the Paris Agreement, making it the warmest year. Recently, as we celebrated the World Environment Day on 5th June — the biggest day on environment observed to increase awareness about and action against this aggravating climate change situation — it is timely to reinterpret our fundamental rights and duties through a climate lens.

With respect to environment and climate change, this year has been a constitutional landmark for India. The Supreme Court of India in its judgement for a writ petition seeking protection for the Great Indian Bustard carved out a new fundamental right for citizens to be free from adverse effects of climate change. The three-judge bench led by the Chief Justice of India linked the new right with Article 14 and 21 (right to equality and life, respectively), recognising the unequal vulnerability of certain communities to climate change hazards. This marked a significant leap forward in our constitutional law and environmental jurisprudence because previous judgements mostly relied on Article 21 for the right to a clean environment.

While governments and institutions are leading in enforcing our fundamental rights regarding climate change, their success also depends on incorporating citizen actions into fundamental duties, some of which are as follows:

### **1. To abide by Mission LiFE and its targets.**

Under the stewardship of the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC), every citizen is called to climate action through Mission LiFE, which outlines 75 key actions to transform long-term demand, supply, and policy ecosystems.

### **2. To cherish and follow the traditional and indigenous wisdom that inspires community-led nature conservation and low-carbon lifestyles.**

Citizens must support a blend of home-grown and contemporary practices such as organic farming and soil conservation to enhance the climate resilience of our food systems.

### **3. To uphold and protect the sovereignty, cohesion, and intactness of India's forests, oceans, and other natural habitats.**

As per the [Biodiversity Indicators Partnership](#), India's biodiversity indicators continue to decline despite progress since 2015. This alarming trend must signal citizens to join indigenous communities in their intensified conservation efforts of our natural heritage.

### **4. To defend the pro-environment movement and participate in democratic processes that support robust climate policies at local, national, and global levels.**

As citizens of the world's largest democracy, we inherit a legacy of powerful grassroots movements, such as the Bishnoi (1730), Chipko (1973), and Silent Valley (1978) movements. These must inspire us to upkeep our collective voices to enforce environmental accountability.

### **5. To promote energy conservation and the advocacy for renewable energy.**

We must adhere to the guidelines set by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) to upgrade our appliances and infrastructure to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## **6. To engage in recycling, composting, and reducing waste through mindful consumption.**

With India generating [58 million tonnes](#) of waste annually and having low collection and processing capabilities, it is vital for us citizens to consume in moderation and reduce waste by adopting segregation and composting practices.

## **7. To cultivate humanism and a scientific mindset to develop strategies that enhance personal and community resilience against climate disruptions.**

We must support science-based institutions and entrepreneurship incubators that drive national climate strategies. By staying informed, joining citizen science movements, and advocating evidence-based projects, we can shoulder their responsibility for driving climate action.

## **8. To uphold and promote sustainable mobility, including public transport, electric vehicles, walking, and cycling.**

As India's megacities face severe traffic congestion, we must rethink our contributions to high road space usage and carbon footprint due to personal car use. Let us embrace low-carbon transport and demand better public transit for cleaner, more efficient cities.

## **9. To strive towards sustainable investment in all spheres of individual and collective activity.**

In India's climate action landscape, the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) and philanthropies is crucial. Let us invest in these impact-driven organisations, boosting their capacity to scale up and accelerate equitable progress towards our ambitious climate targets.

## **10. To provide opportunities in climate literacy for young citizens and support climate research.**

With about [50%](#) of its population under 25, India's youth can lead climate action through integrated education. By discussing climate issues at home and embedding research into school curricula, we can train young Indians for climate-conscious careers and close the knowledge-action gap.

In conclusion, enforcing these environmental duties will not only build citizen responsibility but also multiply eco-benefits across 1.4 billion people, spurring public demand for better policies. Further, this rights-and-duties approach narrows the gap between legal obligations and moral imperatives, enhancing climate awareness and fostering long-term climate action commitment.

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