

# ENVIRONMENT JUSTICE MATTERS

A Bi-weekly News Digest from  
the Environment Support Group

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## Webinar Series

19 April 2021  
SECURING BIODIVERSITY RICH,  
HEALTHY, SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE  
AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE  
COMMONS IN BENGALURU

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Week 5 of the Webinar Series  
Bengaluru's Climate Action Plan  
Making it Participatory and Inclusive

**SPEAKERS**

- **Mr. Anant Hegde Ashisar**, Chairman, Karnataka Biodiversity Board, Government of Karnataka.
- **Ms. Meera K**, Co-founder & Editor, Citizen Matters
- **Dr. S. Subramanya**, Ornithologist & Wetland Specialist, Bengaluru
- **Ms. Lekha K G**, Advocate, Alternative Law Forum (ALF), Bengaluru
- **Ms. Meera Iyer**, Convenor, INTACH, Bengaluru Chapter

**MODERATOR**

- **Satvika Krishnan**, Environment Support Group

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Every Monday, 6-7.30 PM, until 17 May 2021

## Bengaluru's Climate Action Plan- Making it Participatory and Inclusive: Week 5

On March 22nd, World Water Day, ESG began a new webinar series: “Bengaluru’s Climate Action Plan - Making it Participatory and Inclusive”. This is in the backdrop of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike making commitments to make the metropolis climate friendly as per the Paris Climate Agreement. This webinar series draws participation from senior officials of the State and civic administration, elected representatives, student activists, ground workers, civil society organisations, academicians, the wide public, etc., .The idea is to collate a range of views on what this climate action plan should constitute. We invite you to participate in this ongoing webinar series. Reports of earlier webinars as part of this series, along with video recordings, is accessible [here](#). We welcome you to participate in the [next webinar in this series](#), . [Register here to participate](#).

## ESG Features



Read a story on Champu Khangpok, the floating village of Loktak [here](#). The story speaks of people of a village constantly living in fear of being displaced by a parastatal. Now two new proposed projects, the inland waterways project and the eco-tourism projects, have deepened their fears further.

## Public Health



As the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the brutal lockdown that followed [completes a year](#), tragedies continue to unfold. Not much has changed from [last year](#) to [now](#) as people from the margins continue to suffer in a major way.

With the Covid-19 [virus mutating](#) and the pandemic continuing to rage unabated, World Health Day (celebrated on 7th April every year) was a time to reflect how the pandemic wreaked havoc world wide and exposed our unpreparedness. [The mystery of 'breakthrough cases'](#), i.e., the rising incidence of Covid-19 infection among the fully-vaccinated, needs critical attention. Israel and Chile, two countries which have streaked past other nations with immunisation, meanwhile, [present a picture of contrasting outcomes](#) and a cautionary tale underlining the need for persisting with caution. Especially considering how Jair Bolsonaro's denialism has cost his country, and the [South American region brutally](#).

Meanwhile, New Zealand government's policy exclusively restricting Indians arriving there is [being attacked as racist](#). In India, the pandemic has become an opportunity to make the rich, super rich, as [P Sainath's tweets reveal](#). The [Mathew effect of Covid 19](#) is bearing down on the poor and the vulnerable so severely, that some are resorting to [extreme measures](#) unable to survive the mess created by mishandling of the pandemic. Interestingly, the IMF proposes a '[solidarity tax](#)' - an additional temporary tax on high earners and companies which prospered during the pandemic, to raise money to tackle the pandemic. Compare this with the 'wealth tax' super rich used to pay in India, removed in 2015.

As the virus rages across India, no effort has been made by the Central and Uttarakhand Governments to restrict Kumbh Mela ([over 40,00,000 have assembled already](#)). The area is reporting a massive [surge in infections](#) already. Contrast this with how the [Tablighi Jamaat incident was communalised](#) last year, and how the Karnataka Government restricts collective prayers by Muslims. With India [crossing the 2,00,000 threshold](#) of daily infections reported, the [public health system is breaking down just about every respect](#). In Bangalore, [workers in crematoria and burial grounds](#) haven't been paid in a year, and are now threatening to go on strike. The situation in Maharashtra is so serious that the Government is [considering enforcing lockdowns](#), whilst in Gujarat, [the High Court has raised alarm](#) that the government is deliberately underreporting the gravity of the situation.

The threat of impending lockdowns is forcing migrant labourers to [throng railway stations](#) to get back home - fearful that they may be forced to walk home, or be stranded without help, like last year. The impact of this crisis has worsened in Karnataka as public bus transport systems are off the roads with workers on strike demanding better remuneration, and the State Government unwilling to negotiate. Rather than help the country come out

of the pandemic with transparency and accountability, [Prime Minister Narendra Modi has instead chosen to lay the blame on people](#). Regarding this attempt to shift the blame on the ordinary people of the country, All India People's Science Network released a [position paper](#) and [a statement](#) to speak truth to power.



There are, of course, positive stories of resilience and extraordinary work done by communities across India, which Vikalp Sangam has projected through a graphic novel called [EXTRAORDINARY WORK OF 'ORDINARY' PEOPLE](#).

## Climate



A mass extinction event is closer than we think, as a group of researchers have discovered [marine life fleeing the Equator](#), a region known for the richest diversity of aquatic life, for the cooler waters of the poles. Another study has found that [just 3 percent of the land on Earth remains ecologically intact](#), a terrible indicator of the state of affairs of this living planet. In Manipur, the only habitat of the critically endangered Sangai -[the Keibul Lamjao National Park- is shrinking](#) in size because of climate change. Meanwhile, the forest fires which are engulfing large tracts of forest land in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh continue to [expose the flaws](#) in bureaucratic driven interventions in tackling hazards aggravated by climate change.

But Gaia will come through and carry us forth, is the hope, [as this inspiring detail of Periyar's treasures suggests](#). In other heartening news for the climate, New Zealand has become the first country to pass legislation making it mandatory for financial institutions to [report the climate-impact of their investments](#). At the COP 26 summit, scheduled to be held in Glasgow later this year, a major focus is on [placing gender equity](#) at the heart of climate mitigation efforts. In the US, the climate movement is becoming [more inclusive and racially diverse](#) as there is growing sensitivity about the disproportionately large impacts borne by Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.



US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Change John Kerry on his recent visit to India lauded India's energy policy as a [red hot investment opportunity!](#) India, meanwhile, is [pushing hard on expanding its renewables investment in Africa](#). Even as there are warnings that [India should not be cowed down to western pressures](#), and back down on its energy

security strategy responding to calls of carbon neutrality.

## Agriculture



While it's known that farmers across North India are forced to burn crop stubble (which substantially contributes to air pollution) and are victims of wrong policies, the situation is disturbingly being used to promote the case for food GMOs. That when Mihir Shah observes how paddy, along with wheat and sugarcane, consume 80% of water in the agricultural sector and advocates expanding public procurement of less water intensive crops. Water security concerns have also been raised in the context of Andhra Pradesh Government's recent scheme to dig free borewells for small farmers, with fears that this will only further deplete the already scarce groundwater resources.



A recent hike in fertiliser prices is likely to only increase the burden on our already overworked farmers, and it remains to be seen what implications this will have on the ongoing nationwide protests. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's relentless campaign to corporatise agriculture is coming under close scrutiny, including how it is aggressively in support of India's controversial new farm laws. Coincidentally, Bill Gates also happens to be the largest owner of farmland in America. Amidst all this, news has emerged that NITI Aayog has collaborated with BMGF to launch a digital repository called 'Poshan Gyan' - a one stop repository of information on

nutrition in India. Another disconcerting development is Microsoft Corp's [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) with the Indian government which will give the transnational corporation access to a wide range of data on India's agriculture, particularly targeting farmers with post-harvest management solutions.

## Energy



American President, Joe Biden has announced the [Americans Jobs Plan](#), which promises massive infusion of funds into climate friendly technologies. However, questions have arisen [if the Plan can do enough](#) to fight climate change. In search for more energy to sustain current levels of consumption and production, the catastrophic [impacts clean energies can have](#) on the environment, as well as communities, is being overlooked. This when [news from Fukushima, Japan](#) reminds us of the deeply problematic repercussions of promoting nuclear energy as a so-called clean energy.

YUGMA Network, a youth movement across Indian campuses focusing on environmental governance, [has produced an incredible repository on renewables](#).

## Environmental Governance



The Covid-19 pandemic has had [a huge impact on environmental governance and laws](#) all over the world. In India, economic slowdown induced by the pandemic has been used to dilute environmental laws, policies and regulatory standards, the consequence of which is likely to further degrade India's environment. The Central Government has quietly [amended](#) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) 2006 offering more exemptions from public

hearings in environmental decision making. Worryingly, MoEF&CC has [extended time](#) for coal-based power plants to comply with emission norms, besides setting very low penalties for non-compliance.

The Centre and the state governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh inked an MoU to push the linkage of Ken with Betwa, even as its futility and disastrous consequences have been highlighted. It is argued [the project can severely damage the Bundelkhand region](#) and also [gravely impact](#) the local ecosystem, which includes the Panna Tiger Reserve and the Ken Gharial Sanctuary.

In Kashmir, [wetlands continue to drown in waste](#) despite NGT's order to preserve them was passed 7 months ago. And forest clearance for the Delhi-Dehradun Highway was obtained by concealing the fact that [the highway will destroy a critical wildlife habitat](#).

On the other hand, in Tamil Nadu, a [refreshing shift](#) is emerging in politics where people are showing signs of moving away from large infrastructure projects promised by politicians towards environmental protection. Meanwhile in Karnataka, the High Court has ruled [prior environmental clearance is not needed for the widening work](#) of the 82 kilometer stretch of National Highway 4-A in the state.

## Communities & Livelihoods



The devastating effects of a degrading environment is felt most deeply at the level of communities, especially those who still rely on natural resources to sustain themselves. This [New Yorker story](#) illustrates the price local communities are often compelled to pay because big industries with lofty economic promises are allowed to operate with impunity. In India, [a similar story](#) is unfolding near Pulicat Lake Wildlife Sanctuary where fears of displacement and loss of access to traditional fishing grounds have gripped villages living near Adani-operated Kattupalli port.

Among such distressing stories there are also accounts of resilience and revival involving local groups. For instance, a village in Maharashtra [restored its grasslands](#) which were barren since the 1970s and in Uttarakhand [women ended water woes](#) for an entire village by reviving water springs that had gone dry. In related news, [local communities involved in making eco-friendly toys](#) can benefit financially with proper interpretation and implementation of 'Geographical Indicators' norms.

## Urban Issues



It's spring time and myriads of flowers bloom across Bangalore's streets. Shobha Narayan poetically documents Bangalore's [rich ecological history](#), while a study re-iterates the critical importance of green spaces to the metropolis: they can make it cooler by at least [2.23 degree Celsius](#).

All is not well for nature in the city though. Recently [fires raged](#) across 200 acres of Bangalore University's verdant biodiversity-park, destroying several rare and endangered plants. Meanwhile, a land grab case in Bengaluru's Bommanahalli has [hit a dead end](#) after the BBMP decided not to demolish an apartment which has encroached a raja kaluve, citing that it would leave the residents homeless. As the pandemic frightens people away from public transport, traffic woes in the city look set to get even worse, with Bangalore [adding 12 lakh vehicles](#) last year, close to double of what it added in previous years.

## Podcast



TB Dinesh, part of ESG advisory team, [speaks of](#) what brought him back to sleepy Tumkur two decades ago, and how this helped initiate [lruway](#) - a brand that promotes handmade products made from local grasses. But it's really a much deeper account of Dinesh's love for science with his passion for sustainability - which currently includes several active projects such as a crafter space, a natural farming initiative, a natural building project, a hacker's space, and community radio.

Dr. MB Krishna, one of Bangalore's most renowned ornithologists, also shares his thoughts on [bird identification and ecology](#).

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## Help Us Build A Better Tomorrow: Donate Now

2020 was a year of upheaval and uncertainty due to the pandemic, when everything came to a standstill. Yet at ESG, we continued to work and reached out to thousands of people in so many ways. In these challenging times, we can do much more with your constant support! We invite you to consider [donating to ESG](#) generously.

**DONATE NOW**



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