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ESG is in its 25th Year!

It is the 25th year of Environment Support Group (ESG), as India turns 75! It has been a remarkable journey thus far, and has been made possible due to the support and cooperation we have received from hundreds of folks, those who volunteered and worked with us, those who contributed, communities we have been privileged to work with across India and elsewhere, and for the support we have received from so many of our partner agencies and collaborators. It is this support that keeps us going, despite the challenges of our times. And we look forward to your continued cooperation and support.



In the coming issues of Environmental Justice Matters, we will walk you through this journey which has taken us through Dakshina Kannada working with communities there to resist ecologically and socially disastrous power plants, steel plants, barge mounted power plants, chemical factories and also the most unwise expansion of the Mangalore airport. We will explain our efforts in helping imagine that the ending of mining in Kudremukh is possible, which eventually it was ended, so that then critically endangered Lion Tailed Macaque could survive as would shola forests from where three rivers emerged: Tunga, Bhadra and Nethravathi.



We will share stories of what it took to stop the Dandeli Dam, which would have destroyed the last flowing stretch of the Kali River in Uttara Kannada district, and how we worked with local tribal and farming communities to challenge pollution by West Coast Paper Mills: a journey that also revealed to India and the world how fraudulent Environment Impact Assessments were systematically used to accord 'environmental clearance' to high impact projects. We will invite you to journey through the extraordinarily rich farmlands of Chamalapura between Bandipur and Nagarhole national parks where a massive coal fired thermal power plant was proposed, and of collaborative efforts that ensured this ecological nightmare would not occur.

We will explain why we questioned the Bangalore Mysore Infrastructure Corridor Project, which in many ways alerted people across India of the nature of corporate-state collusion that is embedded in major transport infrastructure projects and how this could ruin regional economies and farmlands, while also working against promoting public transport: intra and inter city. We will narrate accounts of how the Bengaluru metropolis was rescued from ill-thought road widening projects, massive housing estates on the shores of T. G. Halli reservoir, of efforts to protect Bengaluru's greenery and lakes and how all this has helped build a deeper understanding of state and nation-wide efforts to question destructive mega projects that promote political ambition, not public interest.



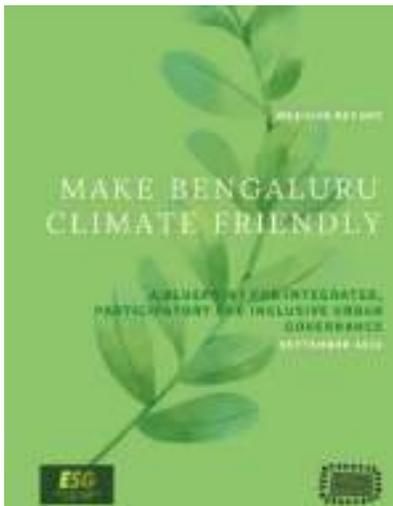
We will walk you through the efforts of valiant people of coastal Jagatsinghpur in Odisha who resisted the massive POSCO Steel project and how we worked with them to expose a massive socio-ecological disaster, including the threat to Olive Ridley turtles. We will introspect about what it is that India can do to secure its economic and social progress without destroying its foundations: ecological wealth and natural

resources and associated traditional knowledge of farming, pastoralism, fishing, soil conservation, etc. We will explain the threats there are to Loktak wetland region, and why the struggle of fisherfolk there epitomises the struggles of all natural resource dependent peoples against development that is mainstreamed and irreversibly destructive. We will speak of ongoing efforts to protect India's biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge from biopiracy and bioloot



We will introspect on the lack of rational and transparent decision making that formed the basis of promoting India's first 'science city' at Challakere, a massive nuclear-military- energy-tech engineering complex built on hegemonies of power wielded by executive and scientific establishments, which ruined centuries old tradition of conservation of grassland ecosystems that are also habitats of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard. . We will explain why we need to be extremely worried about India's pitch to generate 500 GW of energy from so-called 'green energy systems', such as utility scale solar parks, which our research has uncovered is extremely destructive of farmland, indigenous peoples rights, of forests, grasslands and more.

We will share with you various strategies that can help secure every village, town, district, and region in environmentally benign and socially inclusive ways, securing not merely the interests of present generations but those yet to walk this Earth, and work with you in imagining actions to reverse global warming and tackle climate change, as we have attempted in developing Bengaluru's first Climate Action Plan based on collective and inclusive approaches.



We have come a long way despite many hurdles, and our work today spans various landscapes across the country, from the far south to the north east of India. All this experience has helped us contribute critiques of law and policy, financing of projects, about governance, people centred planning, etc.

We couldn't have come this far without your support and the dedicated hard work of many of our team members, interns and volunteers, and the consistent support of our families. We sincerely acknowledge our institutional partners who have believed in our work and who have been patient to see the real results of sustained, diligent and committed efforts.

As we invite you to commemorate with us 25 years of uninterrupted engagement with and service to communities across India, which we consider is a microscopic yet significant contribution to make this only living planet better for all, now and into the future, we welcome you to join us in what we do and also help organise various exciting activities in commemorating not merely the 25th year of ESG, but the fact that a civil

society organisation addressing environmental and social justice challenges has survived in these challenging times.

Do watch this space in the coming weeks of Environmental Justice Matters when there will be detailed accounts of major milestones in ESG's journeys, which we believe is also yours.



Reflections: 75 years since Independence



Illustration: Pariplab Chakraborty, [Source: The Wire](#)

As India turned 75, renowned writer and political leader Rajmohan Gandhi expresses how his [hope as a boy has turned into a deep worry](#): “Something in today’s India stabs my spirit. In old age I am witnessing a fearsome assault on my boyhood dream. What wounds me the most is the silence from the top about cruelties on the ground.”

Writing the introduction to [Pen America's commemoration of India's independence](#), when 100 writers have been invited to reflect, Amitava Kumar contextualises the transition from a time when Rabindranath Tagore said: “Where the mind is without fear, ‘... ’into that heaven of freedom, let my country awake”, to a time when “institutions that can defend India’s freedoms—its courts, parliament and civil service, and much of the media—have been co-opted or weakened”. [Salman Rushdie wrote into this collection](#) before he was brutally attacked in New York wrote: “A shadow lies upon the country we loved so deeply.”

ESG’s Leo Saldanha assesses what could be India’s environmental state when it turns 100 in [Toward 2047: Nehru’s caution on rapid growth matters for ecology](#) and concludes “largely tokenistic and brazenly pro-corporate approach has become characteristic of environmental management and regulation” which is indicative in the Great Indian Bustard inching closer to its extinction which is “serving as an ecological indicator, warning us that far worse would be the situation when India turns 100, if weakening of environmental jurisprudence, management and regulation is sustained”.

Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan writing about [“The next 25 years”](#) comes to this assessment on the journey made thus far: “Since Independence, we have certainly expanded the number of Indians who enjoy most freedoms but it is still a minority”. And argues that “Freedom for the few is never sustainable — unless the many see, experience, and cherish those freedoms also, freedom will remain fragile for all”. About the state of health in India, Lancet reports [“COVID-19 exposed many of India's strengths and weaknesses. India was one of the world's worst-affected countries”](#), and argues that [“Health systems driven by the needs of patients and health-care providers will build a strong foundation for a resilient health system”](#).

Dayamani Barla, tribal activist from Jharkhand, explains how 10 crores tribals nation-wide are being torn away from their forests, land and cultures, and asks [“why can’t 104,281,034 nature-worshipping tribals living all over the country not have a separate religious code?”](#). Frontline provides an interesting timeline on [Gender in the last 75 years](#) in which the rocky journey of securing gender justice is documented. World Economic Forum, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several Indian corporate leaders flock to, in its [Global Gender Gap Report 2022](#) finds India at the bottom of the list. Former chief economic advisor to the Government of India Professor Kaushik Basu warns of the prevailing political situation in India: [“There is a risk in hyper-nationalism. It can do great damage. Countries have undone themselves with that.](#)

At a time when India's independence from colonisation has not resulted in the securing of a syncretic State, it is time to visit late thinker and writer [D.R Nagaraj's lectures on Progress and Development](#) which he delivered when India turned 50. In imagining a future of India, Rajesh argues [Auroville Is The Future India Needs](#) even as he worries if the tiny spot of experimentation in humanism can itself survive authoritarian and consumerist forces.

Remembering Vimal Bhai



On Independence Day, India lost dynamic human rights defender and environmental activist Vimalbhai following a brief illness. National Alliance of People Movement (NAPM), of which Vimalbhai was a convenor, state: "[Vimal bhai Lives on! In Our Hearts! In our Andolans for Azadi and Justice!](#)". His close friend Senior Advocate Sanjay Parikh shared that Vimalbhai was a genuine person devoted to his service and made [unparalleled contributions to environmental justice in India](#). Introduced to Gandhian philosophy at the young age of 20, he deeply practised simple living the rest of his life. Besides being actively involved in NAPM, Vimalbhai helped established Matu Jansangathan, a people's movement for protection of Himalayan ecosystem in Uttarakhand. He was an active supporter of LGBTQIA+ rights and Pride Marches and movements and has [inspired thousands of activists across India](#) with his youthful energy and spirit. Vimal Kaka, as he was fondly called, [kindled a fire that will continue to blaze in our hearts and homes](#). Through the COVID pandemic, he worked relentlessly to extend relief to migrant

workers, even as he was involved in [supporting thousands of families brutally evicted in Khorigaon by Haryana Government](#). His last letter before his demise was to President Ms. Draupadi Murmu on 25th July, 2022 in which he urged her to take substantive steps to end repression of adivasis and protect their unique cultural, linguistic and religious lifestyle. He firmly believed in 'sangharsh-nirman' from zameen to Courts to Parliament.

Rest in Power Vimalbhai!

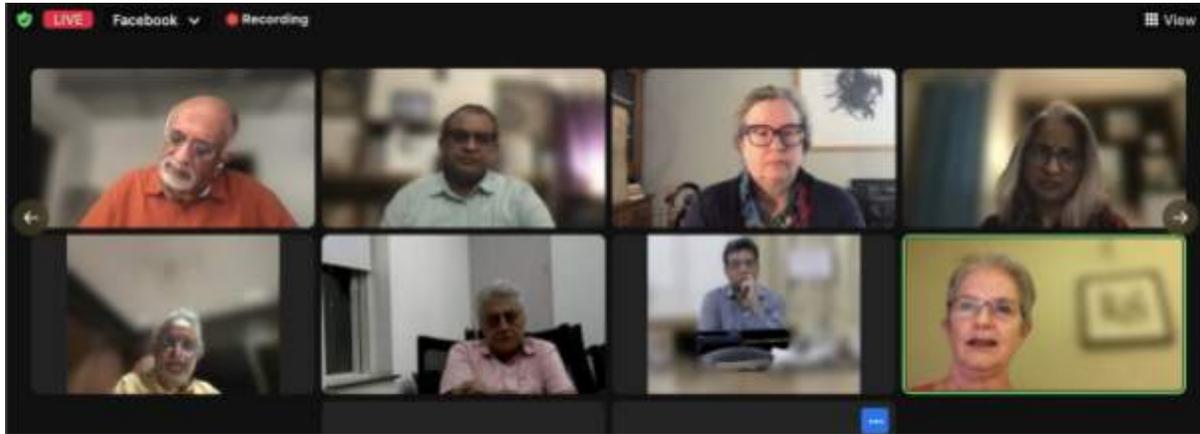
Rethinking cities: ESG Imaginaries To Make Cities Work - A four part webinar series

View the [Webinar Recordings](#) and [Reports \(English & Kannada\)](#)

[Habitat Forum INHAF](#) and ESG collaborated in organising a series of webinars on “*ESG Imaginaries to Make Cities Work*” (ESG here implying environmental, social justice and governance initiatives, pun unintended), as part of INHAF’s [Rethinking Cities](#) series underway since 2020. Four webinars were organised on the following themes:

- The first webinar on “[Waste and Governance](#)” was held on 7th July 2022 and its report is accessible [here](#) and the video recording [here](#).
- The second webinar was on “[Challenges of Securing Urban Commons](#)” held on 14th July 2022, and its report is accessible [here](#) and the video recording [here](#).
- The third webinar was on “[Mobility and Infrastructure](#)” held on 21st July 2022, and its report is accessible [here](#) and the video recording [here](#).
- The fourth webinar was on “[Making Cities of The 21st Century Inclusive](#)” held on 17th August 2022, and its report is accessible [here](#) and the video recording [here](#).

You can also download a compilation of the reports from all four webinars [here](#). We look forward to your feedback at: esgresearch@esgindia.org. (Please ensure the subject is ESG Cities Webinars.)



The panelists for the webinar

Mr.Prem Chandavarkar, Managing Partner, CnT Architects, Mr. Naresh Narasimhan, Principal Architect, VA Group; Ms. Kathy Dorgan, Architect; Prof. Carol Upadhyya, Head, Urban and Mobility Studies Programme at National Institute for Advanced Studies; and Mr.Tushar Girinath IAS, Chief Commissioner, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike. Leo F. Saldanha & Bhargavi S. Rao of ESG; Kirthee Shah, Founder President of INHAF.

Human Rights



The [release by Gujarat Government on Independence Day of all 11 convicts](#) who raped Bilkis Bano when she was five months pregnant and also other women in her family, and murdered her three year old daughter, [by a committee stacked with BJP members, has shocked the world](#). The [remission law](#) used has been pointed out as illegal as they have been [selectively used](#) and plausibly for [electoral gains](#). PUCL has condemned the decision and called for an early reversal, terming the release of the convicts “[shame of the nation](#)”. The judge who convicted the criminals has termed the decision “[a very bad precedent](#)”. Saheli has issued a petition endorsed by over 6000 organisations and individuals [demanding the reversal of the decision](#), and [a petition calling the Supreme Court to intervene has already received over 35000 endorsements](#). Outrageously, the decision has been defended by BJP claiming the convicts were “[sanskari Brahmins](#)”, which has horrified noted journalist Barkha Dutt to write that Bilkis Bano angst [must matter to every woman](#). As Bilkis’ husband expresses deep disappointment in the justice delivery system and asks “What can be worse than seeing your loved ones being

killed?”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who exhorted from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Independence Day to protect women, has remained mute.

Colonial and regressive laws continue to rule an independent India



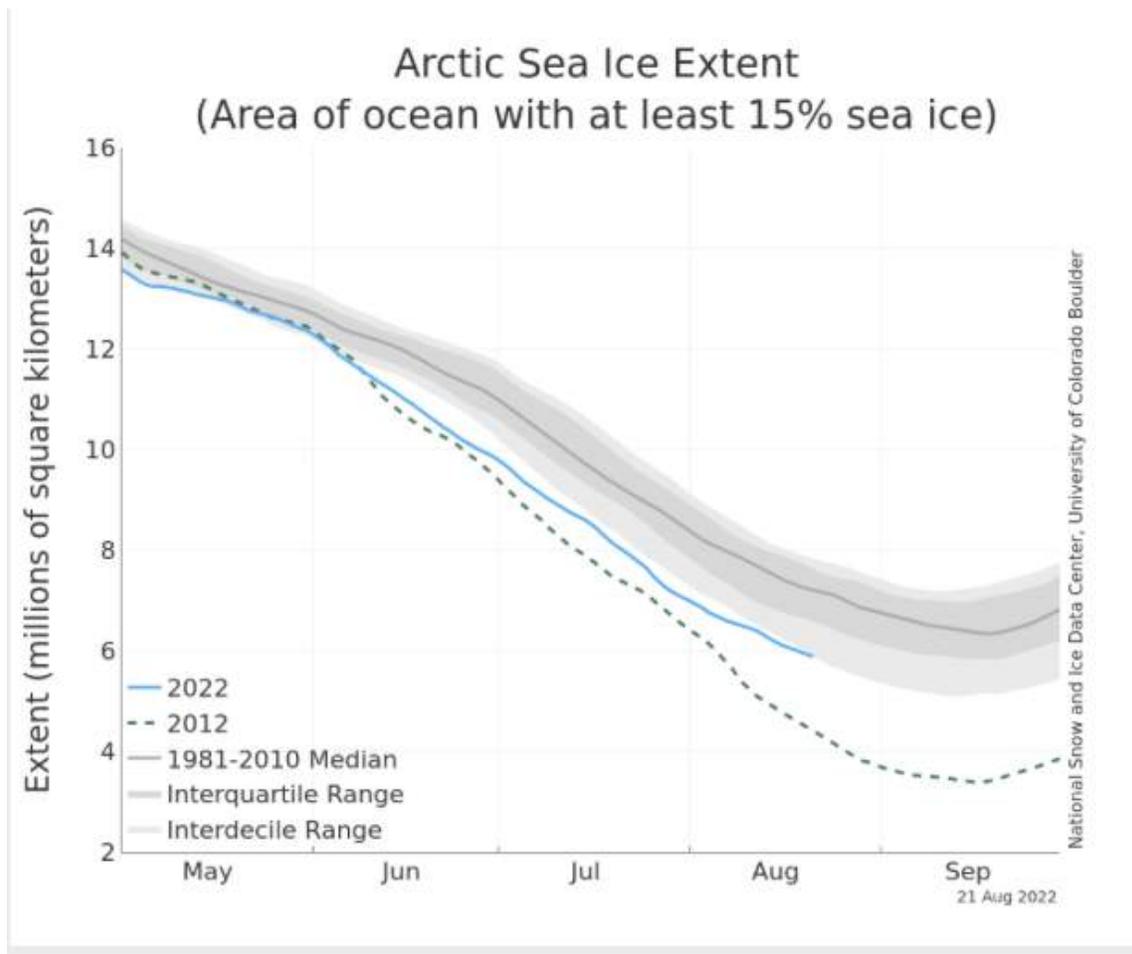
A year after the Bhima Koregaon case accused Fr. Stan Swamy died as an undertrial in prison, co-accused [Varavara Rao was granted permanent bail on medical grounds](#). The continued incarceration of several others accused in the case, with the exception of Sudha Bharadwaj who was released on bail a few months ago, is indicative of the widespread repression in India today, especially targeting human rights defenders and dissenters. While there is widespread condemnation of the abuse of draconian laws, such Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), [Supreme Court has upheld stringent provisions in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act \(PMLA\)](#) which provide Enforcement Directorate(ED) untrammelled powers for arrest, even on the basis of mere suspicion.

Water



[Karnataka's new Water Policy 2022](#), admittedly evolved based on deliberations “with each of the major water sector departments, elicited responses from them under the leadership of Additional Chief Secretary and Development Commissioner to the Government”, and without any input from the Legislature, Local Governments, academia and civil society, acknowledges the challenges from repeating and intensifying cycles of drought and floods and proposes several measures to regulate water use, including penalties for unwise use of water, restricting groundwater extraction, incentivising farmers to grow crops that use less water and harvesting flood water. It also makes a pitch for involvement of communities and Panchayats, but comprehensively misses out the due role of Local Governments in water resources planning and management as required per Article 243 ZD and ZE of the Constitution. Meanwhile, a recent [investigation conducted by the Central Ground Water Board\(CGWB\) across Karnataka](#) shockingly reveals traces of uranium is being found in groundwater from multiple districts with concentrations above the WHO permissible limit of 30 µg/L.

Climate Change



The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the globe since 1979, [reports a new study](#) published by Nature. As the [New York Times reports](#) on this, “the Arctic is heating more rapidly in large part because of a feedback loop in which warming melts sea ice in the region, which exposes more of the Arctic Ocean to sunlight and leads to more warming, which in turn leads to even more melting and warming.” Due to the increase in temperature at the poles, the difference of temperature between the poles and the equator have changed, which has led to changes in climatic conditions across the globe. Meanwhile, Current Science warns of the serious “[existential threat posed by humid heat waves due to global warming](#)”, particularly to human health.

Introducing the African cheetah into Indian landscape



The Indian Government signed an MoU with the Namibian Government to introduce [Cheetahs from Africa into Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh](#). While the first batch were expected to arrive this week, it has run into rough weather as [India rejected some individuals as were found to be not wild](#). This effort to reintroduce cheetah following its [extinction from the wild in the early part of the 20th century](#) has been in process since the idea was proposed in 2009 by then Environment Minister of India Jairam Ramesh. The Supreme Court which stayed this idea in 2013, eventually allowed it in 2020, the [Supreme Court of India permitted the experimental introduction of African Cheetahs](#) from Namibia into India. Consequently, in 2022, MoEFCC launched the [Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India](#) in compliance with IUCN guidelines 2013. But this has [wildlife scientists worried](#) about “scientific, logical and ethical concerns around this move, and most importantly, whether the Asiatic lion will be paying the price for it”. But current Environment Minister Mr. Bhupender Yadav is buoyant about the decision and claims it will help revive [grassland ecosystems](#). As per MoEFCC, the main goal is to [establish a viable Cheetah metapopulation](#) in India to allow it to perform its functional role as a top predator, though [serious concerns are being expressed](#) this might result [in a ‘vanity project’](#) and the [highly problematic creation of a safari](#).

Energy Conservation Amendment Bill 2022

[The Energy Conservation Amendment Bill that proposes amendments](#) to the Energy Conservation Act of 2001, has been passed in the Lok Sabha on 8th August. Amendments focus on setting targets for the industrial sector to reduce dependency on fossil fuel energies. But the question remains if peak demand of Industries can be met from renewable energy sources. Other sources of renewable energy, such as green ammonia and [green hydrogen](#), have been mentioned as potential alternative. But there are huge gaps that need to be filled before they can become reality.

ಪಶ್ಚಿಮ ಘಟ್ಟ (Western Ghats)



ಪಶ್ಚಿಮ ಘಟ್ಟವನ್ನು [ಪರಿಸರ ಸೂಕ್ಷ್ಮ ಪ್ರದೇಶವೆಂದು ಗುರುತಿಸಿ](#) ಅದನ್ನು ನಮ್ಮ ಮುಂದಿನ ಪೀಳಿಗೆಗೆ ರಕ್ಷಿಸಬೇಕಿದೆ. [ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಹೆಸರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಆ ಬಾಗದಲ್ಲಿ ಕೈಗೊಳ್ಳುವ ಕಾಮಗಾರಿಗಳು](#) ಪರಿಸರಕ್ಕೆ ಮಾರಕವಾಗುತ್ತವೆ. ಈಗಾಗಲೇ ನಮಗೆ ಬೀಳುವ ಸರಾಸರಿ ಮಳೆಯನ್ನೇ ತಡೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಆಗುತ್ತಿಲ್ಲ. [ಪ್ರವಾಹ, ಭೂಮಿ ಜಾರುವಿಕೆ ಇದರ ಜೊತೆ ಜೀವವೈವಿಧ್ಯತೆಯ ಅಳಿವು](#) ಮುಂತಾದ ವಿನಾಶಕಾರಿ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಗೆ ಕಾರಣೀಭೂತರಾಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದೇವೆ.

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