Why and How to Adopt A Sustainable Lifestyle:
A Stepwise Guide
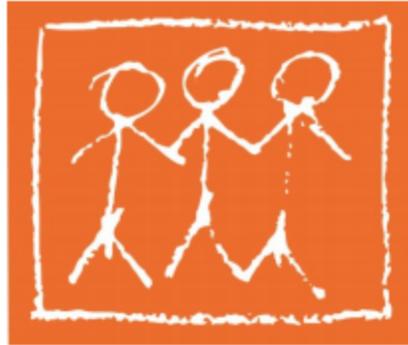
Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG)

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Sustainable Lifestyle: Why Does It Matter?

Since the 1950's, industrialisation and the human population have been growing extensively and along with that, our demands. These demands are met by extreme consumption of natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable. Culturally, our Indian society has been practising sustainable lifestyles - reduce, repair, reuse, recycle, refuse - for several decades, with sharing and caring being at the heart of things. However, over the years, the influence of the western world, coupled with the globalisation and liberalisation policies of our country, and the unprecedented rise in technological and scientific developments, has changed consumer behaviour. The result has been that what was a luxury in the yester years is now viewed as a necessity. This has led to excessive consumption, putting great burden and stress on the planet's resources. To quote Mahatma Gandhi, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed". Human activities such as deforestation, mining and overharvesting of natural resources have resulted in global warming and climate change. Environmentalists from across the world have expressed grave concern and are discussing ways to combat this.

The concept of sustainable living came from the definition of sustainable development that originated during the 1980s in Brundtland Commission's Report 'Our Common Future'.[1] Subsequently, in 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals - an universal call for action to tackle climate change and protect the environment - to be achieved by 2030. Its overall goal is the long-term stability of the economy and environment which is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision making process.[2]

Leading a sustainable lifestyle is key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While a few people have adapted to leading a sustainable life through small but significant changes in their lifestyle, there are still millions out there, who need to change their lifestyles. This article aims to encourage the readers to learn, explore and commit to sustainable practices, as well as, to love nature and conserve its finite resources through simple efforts.

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[1]Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future
[2]The Concept of Sustainable Development: Definition and Defining Principles
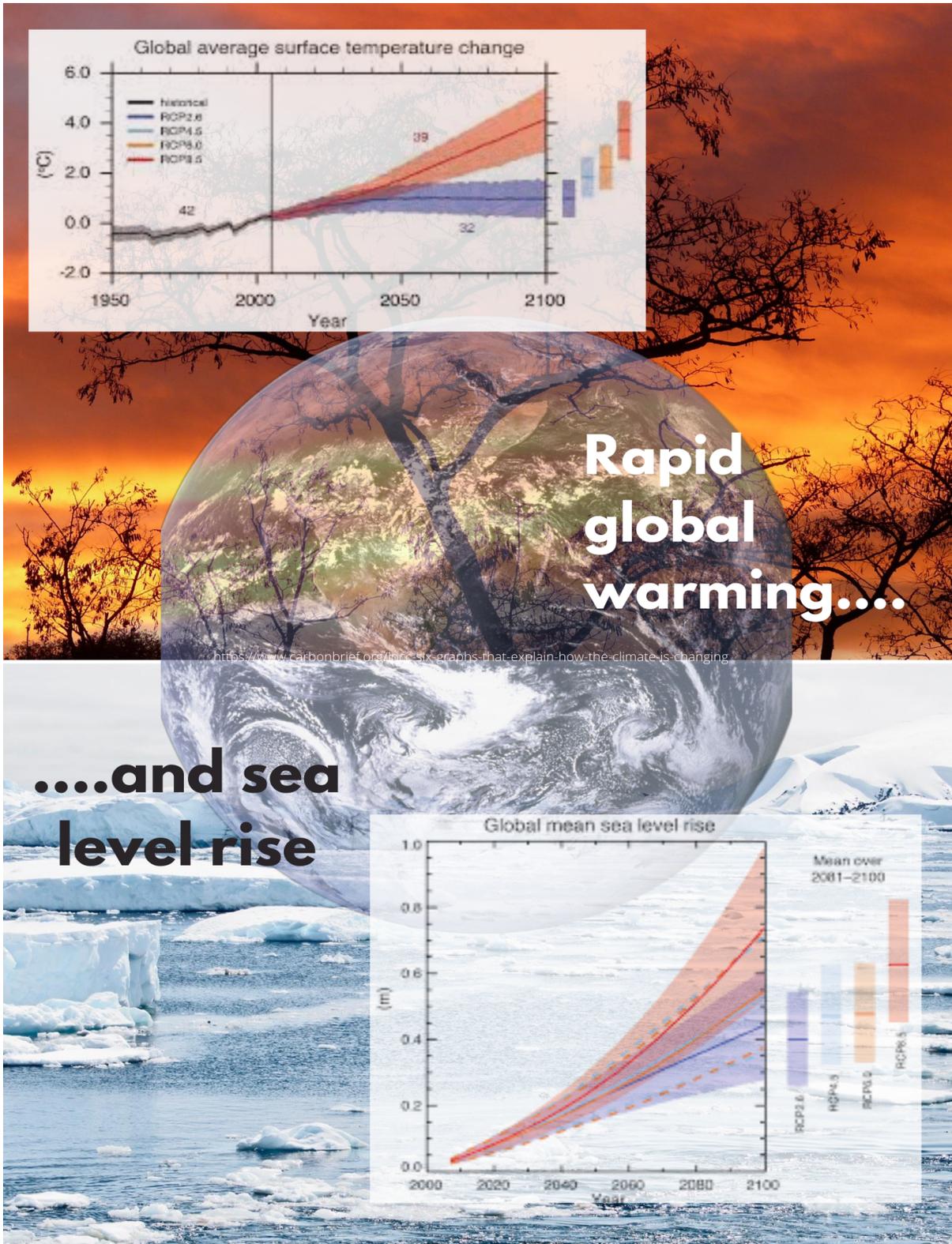
Figure 1: Global impacts of changing climate.[3]

[3] IPCC: Six graphs that explain how the climate is changing

Figure 2: Sustainable lifestyle of Greta Thunberg.[4]

Sustainability Guidelines

The sustainability guidelines suggest daily-life actions such as travelling less, using sustainable energy and everyday water conservation to reduce exploitation of our limited natural resources. This helps us in making our planet a green and safe place. Anyone can follow this step-by-step guide to adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

Ultimately, all the actions that we take to make our life sustainable, will help our country in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as:

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[4]"We Are Striking to Disrupt the System": An Hour with 16-Year-Old Climate Activist Greta Thunberg

I.   How to become water sustainable?

On a planet with a population of 7.8 billion human beings and counting, only 1% of the world's freshwater is available as groundwater and surface water for our daily use. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), "1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to water, and a total of 2.7 billion find water scarce for at least one month of the year.Inadequate sanitation is also a problem for 2.4 billion people—they are exposed to diseases, such as cholera and typhoid fever, and other water-borne illnesses. Two million people, mostly children, die each year from diarrheal diseases alone." [5]

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[5]WWF, Water scarcity

According to NITI Aayog, our water demand will exceed water supply by 2030.[6] With rising water demand for domestic and industrial purposes, aquifers are being depleted. Extreme weather like increasing floods and droughts are making the world's population more vulnerable. Urbanisation increases the water demand for drinking and sanitation, while increasing impermeable areas contribute to urban flooding. Also, many cities are struggling and many more are vulnerable to the impacts of depleting groundwater levels. To satisfy our multiple water needs, we have to invest our money and efforts in local level solutions like rainwater harvesting, recharging wells and green spaces, which will also make our cities flood resilient. We need to take measures to achieve water sustainability through actions like:

a. Limit water use through alternative methods like waterless toilets and wet cloth car washing. For instance, using a bucket takes 57 times less water compared to a 20-minute car wash using a hosepipe.[7]

b. Avoid using a shower while bathing. Collect water in a big tub after bathing, cleaning vegetables etc., and re-use it for flushing the toilets, washing clothes, gardening etc.

c. Install and maintain a water meter and rainwater harvesting system which is a winning strategy both in rural and urban areas.

d. Since water used for washing clothes constitutes about 20% of total domestic water demand, avoid running your washing machine unless you have a full load. Instead, air out clothes in sunlight and reuse clothes between washes.[8]

e. Water auditing to manage water and wastewater through technologies like Reverse Osmosis (RO) and Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD), is recommended.

f. Manufacturing of one A4 sheet takes about 10 litres of water.[9] Thus, we should reduce the use of paper, use both sides of the paper, and print only if really necessary.

g. A leaky tap wastes up to 15 litres a day and minor leaks in the plumbing can add up to 6 litres a day.[10] Promptly repair leaky taps, faucets and toilets to reduce water wastage.

[6] India faces worst water crisis: NITI Aayog
[7] Water's role in the car wash
[8] India Water Facts
[9] A Comprehensive Introduction to Water Footprints
[10] Leaky tap costs 15 litres of water a day
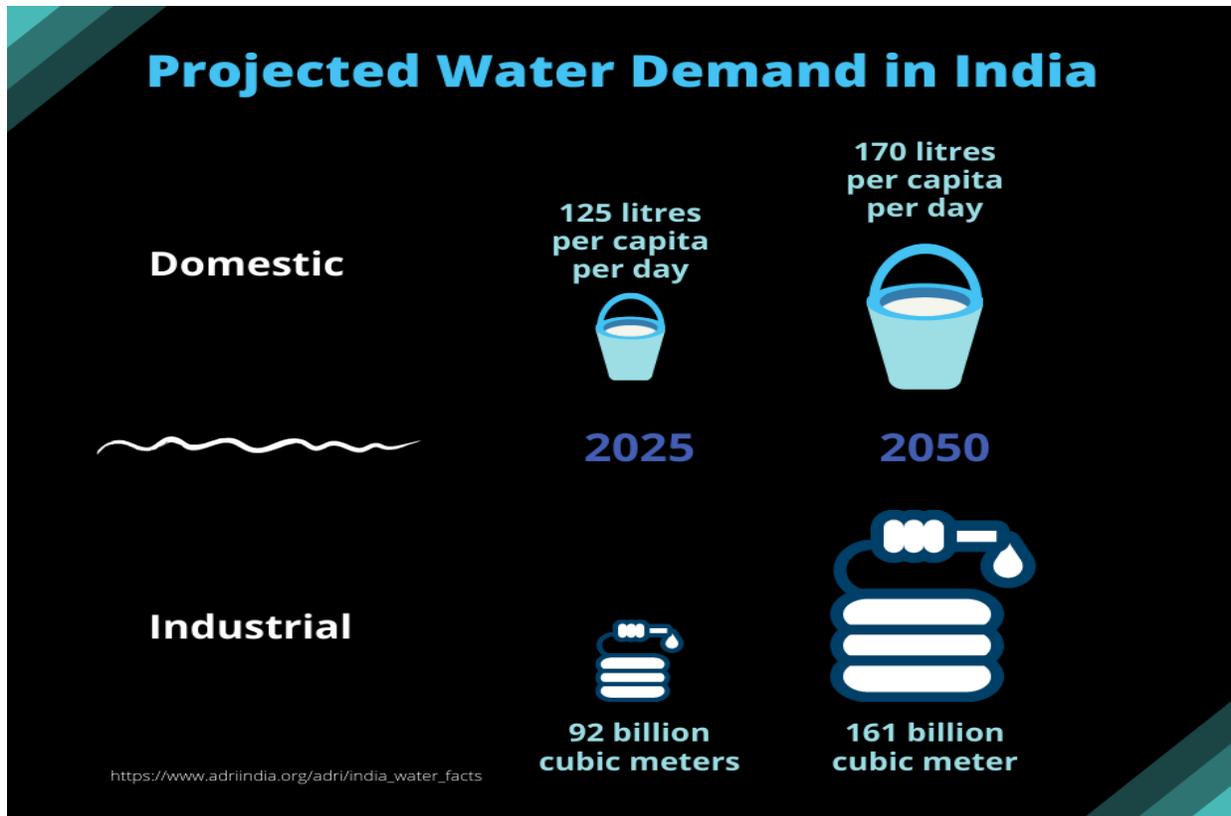
Figure 3: Rising domestic and industrial water demand in India.[11]

II. How to achieve energy sustainability?

Today, nearly 1.2 billion people on the earth have no access to energy.[12] At the same time, economic development and industrialisation are causing ever rising demand for energy generation and supply, especially in developing nations. Conventional energy sources like coal and natural gas lead to depletion of natural resources and cause huge levels of air, water and land pollution. To this time, many parts of the world, including India, remain reliant on coal energy to power their cities and towns.[13] We need to make a shift towards renewable energy sources and practice energy conservation, as follows:

    a. Installing rooftop solar panels.
   b. Saving energy by turning off and unplugging all electric and electronic devices when not in use.

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[11]India Water Facts
[12]Mapped: The 1.2 Billion People Without Access to Electricity
[13]Power Sector at a Glance ALL INDIA

c. Using natural light and air as much as possible for keeping your surroundings ventilated. Avoiding use of air conditioning.
d. Using electronic items such as TV, fridge and air conditioner, with good star ratings.
e. Buying only electricity efficient light bulbs such as LED.
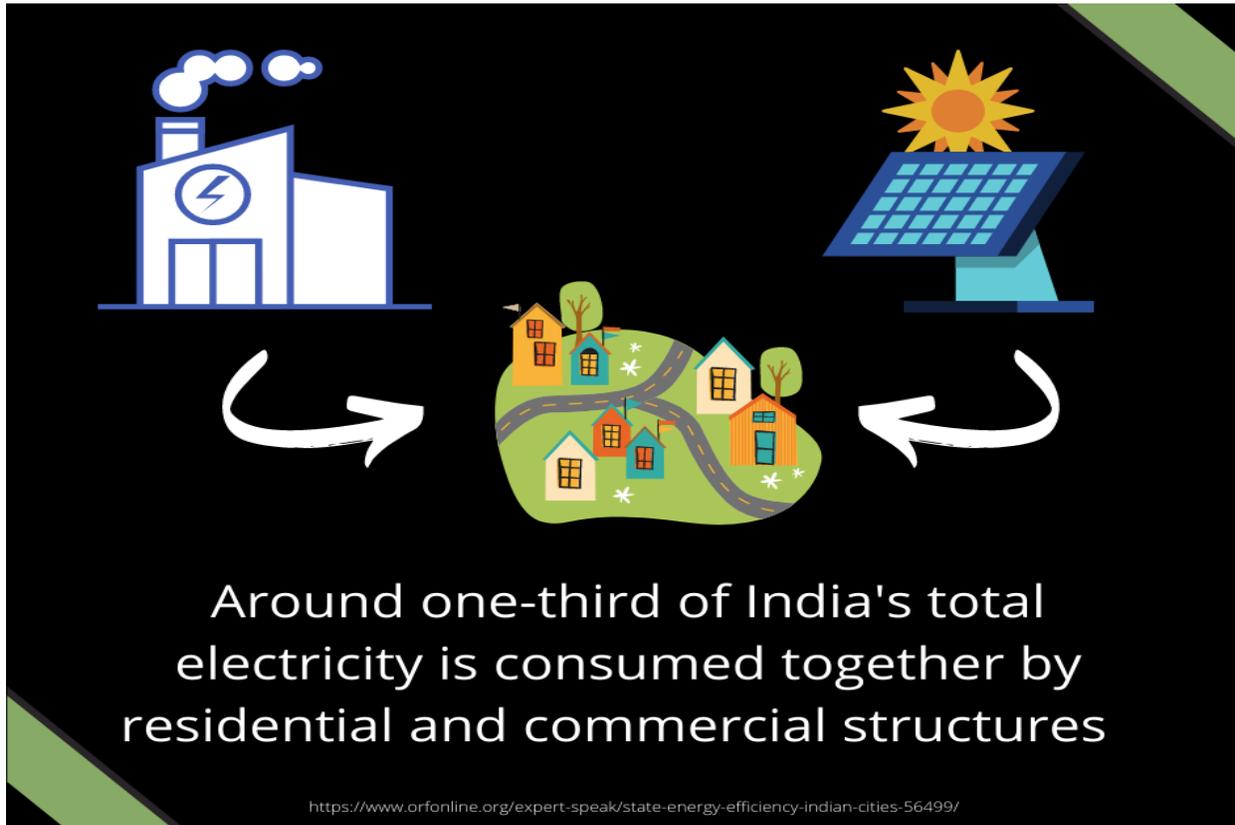
Figure 4: Electricity utilisation in India.[14]

III. How to produce/buy and consume/utilise sustainably?

To achieve a sustainable lifestyle there is a need to promote urban/local agricultural practices and conscious food consumption. In India, around 84% of total available water is used in irrigation.[15] Thus, growing and consuming less water-intensive crops such as millets can significantly reduce our water footprint. Chemically grown food is dangerous for both health and environment and reducing our reliance on these will conserve our soil health for longer.[16] Apart from that, activities like processing, packaging, transport

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[14]The state of energy efficiency in Indian cities

[15]Water and Agriculture in India
[16]How Our Food System Affects Public Health

and storage of food have significant impacts on human health, along with the environmental impacts of disposal of food packaging.[17] Food waste is another cause of concern, as it contributes to release of methane and CO2 after reaching landfills and the huge amount of water as well as fossil fuels utilised from farm to plate gets wasted.[18] Thus, we should take following approaches:

a. Carry reusable cloth bags
b. Buy minimally packaged, fresh foods wherever possible.
c. Avoid use of plastics.
d. Buy items which are recyclable and naturally biodegradable, such as bamboo tiffin boxes and bamboo straws or re-usable products like steel tiffin boxes.
e. Grow / buy organic food to avoid the use of pesticides and hazardous chemicals.
f. Cook and serve food in small quantities to avoid food wastage. Remember that globally, several millions die of hunger everyday and India ranks 94th among 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI).[19]
g. The inedible parts of the food can be composted and the byproduct used as soil enhancer to increase the fertility of the soil.

Figure 5: Waste management in India.[20]

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[17]Water and Agriculture in India
[18]The Environmental Impact of Food Waste
[19]2020 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX BY SEVERITY
[20]How Can India's Waste Problem See a Systemic Change?

IV. How to commute sustainably?

Motor vehicle fuel combustion is the major source of urban air pollution, and in 2012, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that every one in eight deaths were linked to outdoor air pollution.[21] WHO also mentions that, "Approximately 3.2 million deaths each year are attributable to insufficient physical activity".[22] Our present lifestyles are a major contributor to diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and cardiac conditions. Pollution caused by air travel, motor vehicles like cars, trucks, bikes, etc., are neither good for our health or the environment. Walking and bicycling, on the other hand, lead to more physical activity and better environmental outcomes.[23] Using public transport reduces a person's CO2 emission by over 40 times compared to private car transport. Thus, we should take measures such as:

1. Carpooling and using public transport like buses and trains to reduce air pollution.
2. Working from home is also an option that should be given due consideration.
3. Where available, take a bus or a train over a flight.
4. Choose walking and bicycling for small distances.

Figure 6: Public transport vs private car transport.[24]

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[21] WHO, 7 million premature deaths annually linked to air pollution
[22] WHO, health promotion
[23] Physical Activity Associated with Public Transport Use—A Review and Modelling of Potential Benefits
[24] Benefits of public transportation

What needs to be done?

To begin the journey, try taking these three simple steps to make a smooth transition to a sustainable lifestyle:

Step 1: Check your carbon footprint

By calculating the personal carbon footprint we get to know about how unsustainable our daily-life actions are.[25] There are plenty of websites that facilitates online carbon footprint calculation with reliable results at zero cost, such as:

❖ A tool to analyse the GHG emissions from our daily actions.
❖ ICAO carbon emission calculator to know your emission per flight.
❖ A questionnaire based annual footprint calculator.
❖ A calculator by, 'Just One Earth'.
❖ Easy-peasy calculator by Mossy Earth.
❖ A calculator for individuals and small businesses.
❖ Fuel use related carbon footprint calculator by, 'TATA Power'.
❖ 'SUSLA' app by sustainable lifestyles accelerator

Step 2: Get more information

There are many people leading sustainable lives in India. Hear their stories and see how you can emulate them.The following resources will also motivate you and keep you moving forward:

● Sustainable juice shop
● Sustainable clothing
● Sustainable living in urban setup
● Sustainable swaps
● Sustainable tourism in India
● Sustainable fashion brands in India
● Sustainable lifestyle habits
● Sustainable lifestyle advices
● Sustainable period products in India
● Sustainable houses
● Sustainable rooftop farming in India

Step 3: Set your goals, prepare a to-do list and make a difference!

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[25]What is a carbon footprint – definition

After checking your carbon footprint, set small goals, taking ideas from this report and start following up on them. Setting goals will give direction to your choices. Make a to-do list and stick to it.

To make it fun, give yourself a 5 score for 'yes' and 0 score for 'no' and analyse your score on weekends. Also, design a new to-do list for every new week by adding a few new tasks to replace the ones which need no repetition and keep the rest of the tasks the same as the previous week. After completing a month (4 weeks), you can share this score, alongwith interesting pictures and videos of your progress to motivate your friends and family. Challenge them to beat your score!

You can also participate in online challenges, like:

- [Try a 12 x 12 sustainable lifestyle challenge in 2020: 12 Eco challenges in 12 months.](#)
- [Cath's 14 days challenge](#)
- [7 Day go green challenge.](#)
- [Monthly challenges](#)
- [30 Day challenge: Live an eco-friendly lifestyle](#)
- [A handy action set for everyday sustainable living](#)

Learning programmes, such as:

- [Sustainable Leadership Program](#)
- [Young India Challenge](#)

Wishing you luck!

Figure 7: A 30 days sustainability challenge calendar by CAG.[26]

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[26] 30 Days Sustainability Challenge Calendar

Let us demand for a change in policies!

According to the Emission Gap Report, 2019 of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), it is possible to limit global temperature increase to 1.5°C by dropping our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 7.6% each year between 2020 and 2030.[27] Unsustainable consumption of natural resources and destruction of ecosystems due to release of toxic pollutants in air, water and land during manufacture and disposal of plastic products straws, sanitary napkins, mobile phones, leather shoes etc., leads to global warming and climate crisis. Thus, a change in our habits, attitude and behaviour are a must to cut-off our carbon footprint.

Some of the simple things you can do are:

- Join or support local organisations, social-media campaigns etc., by actions such as signing petitions and retweeting the twitterstorm, that are related to conservation of the environment, sustainable livelihoods etc.
- Attend events like youth parliaments and leadership programmes to understand the seriousness of impacts of climate change and global warming, and discuss solutions that can be implemented at local or national levels.
- Organise consulting webinars for schools and colleges to educate them on topics that can help them in adopting sustainable lifestyles.
- Dinner-table conversations about issues such as overconsumption, biodiversity conservation and waste management, and simple solutions to tackle the situation and manage it to save natural resources.
- Vote for political leaders who are interested and are working on issues such as wildlife conservation, protection of the rights and land of indigenous peoples, reducing GHG emissions and climate change.

Considering the complexity of the issue, governments should implement stricter regulations to control pollution, stop investing in fossil fuels, conserve biodiversity and frame policies to make sustainable living affordable.[28&29] You can be a part of this change too!

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[27]Cut global emissions by 7.6 percent every year for next decade to meet 1.5°C Paris target - UN report
[28]A framework for shaping sustainable lifestyles
[29]Climate Crisis is Breaking the Back of South Asian Countries