

Leadership and climate change

To combat climate change, government legislation and corporate initiatives must work in tandem

Climate change has become a significant agenda for both the government and the corporate sector in the present decade. Climate affects all of us – and the recent forecasts on the worsening global weather conditions (climate change) and their potential to unleash unprecedented catastrophes is a significant cause for concern. Drastic climate changes can be disastrous for the delicate balance of our planet and can impact every aspect of our lives including our livelihoods, businesses and more importantly, chances to continue existing in this world.

Natural forces aside, industrialisation has been the key agent for climate change. The rapid expansion of industrial activity in the past 200 years has dealt a significant blow to the natural order of the elements that help maintain the Earth's delicate balance. With industrialisation, our planet has progressively become warmer and wetter, causing a range of unprecedented climatic conditions.

Today, the extent of damage has become significant enough to elicit an urgent response from leaders across governments and industries. Business leaders today need to be cognizant of the moral, economic and social implications of not just the way they manage their business but also the way the implications impact our world. They need to realise that the state of our climate is essentially a function of the quality of relationship that we have had with our environment, energy resources and other natural sources.

While governments, interest groups and industry lobbies are aware of the looming crisis, they largely continue to battle over who needs to take the responsibility and ultimately drive the tough measures necessary to combat climate change. However, a few organisations and leaders have emerged in the forefront with initiatives that help protect our environment and restore our depleted natural resources.

Sustainability is the core philosophy driving **Indian Tobacco Co's** (ITC) business processes. The company has innovatively built its business strategy around societal contribution and environment protection. It has adopted conservative energy saving systems across its



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organisation through measures such as green lighting systems and the reuse of significant quantities of waste paper, which it sources locally and internationally for its paper business. The company's sustainability-based approach has enabled access to newer markets, continued long-term access to raw materials and resources and enabled opportunities for sustainable living for large sections of people. Additionally, it aggressively pursues large-scale social and farm forestry plantations and watershed projects initiatives.

Larsen and Toubro (L&T), the infrastructure giant, is conscious of the potential for environmental impact created by its businesses, which involve extensive use of raw materials and considerable greenhouse gas emissions due to the nature of the processes in its plants and projects. To combat the extensive use of raw materials in its business, L&T has begun using alternate materials and also conserves natural resources through rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge initiatives across all its plants and project sites. In addition, the company reuses the waste generated from its processes such as fly ash, ground-granulated blast-furnace slag. It also uses other additives to significantly reduce the consumption of cement.

Suzlon Wind Energy has revolutionised the alternate energy sector in the country by launching sustainable wind-power projects on a commercial scale. Since inception, the company has significantly expanded the scale and potential of wind energy through a wide range of high-efficiency wind turbine products. Further, the company is committed to reducing its carbon footprint across all its operations. On its One Earth campus at Pune, the company has stressed its belief in co-existence and sustainability, incorporating a range of eco-friendly measures such as natural lighting and improvised water systems that help conserve energy and resources.

Aside from organisations, key individuals have offered leadership to the cause of combating climate change through environment protection. They have made significant contributions by way of enabling awareness on the climate change debate and advocating active community action in protecting

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the environment.

Vandana Shiva's organisation, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, promotes biodiversity and eco-conservation. She has individually crusaded against agricultural companies such as Monsanto, that have penetrated the crop seed market through patented and genetically modified seeds, impeding direct access to seeds for farmers.

Nobel laureates **Al Gore** and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) headed by **Rajendra Pachauri** have made significant contributions in the area of climate change. Their joint investigation on global warming and its consequences for Earth is deemed an influential study that simultaneously commanded the interests of world leaders and the common masses.

A **anna Hazare** has pioneered the rural sustainability movement in India through his model village project at **Ralegan Siddhi**, initiated in 1975. Although Ralegan Siddhi is in the midst of the dry plains in Maharashtra, Anna Hazare's visionary Watershed Development Project

has helped the village and neighbouring areas move towards sustainable irrigation and water management, through the construction of several embankments and percolation tanks, which help with efficient collection and utilisation of water. Further, farmers have been encouraged to switch to cultivating oil seeds, pulses and cash crops with lower water requirements, as against crops such as sugar cane, thus helping conserve enormous water resources. The initiative has helped farmers in over 70 villages in the drought-prone areas of Maharashtra lift themselves out of poverty and debt.

It is imperative that both government legislation and corporate initiatives work in tandem, for serious advances to be made in combating climate change. While governments lay down the mandates on responsible environmental actions expected from corporates, they also enable and facilitate the corporate sector to take positive steps in the area. Likewise, corporates have a responsibility to not just profit from the Earth's resources, but also give back, ensuring its preservation for years to come. ♦