

PURPOSE & SOCIAL IMPACT

# THE CHANGE MAKERS FOR THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LANDSCAPE



A SPAG FINN Partners Publication

SPAG  
**FINN**  
PARTNERS

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## LETTER FROM PETER FINN

It's been more than a decade since I took a leap of faith and decided to build a business based on what I believe to be an incontrovertible fact: true business success depends upon moral leadership. When an organization has purpose, it can achieve greater prosperity than one that puts profits over people and planet.

The issues of our time, from climate change to social justice, are clear and urgent. In a time of increasing political division, purpose-driven organizations have a responsibility to take the lead and drive positive change to build a better future for all.

In the following pages, you'll read the words of professionals authentically dedicated to the preservation of the planet and the prosperity of its people. Every day, they apply their energy and expertise to serve clients who seek to find and articulate their own purpose. At FINN Partners, we are privileged to work collaboratively with organizations large and small, for-profit and non-profit, across many industry sectors, to build coalitions of like-minded partners to make a difference.

This is at the heart of the FINN Purpose and Social Impact Practice.

**Peter Finn, CEO & Founding Managing Partner**



# Leading with purpose drives business impact.

## Transformative Results

FINN delivers transformative results for clients seeking to foster positive change in the world. Our work spans industries, markets, organization sizes, cultures, and countries. As one of the world's largest independent communication agencies, FINN offers fully integrated communication with the flexibility to focus its team on client priorities.

## Integrated Marketing

With deep expertise across sectors, we deliver a full range of integrated services. The breadth of our capabilities and credentials allows us to deliver custom solutions for every challenge with a single, efficient team.

## Our Expertise:

Public Relations & Advertising, Research & Insights, Digital & Social Media, Thought Leadership, Creative Content Creation, Branding & Positioning, Investor Relations

## Global Network

**1500+** employees

**100** purpose & social impact people worldwide.

**33 offices** in North America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

## Our Values Drive Us

Work Hard Play Nice  
Create a Best Place to Work  
**Take Risks**  
Amaze  
Make a Difference  
In the World  
Collaborate  
Commit to Diversity

# Doing good by being good.

Founded in and on purpose, offering meaningful solutions for the modern business landscape. We don't just preach sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

## We live it.



2022 Sustainability Rating Certification



2022 Sustainability Rating Certification



Certified team members



Paris Climate Summit Senior Presence



Member

# What sets FINN Apart

**In today's competitive global business landscape, what can an organization do to set itself apart?** Increasingly, the answer to that question is recognizing that prioritizing society's needs aligns with business performance goals. Good global corporate citizenship starts with defining values, aligning to corporate priorities and creating a plan that connects with stakeholders' expectations. FINN can be your partner every step of the way.

We understand what it means to lead with Purpose. Our values guide us, and our expertise across

Corporate Social Responsibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Environment, ESG and Sustainability, is unmatched. Our expert global team helps clients become thought leaders, driving meaningful change in their communities, regions, countries and across the world. Let's have a conversation about the kind of organization you aspire to be.

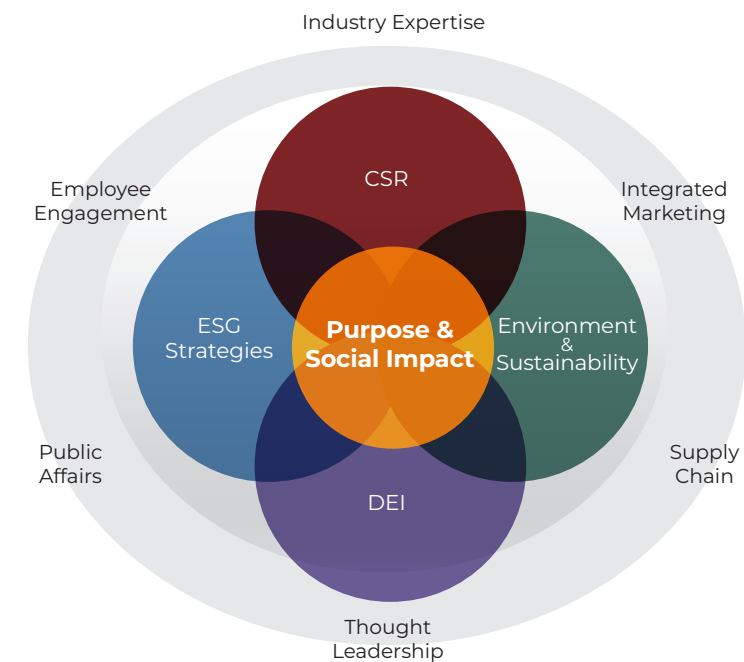
## The World of FINN Partners

**FINN Partners is one of the fastest growing, global marketing communications firms in the world, and still proudly independent.** Our vision has

remained steady to be a world class, best place to work global agency, with a heart and a conscience, that any major client in key markets around the world would consider hiring as its agency.

## United in Values

**Entrepreneurial spirit is a core performance metric in everything we do.** We believe we can be great, and be great people, at the same time. We've founded nonprofits, cause campaigns, and advocacy organizations, and we give \$1MM in time to employee causes.



## We do the unexpected

Our hallmark is finding creative and unexpected approaches to your challenges, including media targets and related, integrated media activations.

## We're relentless

We go beyond what is expected and push higher to create actionable strategies in our pursuit to drive meaningful change.

## We have perspective

We have high expectations for staying ahead of the issues and thinking and acting creatively and strategically.

## We're great collaborators

We believe our best work is possible when we work as collaborative partners fully integrated as an extension of your team.

# THE FINN PURPOSE ALIGNMENT INDEX

The FINN Purpose Alignment Index is a proprietary research product designed to quantify the influence of a company's or brand's purpose-related commitments and efforts on consumer buying decisions.

## BRAND PURPOSE ALIGNMENT INDEX STUDY SUBFACTOR LIST

### MARCOMMS –

The Brand:

1. Advertises the right amount.
2. Has good quality advertisements.
3. Has advertisements only seen by those that may buy their products.
4. Has advertisements that communicate the right information and are helpful.
5. Has a good logo or tagline.

### ESG –

The Brand:

6. Acts in a way that is good for the environment.
7. Minimizes product packaging waste.
8. Acts in a way that is good for the communities in which they are located.
9. Treats their employees well (salaries, working conditions, etc.).
10. Has a diverse workforce (race, gender, age, etc.).
11. Has a positive company mission and are purpose-driven.
12. Is transparent about their business practices (investments, supply chain, etc.).
13. Shares information about their commitments to the well-being of people and planet.
14. Has a positive economic effect (hiring, investments, etc.).

15. Has leadership (CEO, etc.) that is visibly involved in important social issues.

### Brand –

The Brand:

16. Operates in a trustworthy way.
17. Is consistent in quality, pricing, experience, etc.
18. Constantly innovates and comes up with new ideas.
19. Keeps customer data private and secure.
20. Works to retain customers and make them feel included.
21. Has a founder or CEO that is vocal about the direction of the company and engages with customers.

### Cost & Value –

The Brand:

22. Has a product line at competitive prices.
23. Has products that are easy to find in stores.
24. Makes products that are a good value.

### Features & Functionality –

The Brand:

25. Makes high quality products.
26. Makes product information easy to find.
27. Makes products that have desirable features.

### Customer Experience –

The Brand:

28. Has stores that are designed well and pleasant to be in.
29. Has stores in good geographic locations.
30. Has good delivery options.
31. Makes product returns easy.
32. Has good payment options.
33. Has a website that is easy to use.
34. Sells its products in stores and on websites that I like to purchase from.

### Social Influence –

The Brand:

35. Has positive social media conversations about them.
36. Has positive online reviews (Yelp, etc.).
37. Is spoken of highly when I hear from other people.
38. Is spoken of highly by online influencers who I trust.
39. Is spoken of highly by online groups or message boards (Reddit, etc.).
40. Is approved of by my social group or community.



# PURPOSE-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

Aman Gupta,  
Managing Partner, SPAG FINN  
Partners



Aman Gupta is a seasoned Senior Policy Advocacy Specialist with an extensive career devoted to enhancing global health. With over two decades of profound contributions, he excels in policy analysis, stakeholder engagement, and strategic advocacy, focusing on healthcare, purpose, sustainability, and health-tech initiatives. Aman's influence extends globally, collaborating with renowned entities like WHO, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and PATH, propelling transformative actions. Recognized for his exceptional work, he has been honoured with prestigious awards, cementing his position as a leading innovator and influential voice in shaping the global health landscape.

Bhaskar Majumdar,  
Head – Marketing  
communication, CSR and Digital,  
India and South Asia, Egis



Bhaskar Majumdar is a seasoned marketing communication expert with over 24 years of experience, currently serving as the Head of Marketing Communication, CSR & Digital for India & South Asia at Egis. His expertise lies in crafting and executing integrated marketing campaigns across multiple platforms, driving brand awareness, and managing reputation for global and Indian brands. Bhaskar's remarkable accomplishments include leading CSR initiatives for Egis, supporting various social causes, and earning accolades such as the "Corporate Communications Person of the Year." He is a visiting faculty at prestigious institutes, contributing his knowledge on CSR, purpose, and ESG. Bhaskar is a respected leader in the field, known for his dedication to social responsibility and purpose-driven communication.

Jean-Michel Dumont,  
Strategic Advisor, Asia Pacific,  
FINN Partners



Jean-Michel Dumont is a highly experienced Strategic Advisor, Asia Pacific, FINN Partners, with a remarkable 35-year career primarily in Asia. His expertise spans diverse sectors, notably corporate communications and CSR. Jean-Michel's extensive experience in Asia equips him with profound insights into supporting senior executives, offering training in messaging, media, and crisis management. Recognized as a PR luminary, he received accolades such as PRWeek Global Power Book inclusion, Sabre Individual Achievement Award, and Public Affairs Asia Gold Standard Award. Fluent in multiple languages, Jean-Michel bridges communication opportunities between Europe and Asia.

Arun Sudhaman,  
CEO and Editor-In-Chief,  
PRovoke Media



Arun Sudhaman is the CEO and Editor-In-Chief at PRovoke Media, where he oversees the global content offerings, including analysis and insights into reputation, public relations, and communications trends and issues. With over a decade of experience as a journalist and digital content specialist, most of which has been dedicated to analyzing the media, marketing, and communications industries, his career has spanned coverage and analysis of reputation and leadership issues in numerous countries worldwide, including the US, UK, Russia, China, India, and South Africa.

Pooja Garg Khan,  
Head Corporate  
Communications & CSR,  
Panasonic Life Solutions India



A communications specialist with over two decades of experience in Public Relations, Government Relations, Employee engagement, Digital PR, Crisis Management, Leadership coaching and Corporate Social Responsibility, Pooja is currently responsible for the Corporate Communications & CSR divisions at Panasonic Life Solutions India (PLSIND).

Pooja boasts extensive knowledge of the Indian market and various Asian markets. Her career includes stints with MetLife Asia, PNB MetLife, Aviva, Coca-Cola, Text 100, and Clea PR. She has played pivotal roles in award-winning campaigns such as Aviva Great Wall of Education, PNB MetLife Junior Badminton Championships, and Panasonic Welcome to Adulthood, showcasing her remarkable leadership and strategic communication skills.

Sujit Patil,  
Vice President and Head Corporate  
Brand and Communications,  
Godrej Industries Limited and  
Associate Companies



Sujit Patil is an accredited business communications professional and a three-time IABC Gold Quill award winner. From 2018 to 2023, he has been listed on Provoke media (erstwhile Holmes Report) Influence 100 research and listing of the world's most influential CCO's/CMO's. He is responsible for the Corporate Brand & Communications at Godrej Industries Limited and Associate Companies. An instrumentation engineer with Masters in marketing and Diploma in advertising and PR, Sujit is a regular speaker at national and international platforms and volunteers as a guest faculty at various B-Schools.

Gil Bashe,  
Chair Global Health and  
Purpose, FINN Partners



Nothing has kept Gil Bashe from advancing people's well-being from battlefield to boardroom. As a combat medic in an elite paratrooper unit, he tended to the wounded under fire. As a C-suite and global practice leader, he sees communications as the bridge to connect healers from around the world with those seeking to be healed. Through it all, he is dedicated to making a difference in people's lives and instilling a culture where colleagues are empowered to do the same. At FINN Partners, which makes a difference through collaboration and shared values, he has a role to which he is ideally suited. As Chair Global Health and Purpose at FINN, he champions both sectors within one of the world's leading integrated marketing and communications agencies.

Sarita Bahl,  
Country Group CSR Head -  
South Asia, Director – Bayer  
Foundation India



Sarita Bahl is an alumna of Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the Swedish Institute of Management Program. She leads the Corporate Social Responsibility function for Bayer South Asia and is also the Director – Bayer Foundation India. An experienced and versatile leader, she has over the years successfully overseen the communications and public affairs function and has led the corporate social responsibility strategy for Bayer South Asia, Pfizer and Monsanto, among others. Sarita has held multiple roles across diverse industries, public sector, trade associations, MNCs and the not-for-profit sector. Her areas of interest include advocacy, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, and communications.

Dr. Dhanalakshmi  
Ramachandra,  
CSR Business Partner -Strategic  
Projects & Stakeholder  
Engagement, Bayer



Dr. Dhanalakshmi Ramachandra has a professional training in agriculture, with 19 years of rich experience in the corporate world. After 12 years of active research in biotechnology and data sciences, she shifted her domain and has carved out a niche in the field of CSR. She is responsible for designing strategy for CSR and is experienced in managing large scale projects, monitoring and evaluation. She leads impactful projects for Bayer in Preventive Healthcare, STEM Education, Women empowerment and Agriculture across diverse geographies within the country. Through her collaborative spirit, she has nurtured successful partnerships with multiple stakeholders in the industry and other organizations. She is passionate about bringing a positive transformation in the community.

Amy Terpeluk,  
Managing Partner, CSR & Social  
Impact, FINN Partners



Amy has dedicated her career to counselling leading brands, non-profits, government agencies, and startups to help them find their rightful place on the frontlines of social impact and responsible business. Her expertise is in crafting programme for businesses and society that address social, economic, and environmental issues. She's particularly proud of her work building coalitions and directing national initiatives to address education equality and access, public health, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, women's economic empowerment, and veterans' well-being, among others.

Sanjay Notani,  
Partner, Economic Laws  
Practice



Sanjay Notani is a prominent legal professional and Partner at Economic Laws Practice, specializing in Defence & Aerospace, International Trade, and Policy & Regulation. He is a member of the Supreme Court Bar of India (SCBA) and Maharashtra & Goa Bar Council, Inter-Pacific Bar Association (IPBA) and American Bar Association (ABA) and also serves as Vice Chair on the ABA's South Asia/Oceania & India Committee. Sanjay has also been nominated by the Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF) to be a member of its Committee on Environment and Climate Change. His expertise is widely recognized, with accolades from Chambers Asia-Pacific, Chambers Global, Legal500 Asia-Pacific, Who's Who Legal Trade & Customs, and India Business Law Journal's A List as India's Top 100 Lawyers.



Naghm Ghei,  
Principal Associate, International  
Trade & Customs team at ELP



Naghm's work includes representing and advising clients on a wide range of trade-related issues, including trade remedial investigations, WTO disputes, non-tariff barriers and trade policy advisory. Naghm is recognized for her experience and knowledge in the field of International Economic Law, having previously worked at the Legal Affairs Division of the World Trade Organisation in Geneva and holding an LLM in International Law from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. Along with her team, Naghm has authored various articles on international trade law and policy for academic journals, web publications, as well as international and domestic forums.

Amrit Ahuja,  
Communication Consultant



Amrit Ahuja is a seasoned industry veteran with over 30 years of experience specialising in elevating the brands within the realms of capital and social impact. She served for 25 years in the capital world, and her last role was as communication director Meta India till 2019. Since 2020 she has consulted brands in the social impact space like Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, YuWaah (Unicef) and The Centre Square Foundation. Her work revolves around crafting digital-first strategies and nurturing advocacy efforts to ensure these brands attract strategic partners for expansion and impact.

Bob Martineau,  
Senior Partner, Environmental  
Policy and Communications,  
FINN Partners



Bob is an environmental and sustainability expert and attorney with decades of experience in the public and private sector. He served as the Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) for Governor Bill Haslam. Previously, he was a partner at Waller—one of the largest law firms in Tennessee—and was a Senior Attorney in the Office of General Counsel at the United States Environmental Protection Agency in Washington D.C. He has served as Board Chair for the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee, First Steps, Inc., the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and Community Health Charities and is a member of the American College of Environmental Lawyers.

Bess Winston,  
Senior Partner, ESG Strategy  
and Communications,  
FINN Partners



Creating more resilient, sustainable, equitable, and thriving communities and enterprises has been Bess's mission and passion for most of her professional life and the heart of the work she's done since founding her own agency in 2013, the Winston Agency, a FINN Partners Company. She's leveraged know-how in advocacy and communications to help blue chip companies and renowned organizations advance stories and commitments that are responsive to shifting societal priorities around climate adaptation, natural resource conservation, zero waste, circular economies, labour and human rights, and other pressing global issues of our time. Her issue expertise is complemented by robust experience in sectors as varied as apparel, manufacturing and supply chain, packaging and recycling, and food and beverage.

Shipra Singh,  
Head-Communications,  
GE HealthCare South Asia



A communication leader with 17 years of experience in the business, Shipra Singh is spearheading a diverse portfolio in South Asia at GE HealthCare, having represented some of the world's largest multinational corporations across South Asia and JAPAC during the expanse of her career. Shipra has led counsel in managing global digital-first brands like Google Cloud (JAPAC), Microsoft India, Infosys, SAP, Oracle, Adobe, Visa (India and South Asia), Vivo (South Asia) among others. Shipra has won accolades for her rigorous work in the Communication and PR industry—Communication Leader of the Year by PRCA (2023), influencer & leader by 40 Young Turks, Reputation Today 'Emerging leader in PR', E4M media, 'Technology head of the year, 2020' by Ad Gully and 'Communications Personality of the Year 2023' by PRCA.

Geetika Bangia,  
Head - Corporate  
Communications, Stryker India



A story teller and true believer in story living, she is a professional with 18+ years of experience in industries such as consumer durables, automotives and healthcare. She has passionately and relentlessly contributed towards building compelling brand imagery through communication. She is a resolute and committed professional offering rich & prolific exposure in the realm of Public Relations, Corporate Communications, CRM and mitigation of Crisis Management. ambitious and performance driven professional who has strengthened the core of business that She has been associated with and delivered the objective of connecting the brand to its target audience.



# CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: FROM OBLIGATION TO OPPORTUNITY

By: Aman Gupta,  
Managing Partner, SPAG FINN Partners

In an increasingly interconnected world where stakeholders demand transparency and ethical practices, the role of organizations extends beyond profit generation. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a powerful tool that not only contributes to societal welfare but also serves as a driving force for purposeful business operations and reputation enhancement. This strategic alignment of values and actions benefits society as well as enhances an organization's long-term sustainability and credibility. India is one of the key countries where CSR has gained substantial traction and yielded remarkable results.

A couple of decades ago, CSR was seen as a philanthropic activity that organizations engaged in voluntarily. However, the landscape has shifted, and CSR is now increasingly recognized as a strategies imperative. In India, the Companies Act of 2013 mandated that certain organizations allocate a portion of their profits towards CSR activities, signalling a shift from voluntary engagement to legal obligation. This transition has fostered a culture of purpose-driven business practices that extend beyond profit margins.

## Driving purpose and enhancing reputation through CSR

CSR initiatives provide organizations with a platform to align their operations with societal needs, contributing to a stronger sense of purpose. For instance, Tata Group, one of India's oldest and most esteemed conglomerates, has exemplified purpose-driven CSR through its wide-ranging initiatives. The Tata Trusts have been pivotal in fields such as healthcare, education, and rural development. Tata's commitment to eradicating polio, its establishment of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and the introduction of affordable and energy-efficient water purifiers are all testaments to how a company can infuse its operations

with purpose.

**In this age of information and social media, an organization's reputation is its most valuable asset. CSR initiatives allow businesses to engage authentically with their stakeholders and showcase their commitment to ethical practices.**

An illustrative example is the Aditya Birla Group, which has consistently championed CSR initiatives across sectors. From education and healthcare to sustainable livelihoods, their initiatives reflect a commitment to the well-being of the communities. Such dedication has not only earned the company a positive reputation but has also enhanced employee morale and stakeholder trust.

**Collaboration between the corporate sector, non-governmental organizations, and government bodies is crucial for driving meaningful change.**

An outstanding instance of collaboration is the partnership between Hindustan Unilever Limited and the government's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The campaign focused on promoting healthy sanitation habits, aligning seamlessly with the government's larger mission. This collaboration showcases how the private sector's resources and expertise can be harnessed to accelerate the impact of national initiatives.

## Making a difference

Implementing sustainable business practices is an essential aspect of CSR. By adopting eco-friendly policies and practices, companies can not only reduce their negative impact on the environment but also create a lasting impact. Here are some ways companies can further expand on

implementing sustainable business practices:

- **Investing in renewable energy sources:** Transition to renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power will not only help in reducing carbon emissions but also promote the use of sustainable energy alternatives.

- **Reducing carbon emissions:** Various measures to reduce carbon footprint include optimizing transportation logistics, improving energy efficiency in buildings, and encouraging employees to adopt eco-friendly commuting options.

- **Implementing waste management and recycling programmes:** Establish waste management systems that prioritize recycling and waste reduction by setting up recycling bins, composting programmes, and encouraging employees to follow sustainable waste disposal practices.

## Creating a lasting impact

Businesses should be committed to operating in an ethical and sustainable manner, taking into account the interests of various stakeholders such as employees, customers, communities, and the environment. By engaging in CSR activities, companies can make a long-lasting impact on society and contribute to sustainable development.

In today's evolving business landscape, CSR has transcended its philanthropic roots to become a central tenet of purposeful and sustainable business practices.

**Indian organizations have demonstrated how CSR can shape their reputation, foster a sense of purpose, and create tangible societal impact.**

As businesses worldwide recognize the interconnectedness

of profit and societal well-being, the experience serves as a beacon of how CSR can be a driving force for positive change while enhancing reputation in a mutually reinforcing cycle. Through genuine engagement, collaboration, and transparency, organizations can embrace their role as responsible citizens and catalysts for progress





# HOW INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ARE ENABLING NOVEL SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

**By: Bhaskar Majumdar,  
Head – Marketing communication, CSR and Digital,  
India and South Asia, Egis**

Innovation and technology have emerged as potent tools in the fight against social and environmental challenges, particularly in the context of India and other Asian countries. As these regions grapple with rapid population growth, urbanization, and economic development, they are faced with a pressing need to find novel solutions to address issues ranging from pollution and climate change to social inequality and healthcare access. Let's into how innovation and technology are reshaping the landscape of solutions for these complex challenges.

**Tackling Environmental Pollution Through Technological Innovations**

Due to industrialization and urbanization, environmental pollution has become a significant concern in countries like India. Air pollution poses a severe threat to public health and the environment. However, technological innovation is providing a ray of hope.

**Research has shown that by embracing renewable energy sources and energy-efficient technologies, countries can significantly reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, thereby contributing to a cleaner environment.**

For instance, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi

has developed a low-cost air purifier that can eliminate up to 90% of pollutants from indoor air. This innovation not only improves air quality but also underscores the potential of homegrown solutions to combat environmental challenges. Furthermore, initiatives like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) leverage technology to monitor pollution levels across cities and identify pollution sources, facilitating targeted interventions.

In recent news, India's National Hydrogen Mission aims to harness hydrogen as a clean energy source, while Asian nations collaborate for enhanced climate resilience through joint research and knowledge sharing. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital healthcare solutions, bridging gaps in access.

The Mahindra Group's "Hariyali" program stands as a testament to private sector innovation. This initiative, aiming to plant one million trees annually, showcases the potential of corporate entities to drive positive environmental change. Through strategic partnerships and innovative planting techniques, this initiative combats deforestation and promotes environmental awareness.

## **Social Sustainability Powered by Technological Advancements**

In the pursuit of sustainable development, technological innovation plays a dual role by addressing both environmental and social challenges.

**By fostering innovation, societies can create products and services that directly target social issues such as poverty, education, and healthcare.**

Take, for example, India's ambitious Digital India program, which aims to provide digital access and services to citizens, especially those in rural areas. This initiative not only empowers individuals through connectivity but also fosters financial inclusion, enabling underserved populations to access resources and opportunities previously beyond their reach.

Recent advancements in India and Asia demonstrate the region's commitment to innovation and sustainability. The startup ecosystem is witnessing a surge in environmentally focused initiatives, from waste management apps to urban farming technologies. Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming disaster management with predictive models aiding early warning systems. Renewable energy and smart grids are reshaping the energy landscape, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting efficiency.

In the healthcare sector, mobile health technologies are revolutionizing the delivery of medical services. Remote healthcare services, powered by mobile apps and telemedicine platforms, are extending healthcare access to rural and remote areas. This innovation improves the quality of life and contributes to social sustainability by narrowing healthcare disparities.

**Leveraging Innovation for Climate Resilience**

Climate change poses a significant threat to Asian countries, with potentially dire consequences for vulnerable populations. However, **innovation is proving to be a potent weapon in building climate resilience.** Initiatives such as the TechEmerge Resilience India Program and the Climate Innovation Challenge are at the forefront of driving innovative solutions.

For instance, Wi-Fi-connected community radios are emerging as a lifeline in rural India. These radios provide vital information and early warnings about impending disasters, empowering communities to take timely action. Additionally, the Indian government's National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) is pioneering climate-resilient development by supporting projects that harness innovative technologies. These initiatives underscore the collaborative efforts aimed at addressing climate-related challenges.

On the other hand, social innovation takes centre stage in the form of the Barefoot College's initiative in Rajasthan. This remarkable institution empowers rural women by training them to become solar

engineers. Armed with knowledge of solar panel installation and maintenance, these women are

revolutionizing energy access in their villages. This sustainable solution highlights the fusion of technology and grassroots empowerment.

The way forward

A pressing imperative emerges to systematically conduct assessments across various life-cycle stages of these myriad initiatives and juxtapose their sustainability implications, a crucial stride in confronting the multifaceted quandaries posed by technological innovation. This task must not only encompass environmental metrics but also encompass social dimensions, forging a harmonious equilibrium between technological progress and its societal ramifications.

Such a holistic approach stands as a linchpin in orchestrating innovation strategies that harmonize with prevailing societal and environmental exigencies. The ongoing array of initiatives and breakthroughs invariably underscores the power of technology-fuelled solutions in incubating a future that is both sustainable and inclusive.

**This trajectory, underscored by collaborative synergies and a nurturing ecosystem for innovation, elucidates how India and its Asian counterparts are charting a course toward an optimistically radiant horizon.**



# I WISH I COULD HAVE KNOWN THEN... OR THE PYTHAGORAS TRIANGLE

ESG REPORTING CONTINUES TO EVOLVE THROUGHOUT ASIA

By: Jean-Michel Dumont,  
Strategic Advisor, Asia Pacific, FINN Partners

In a world where human impact on the environment, society, and corporate governance have become increasingly evident, the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria have emerged as a compass for responsible and sustainable decision-making. What began as a niche corporate metric for sustainable business transformed swiftly into a global movement transcending borders, industries, and ideologies.

**The journey of ESG has been nothing short of an odyssey, evolving from scattered initiatives to a pervasive force shaping the strategies of businesses, investors, and policymakers alike.**

When I created the first Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)-dedicated team in a PR consultancy in China in 2001, and a matching CSR programme with the Tsinghua University School of Journalism, our offering was - albeit

innovative for a fast-changing China - fairly straightforward. It sought to establish strong links between civil society, corporations, and governments to create a virtuous circle of sustainability and social programmes for our clients. It helped journalism students see through greenwashing and raise the bar along the way. Our logo was a triangle to illustrate this simple concept. Fast-forward two decades, and the ecosystem is much more complex.

Many acronyms have since sprouted beyond CSR, all covering different sectors of focus, from ESG (environment, social and governance) to DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), monitored by GRI (global reporting initiative), and supported by IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and COP (conference of the parties).

Along with these acronyms came controversies. What seemed like an obvious thing to do - involving corporations in solving

issues through strategic stakeholder engagement - seems to have created its new set of issues, even a vocabulary such as Greenhushing or Greenshouting, as greenwashing or ESG becomes obsolete or controversial. Even Larry Fink considered the ESG godfather, claims that he doesn't use the acronym anymore as it has been "entirely weaponised", and mentions of "ESG" on S&P500 earnings calls between Q1 2021 and Q1 2023 decreased 47%.

And with a world increasingly connected through social media, yet increasingly fragmented, came challenges to "do the right thing" and, importantly, communicate it. Nowhere is this fragmentation more apparent than in Asia, a continent of multiple cultures, languages, religions, political systems, and development levels. Consumers in developed parts of Asia such as Japan or Singapore, demand that products and services be environmentally and ethically sound. This is secondary in places such as Laos or Bangladesh.

The expectation that employers create more supportive and inclusive workplaces has been present in Asia for a long time, but what racial and religious diversity means in India or Malaysia is different in a more culturally cohesive China or Japan. Meanwhile, gender diversity takes a different sense in Australia than in Korea or Bangladesh. And more often than not, a completely different meaning in US or European headquarters.

Companies have had to adapt their HR and marketing to these ever-changing trends for a long time. In an increasingly connected world, they must look beyond individual markets while staying true to their global core values. Tariq Fancy, former chief of sustainable investing at Blackrock, explains, *"Marketing is moving away from generalised ESG into specific areas like renewables, the reuse economy, or batteries. It can only be a good thing because it's more real, descriptive, and valuable."*

**As climate change becomes more visible in many countries and social instability also rises because of wealth inequality, measuring outcomes has become a priority for both companies and governments.**

Investors are looking beyond the bottom line to responsible practices, and global stock exchanges have set reporting standards that differ. Although Hong Kong and Singapore Stock Exchanges usually set the tone for Asia, it is unlikely that Asia-wide standards will be implemented soon because of different levels of development, further complicating reporting and compliance.

Additionally, while the 'E' of ESG has seen progress in reporting and action (albeit not fast enough), the 'S' and 'G' values are harder to quantify and rarely scale across countries. Social value derived from investing can have a different meaning in Shanghai or Singapore. This opens the door to misunderstanding at best and new sets of issues at worst.

Risk management has moved to the core of doing business and of Boards concerns... Asia is at the frontline of climate change and is more exposed to physical climate risk than any other part of the world. A McKinsey report stated that by 2050, several parts of Asia are likely to witness a rise

in average temperatures and lethal heat waves and that between \$2.8 trillion and \$4.7 trillion of Asia's GDP could be at risk from loss of outdoor working time because of increased heat and humidity.

The Asian GDP at risk accounts for more than two-thirds of the global one. And about \$1.2 trillion in capital stock in Asia is expected to be damaged by river flooding in a given year by 2050, equivalent to about 75% of the global impact. These risks compound the cost of doing business. Last year, the Insurance Business Magazine wrote that economic losses due to natural disasters amounted to nearly USD 313 billion. The APAC region significantly lagged behind the rest of the world, with 86% of losses missing insurance coverage. More than ever, companies have to prepare for the worst while trying to mitigate this impact.

Beyond physical risks onto reputation risks, while our 2001 China CSR University programme and team always emphasised that stakeholders' engagement positively impacted risk management, this engagement can now be at the root of a new crisis. For example, with the current China-US geopolitical issues, doing the right thing in China may carry a reputation weight in the US (or in India) or vice-versa, as H&M or Nike found out when they took Xinjiang cotton out of their supply chain or as Shein is seeing now in the USA.

As a result of possible backlash, one in four companies surveyed by the South Pole in 2022 have set science-based emission reduction targets but do not plan to publicize them (the famous Green-hushing), despite "three-quarters of them having increased their net zero budgets over the past year and a majority of those not on track to meet their net zero goals expanding their sustainability teams."

Despite all these changes, one thing seems constant - the need to demonstrate transparency, action, and progress. This is a common request by governments, stock exchanges, investors, and consumers. This was at the core of our crisis preparedness training in 2001 and is now at the centre of what companies must do to stay in business. Likewise, purpose was a new concept in China in 2001, and Chinese and foreign companies rarely focused on it.

But now, it plays a central role in tying up all the above challenges. **A well-articulated purpose and thoughtful communication are the backbone of stakeholders' engagement (and risk reduction) as they help define the areas for CSR programmes that address social and environmental issues while aligning with ESG measurement.** It also attracts and retains the best employees while engaging with the supply chain.

The Triangle concept from 2001 is still valid. The lines linking the three angles could be clearer and more cohesive. Our role as global communicators is to redefine those lines and make them work from Beijing to Sydney, Singapore to London, and Delhi to New York. I sometimes still invoke the genius of Pythagoras to help redraw those lines.



# ESG INVESTING: GREEN IS THE NEW GOLD



By: Arun Sudhaman,  
CEO and Editor-In-Chief, PProvoke Media

ESG proponents currently find themselves under attack from both sides of the split that plagues today's political landscape, which may be nothing more than a sign of the times. The idea that environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations should affect investment strategies is coming under heavy fire from US Republicans. Texas has mandated that state retirement and education funds withdraw their holdings in financial institutions that are "boycotting" the fossil fuel sector, while Florida has approved a resolution prohibiting pension fund managers from taking such problems into consideration. Both states deride it as "woke capitalism." Anti-ESG funds are beginning to gain popularity, and a recent survey reveals that most American CFOs support these initiatives.

Nevertheless, amidst the ideological battle, a compelling case for ESG is being made. New York Times columnist Frank Bruni has noted that younger employees have distinct expectations from companies, ones that compel action on environmental and social fronts. Incidents of misstated ESG criteria by financial institutions highlight the need for standardized, regulated reporting to ensure transparency and accountability.

**Regulation is becoming a crucial focal point. The EU has taken a robust approach, introducing directives for corporate sustainability commitments and disclosure of ESG-labelled investments.**

Other countries such as India, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan are also exploring environmental disclosure requirements. These regulations attempt to bridge a significant gap—the lack of standardized criteria for ESG reporting. As the number of reporting standards and frameworks proliferates, efforts to standardize ESG data reporting are emerging, aiming to provide investors with more consistent information.

The question of self-regulation within the financial industry has also come under scrutiny. Instances where purported ESG champions maintain investments in seemingly contradictory industries, such as fossil fuels, have sparked debate. The need for transparency and credibility in ESG reporting and investment decisions is pressing, driving regulatory efforts.

Despite the debates and challenges, the journey of ESG is an evolution rather than an end. **The surge in ESG investment, amounting to trillions of dollars in ESG-labelled funds, is indicative of a growing desire for responsible investing.** However, the ESG movement must transform from buzzwords to tangible action. As ESG continues to gain prominence, it is essential to refocus on the core principles that spurred its creation—assessing risk, fostering transparency, and encouraging corporate responsibility.

The regulatory shifts may appear daunting, but they represent an opportunity for the finance industry to redefine its role in a world grappling with complex challenges. ESG, as a concept, might give way to more specific terms, but the underlying drive for sustainable, ethical, and transparent investment remains. The tumultuous debate around ESG is a call for a reset that aligns corporate behaviour with social and environmental realities.

While critics may be quick to point out ESG's imperfections, they should not overshadow the fact that ESG has succeeded in sparking an essential conversation about the future of responsible capitalism. The road ahead is one that necessitates not just rhetoric, but substantive actions that align with a global imperative for a more sustainable and equitable world. As the ESG narrative unfolds, a clear message emerges—for recalibration towards a more accountable and impactful future.





# Making ESG your company's ikigai results in a win-win for all

By: Pooja Garg Khan,  
Head Corporate Communications & CSR, Panasonic Life Solutions India

In the south of Japan lies Okinawa, famously known as the 'island of longevity.' According to the centenarians on the island, the secret to their longer lifespan lies in what is known as 'ikigai,' a Japanese concept that refers to the purpose of life or something that gives a person a reason for being. The good news is everyone has an ikigai—all one needs to do is find it. Significantly, in the aftermath of the pandemic, as we navigate a chaotic and unpredictable world, the principles of the well-known Japanese philosophy might even hold the answer for organizations that want to emerge sustainable and resilient in the long run.

In the new normal, as the world re-examines errors of the past, the triple bottom line approach to organizational performance (which considers not only the financial but also the social and environmental impacts of business activities) has become even more relevant. The case for a strong ESG (Environment, Social and Corporate Governance) proposition that has the potential to positively affect the people, planet, and profit is compelling. Moreover, there is no doubt that an ESG-led approach is responsible for value creation. From improving the company's reputation among customers, employees, and investors, to enhancing its risk management and compliance, driving innovation

to reducing environmental footprint, emissions, and waste, ESG goals can do it all. A 2019 McKinsey report even links ESG to top-line growth, cost reduction, productivity uplift, among others. Not surprisingly, stakeholders are asking for it; the government is in the process of making it mandatory; and the world needs it. To put it simply, there is no time like the present for companies to make ESG goals their ikigai.

## India's ESG landscape

Countries in North America and Europe have seen a steady rise in ESG investing in recent years. As the most populous country, the fastest growing economy in the world, and the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs), after China and the US, India is particularly vulnerable to climate change.

### **Indian companies can lose Rs.7,138 billion due to climate-related risks in the next five years if we do not build robust ESG frameworks on priority.**

Fortunately, post-pandemic, ESG investing has picked up momentum. The government has made major investments towards renewable energy sources to harness solar and wind energy. Companies are following suit by paying attention to energy consumption, waste management, water consumption, etc.

Panasonic conducted a brand survey with Gen Z and Millennials to understand their engagement with brands around ESG. It appears that around 95% of Indian Gen Zs and millennials try to minimize personal impact on environment. Indian Gen Zs and millennials strongly agree that large companies are taking substantive actions to combat climate change. And 48% of consumers share an emotional

connection with products or organizations that demonstrate eco-friendly qualities. Hence to succeed in terms of business too, ESG needs to be in the DNA of any organization.

An area of concern, however, is the fact that ESG is often used interchangeably with sustainability, whereas individual elements of ESG are deeply intertwined and need equal attention. For instance, the social criteria on employee safety and health, working conditions, and the requirements for the implementation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) are treated as an internal activity, when they need to be extended to the society as a whole.

## Change in the offering

Although the emphasis is currently on protecting the environment and creating safer working conditions, India is gradually moving towards developing stricter regulations which call for more implementation, transparency, and disclosure in ESG.

In the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2021, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2070. On their part, corporations have made commitments that clearly indicate that global environmental issues are top priority, be it with measures such as introducing energy-efficient technology, recycling e-waste by tech giants Apple and Dell, or Panasonic Group's ambitious Green Impact pledge to achieve net zero CO2 emissions at all its operating companies by 2030.

CSR reporting and spending has already been made mandatory under the Companies Act, 2013. Not only does it allow corporates to demonstrate their societal commitment transparently but it also acts as an effective communication tool to engage with various stakeholders.

With the pandemic throwing light on the importance of health and well-being, it is good to note that India Inc. has consistently upped its DEI initiatives over the past three years, to address employee satisfaction and well-being. Recently the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has revised the annual Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) required by the 1,000 largest listed companies in India, mandating disclosures from GHG emissions to gender and social diversity. Pursuing responsible and ethical business practices through ESG-enabled lens is a great way to future-proof business in these uncertain times where we are witnessing unpredictable changes in the environment, society, and the economy.

ESG is a journey, not a destination **The ESG journey starts with understanding customers and figuring out what value the organization can add to customers' lives while simultaneously reducing the negative impact on the planet.** For instance, companies could focus on reducing energy consumption, circular economy, and waste management in their product supply chain. The next step involves bringing in a cultural shift within the organization through DEI and focus on well-being and safety of employees, while aligning the goals of the employees with those of the company. And finally, understanding the 'G' in ESG—which refers to the governance risks and opportunities—is critical in decision-making. It helps stakeholders, right from investors and the board of directors to the customers, make decisions that impact the very future of the organization.

Finding ikigai is not about crunching numbers. Instead, it is about tapping within to find the sweet spot where passion, mission, vocation, and profession intersect. Where ikigai goes, long-term gains are sure to follow. In the case of organizations, it is up to the business leaders to find the ikigai, as well as achieve a balance between purpose and profitability. Focussing on ESG goals is the path to do so. After all, doing good equals doing well.



# RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS: STRENGTHENING YOUR PR ARSENAL!

By: Sujit Patil,  
Vice President and Head Corporate Brand and Communications,  
Godrej Industries Limited and Associate Companies

One would have certainly noticed a reinforced sagacity to be more responsible and a few phrases becoming mainstream in recent times—sprinkled across LinkedIn posts, making headlines at every PR event and part of almost every panel discussion. Terms like 'social impact', 'purpose', 'sustainability', 'ESG', 'DEI' and others have truly taken centre stage for good. In the book, 'The Pursuit of Reputation', which I co-authored with reputation scientist Amith Prabhu, and published by Westland in September 2023, we have tried to define some of these terms in a simple manner as follows.

**Sustainability** immediately conjures up thoughts about the environment. However, it is much more. It is about what can be done to ensure the areas which need support are sustained. As per Investopedia, 'In the broadest possible sense, sustainability refers to the ability of something to maintain or "sustain" itself over time. In business and policy contexts, limits to sustainability are determined by physical and natural factors, environmental degradation, and social resources. Accordingly, sustainable policies place some emphasis on the future effect of any given policy or business practice on humans, the economy, and ecology. The concept often corresponds to the belief that without major changes to the way the planet is run, it will suffer irreparable degradation.'

**Corporate philanthropy** is when a company dips into its budget—either after making a profit, or during the year based on either the previous year's profit or anticipated profit—and sets aside cash to be given away to a cause or non-profit or a foundation that has been created by the organisation. In essence, giving back to society.

**Social impact**, a concept different from social impact funds, is about the impact made on society. Here, the context is about how organisations volunteer their time or how

employees are involved in causes which can go a long way in making a difference to the beneficiary.

**CSR** is a traditional method of making time to volunteer for causes, writing cheques periodically to preferred charities, or creating a department that focuses on giving back to communities.

**ESG** has been around for a while but has gained traction in the last few years. Environmental, social, and corporate governance is an evaluation of a firm's collective conscientiousness for social and environmental factors. It is typically a score that is compiled using data collected around specific metrics related to intangible assets within the enterprise. It could be considered a kind of corporate social credit score.

**Purpose** is about having a clear-cut goal that goes beyond profit. We hear this word from various sources and very often, it is used without too much thought. However, purpose is the reason for existence. It is the gap you are promising to bridge between various stakeholders. Purpose can be the roadmap for companies to remain competitive in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world."

A few traits demonstrated by purpose-driven organizations are:

**1. They integrate purpose into their business strategy** – As an example, GCPL's (Godrej Consumer Products Limited) purpose, 'Bringing the goodness of health and beauty to consumers in emerging markets' guides their choices and ways of working.

**2. Purpose-driven companies are innovative** – GCPL recently introduced the Goodknight Mini and HIT No-Gas

Spray. These innovations bring down the cost of liquid repellent and spray categories in India by up to 50%, making them accessible to all. These innovations have democratized safe mosquito repellents for lower-income consumers, supporting the government's vision of easing the nation's health burden.

**3. They partner with all stakeholders and celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion** – At Godrej Properties Limited (GPL), job descriptions have been made gender-neutral. There are clearly marked 'all inclusive' washrooms for all genders in various work locations which are also PwD compliant. Sensitization sessions at offices across the country cover topics that include pronouns, and what constitutes inclusive language. They recently partnered with Gaysi Family to produce an illustrated booklet on how to be a better workplace ally to the LGBTQIA community which was distributed to all employees.

**4. They walk the talk** – They are honest, avoid greenwashing, and believe in the greater good.

**5. They hire people aligned to their purpose** – From a communications perspective, all the above are awesome themes around which stories can be told. Very often, organisations look at doing one or more of the above to get mileage. This can accrue in different ways—reports in the media, employees sharing details with their connections, and management talking about it at various forums. **It is here that a brand needs to take an ethical stance and answer a simple question—are these activities undertaken to contribute to society, get a pat on the back... or both?**

Public relations executives play the role of harmony officers. Their key job in the realm of communicating these narratives

is to inform and update the impacted stakeholders in an authentic and ethical manner, bringing everyone together harmoniously. Responsible communication can be defined as, 'managing communication processes, content and impact in an accountable, ethical and transparent manner and recognizing stakeholder interests and human rights with no harm to the environment in order to contribute to the growth of an enterprise.'

More than just a definition, it can be a strong archetype in the field of public relations and corporate communications. Responsible communications can strengthen the PR arsenal of an enterprise. It would be the best tool to attract consumers who are increasingly passionate about environmental and social aspects. **The impact of consistent responsible communications can lead to loyal long-term customers, employees, and investors, and build an enduring reputation.** These very customers can play the role of advocates in the eventuality of an adverse incident since they understand the ethos of the company. This cannot be expected from customers who may see your messaging as 'greenwashing'. Excessive claims and promises made for short-term gains get called out and are more damaging. Customers today are aware and shift loyalty the moment they sense anything that is untruthful and unethical.

Corporate scrutiny has gone up significantly. Businesses are expected to be transparent and aligned to their purpose. The vulnerability of getting called out for even small slips in corporate behaviour is high. With social media, the potential of an incident becoming a crisis also skyrockets. I feel that the only trustworthy solution is to have a responsible communications strategy.





# HEALING THE WORLD: HOW HOSPITALS AND DIGITAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS ARE LEADING THE WAY

By: Gil Bashe,  
Chair Global Health and Purpose, FINN Partners

The inextricable link between the well-being of our planet and our own health is undeniable, and it's imperative that the healthcare community collaborates with environmental experts to address this issue. As highlighted by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, in a report 'Healthcare Without Harm', healthcare institutions should lead the way in promoting health and preventing disease, rather than contributing to the global disease burden. However, it's disconcerting to note that the global healthcare industry is a significant contributor to carbon emissions, responsible for a yearly output of two gigatons of carbon dioxide, which accounts for 4.4% of total global emissions. Hospitals also generate approximately five million tons of medical waste annually, encompassing various materials from medical packaging to used surgical equipment. If the healthcare sector were a nation, it would rank as the world's fifth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, following China, the United States, India, and Russia. Clearly, this is not a ranking that any hospital would aspire to achieve.

In response to this critical issue, health systems are diligently working to course correct. To achieve this, major medical centers must align their sustainability goals with their objectives. This is where the concept of "eco-health" and the latest digital health innovations come into play, offering the potential to mitigate the industry's contribution to environmental degradation, while addressing pressing public health challenges.

The healthcare sector has inadvertently made positive strides during the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting advanced telehealth and remote care technologies to enhance

accessibility. These digital health solutions not only improve health delivery but also have direct environmental benefits. Telemedicine and Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) have already reduced in-person office visits, with experts projecting that permanent telemedicine integration could lead to a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

Moreover, EMRs have the added benefit of saving forests by reducing paperwork. Healthcare institutions, such as Kaiser Permanente, have managed to achieve carbon-neutral status by embracing eco-friendly practices, citing the significant carbon sequestration potential of EMRs and telemedicine. Beyond reducing carbon emissions, the adoption of telehealth has resulted in substantial savings in terms of travel and gasoline consumption. Patients have also gained valuable time by opting for virtual consultations.

Hospitals are not only addressing their internal operations but also the energy consumption by their physical infrastructure. They are exploring technologies that can reduce energy dependence, recognizing that they are one of the largest energy consumers among commercial buildings in the United States. Leading medical centers are now leveraging their expertise to combat climate change actively. Hospitals are advocating for policies that protect communities from environmental risks and inspiring others to follow suit.

Cutting-edge technology, such as robots for supply delivery, handheld devices for staff, and integrated bedside terminals, is becoming commonplace in such facilities, enhancing both patient care and operational efficiency. Some hospitals, like Humber River Hospital in Toronto, have been recognized as digital pioneers, embracing technology to improve health delivery.

To continue their tradition of innovation, healthcare providers are now becoming champions of environmental change by adopting green technologies like smart beds, artificial intelligence, EMRs, virtual reality, and digital health solutions. While these technologies do have an environmental impact, such as energy consumption and electronic waste production, these issues can be mitigated through green power adoption and innovative recycling programs.

The healthcare sector has an unprecedented opportunity to lead the charge in promoting planetary health through eco-health. By harnessing the collective expertise of architects, entrepreneurs, engineers, scientists, physicians, and healthcare professionals, hospitals and other facilities can contribute to lasting and sustainable changes in the world. The sector, known for its innovation and commitment to saving lives, is poised to become a powerful advocate for planetary health alongside its traditional role as a provider of exceptional patient care.



# PHYGITAL: ASPIRING FOR ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

By: Sarita Bahl,  
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Director – Bayer Foundation India

Dr. Dhanalakshmi Ramachandra,  
CSR Business Partner -Strategic Projects &  
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Social inequality in our world is growing and is exacerbated by challenges such as climate change and pandemics. Access to adequate healthcare or sufficient and quality food is limited for many parts of the world's population. At Bayer, we contribute to a world where everyone has access to enough food and can live a healthy life. Our development work focuses on finding new answers for challenges related to the UN sustainable development goals around nutrition, health, gender equality, and access to water, in alignment with our vision of 'Health for All, Hunger for None'.

This is reflected by the 'Phygital' set up put in place by Bayer Foundation India (BFI), the CSR arm of Bayer India in aspirational districts across the country. Phygital refers to the telemedicine centres co-located within the Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs). This initiative aims to expand the essential health facilities at block, and village levels, by making free specialist consultation services, point-of-care testing, vitals screening, and medication distribution available to rural communities.

Kishor Sathe, an electrician from Vitthal Nagar in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa district, shoulders the responsibility

of a seven-member family, and is grappling with hypertension. Conventional hospital visits offered no respite to Kishor despite medication. Ms. Akanksha, a staff nurse at the centre, recorded his medical history, assessed his vitals, and facilitated a teleconsultation with the physician. The physician recommended an enhanced medication regimen, suggested lifestyle modifications, and provided tailored dietary recommendations. This was the beginning of Kishor's transformative journey and within few months his blood pressure normalized, and he felt a renewed sense of well-being.

The health infrastructure in India is currently inadequate to meet the requirement of the growing population. This is further accentuated by disparities that exist in healthcare access and utilization between rural and urban locations. With a doctor patient ratio of 1:1445 in India as against the WHO recommendation of 1:1000, accessibility to quality healthcare is a challenge. Lack of awareness about general health, hygiene, and nutrition are some of the other key challenges.

In 2018, Niti Aayog, the policy think-tank of the Indian government launched the 'Aspirational districts program',

with the objective of providing targeted interventions in the identified districts. The key thematic areas are health and nutrition, education, financial inclusion and skill development, agriculture, and basic infrastructure. Given the fact that most of the aspirational districts are in inaccessible areas, and low on prosperity indices, working in these districts is a huge challenge. However, at Bayer, we strongly believe that the path to new India lies through change and transformation in all corners, including the remotest districts.

## Project idea

In rural India, access to healthcare is a challenge with people having to travel long distances. Moreover, the PHCs lack the required infrastructure, healthcare providers have limited formal training and availability of doctors (general practitioners and specialists) is limited.

While the PHCs and Community Health Centres (CHCs) are the first touch points for the rural community, reports by Rural Health Statistics, 2021, indicate a 7% shortfall of doctors at PHCs and a 57% shortfall at CHCs.

**To add to the infrastructural challenges, changing lifestyle and occurrence of disease patterns have become barriers for provision of comprehensive healthcare solutions.**

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death, contributing to 60% of total deaths. Out of this, four major diseases—heart diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic pulmonary diseases contribute nearly 80% of all deaths.

Bayer felt that many of these issues could be addressed through implementation of technology-driven innovative solutions such as teleconsultation. The key objectives of the project are establishing a telemedicine facility, provision of complete healthcare solution via telemedicine services, and training and awareness sessions on health, hygiene, and nutrition. Nearly 28 telemedicine centres have been set up in 14 districts, of which 13 are aspirational. The states include Bihar (Araria and Katihar), Chhattisgarh (Narayanpur and Kondagaon), Jharkhand (Latehar and Dumka), Karnataka (Raichur), Gujarat (Valsad), Uttar Pradesh (Bahraich), Maharashtra (Osmanabad), and Madhya Pradesh (Khandwa and Barwani).

## Implementation

The necessary digital infrastructure such as video facility with internet connectivity has been set up in collaboration with implementing partners. Two models of operation have been employed:

1) Telemedicine centres co-located within the PHCs. The physicians and specialists operate from their respective locations and connect with the patients as recommended by the ANM/GNM (Auxiliary Nursing and Midwifery/General Nursing Midwifery)

2) A hub and spoke model with the central hub at one location and the spokes within the PHCs. The physicians

and specialists are placed at the hub.

A trained GNM registers the patient on a digital platform and checks the vitals. Depending on a patient's medical history and requirements, there is provision to perform basic laboratory screening to check multiple parameters. The ANM facilitates teleconsultation with a general physician who diagnoses based on the test results and prescribes medication. Depending on the case, the ANM facilitates teleconsultation with the respective specialist who reviews the reports and suggests the remedy/follow up. The ANM explains the medication to the patient and ensures follow up too. About 15 medical specialties are being offered. General medicines available in the PHC pharmacy are provided free of cost by the government.

The pattern in teleconsultations is analyzed and the trends define the topic to be addressed at the health camp for every location. ASHA workers help mobilize the communities to attend the monthly health camps.

According to the gender gap report July 2022, India ranks 140th out of 156 nations on gender parity. On the health and survival sub-index, we stand at 146th position. Hence, our focus is also to improve women's health. In general, women pay less attention to health, and in rural India, nutritional needs are

disregarded resulting in multiple health-related issues. We encourage women to take ownership of their health by conducting awareness sessions. We are also proactively screening women for breast cancer to enable early detection and treatment.

## Impact

The Phygital centres have been operational for about 18 months, and we have observed an increase in footfall from 10 to 19/day per centre. The average number of consultations per day increased by 42%. Phygital centres also offer awareness about mental well-being, and the community is encouraged to avail this service.

As value additions, point of care devices have been deployed at all the centres for breast cancer, eye health and pulmonary health screening. Till date, 268 women have been screened for breast cancer, 1,530 people have been screened for diabetic retinopathy and 1,756 screened for refractive errors. Proactive screening for NCDs is ongoing. It has helped in the primary diagnosis of individuals with diabetes (9,246), hypertension (4,013) and both conditions (4,029) so far.

**Establishing telemedicine centres to enable remote monitoring has the potential to strengthen the country's health index.**

These centres have enabled accessibility, affordability, and availability of quality healthcare at the doorstep in rural regions.



# FINDING THE SILVER LINING IN A DARK WORLD

By: Amy Terpeluk,  
Managing Partner, CSR & Social Impact,  
FINN Partners



I have a six-year-old daughter who never ceases to astonish me. Recently, there was a specific moment we shared that has been on my mind for weeks. It was after sunset, and fireflies illuminated the night. Standing by the window together, my daughter and I watched the darkness intermittently punctuated by the flashing lights of these tiny insects. Without taking her eyes off this enchanting scene, she remarked, "Mom, the world is a magical place." Her innocent observation moved me nearly to tears.

In an era marked by global political turmoil, environmental crises threatening our planet's very existence, and constant social discord, my daughter's ability to find wonder and appreciation struck me profoundly. It made me realize that, perhaps because of her innocence, she was absolutely right.

**Despite all the chaos, the world is indeed a magical place, and we often forget that.**

As I engage with clients in the nonprofit, government, and corporate sectors, I carry her words with me, reminding myself to view the world through her lens. To make a meaningful impact, one must believe in the possibility of change.

I understand that in a world filled with daily negativity, it can be challenging to maintain such optimism. We cannot simply shut out the news, especially as communication professionals. So, how do we cope with the constant barrage of negativity and hold onto hope for a better future? To explore this question, I want to share a recent conversation I had with Regina Blye, the Chief Program and Policy Officer at the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. Regina, who hails from Texas, suffered a spinal cord injury at the age of 10 when she was accidentally shot in the neck during a sleepover with friends. This tragic incident left her with quadriplegia, and she has spent the majority of her life dealing with this disability. However, Regina made a conscious decision early on to lead a fulfilling life without allowing her disability to hinder her, a lesson instilled by her parents, particularly her mother.

One might wonder how someone who experienced such an unjust loss at a young age could maintain a positive outlook on society and the world at large. It's undeniable that the world can seem less magical when confronted with such injustice. Yet, Regina has channeled her experience into a deep commitment to improving the lives of others affected by disability. She remains unwavering in her focus on inclusivity and effecting positive change, stating, "When it comes to inclusivity, I believe completely that people with disabilities are human beings. Sometimes that gets overlooked. People do not know unless they have someone in their life with a disability."

So, how can we translate this passion into tangible real-world change? Many of my clients grapple with this dilemma. They recognize the need and desire to address pressing issues affecting their companies, employees, and communities but often lack a clear path forward. Nonprofit leaders can

attest that it's a constant uphill battle. The odds are stacked against them as they strive to advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves. Gaining media attention, government support, or corporate backing can be daunting, and the competition for funding has never been fiercer.

Nevertheless, nonprofit leaders are increasingly inserting their voices into current issues, shining a spotlight on the impact of their work. They understand that one organization receiving recognition for social progress can lead to a ripple effect, bringing more funding and resources to the entire field. Achieving this requires persistence, fearlessness, and an unshakable belief in the magic that exists in the world. It necessitates optimism, even in the face of overwhelming negativity.

In both the nonprofit and corporate realms, there is a growing emphasis on thought leadership, alongside executive visibility communications—two distinct but complementary approaches. While executive visibility focuses on being seen and heard through speaking engagements, media coverage, and social media engagement, thought leadership requires a consistent narrative that aligns economic results and business priorities with a strong commitment to societal value. This is the essence of purpose and social impact, and it's what inspires me daily as I collaborate with exceptional individuals in the fields of ESG, corporate reputation, environment, and DE&I.

**In our roles as communication professionals, we must remain focused on problem-solving and fostering unity in an increasingly divided world.**

We must operate with the firm belief that change is attainable, even when circumstances appear bleak, perhaps especially then. My daughter's insight was spot on—the world is, indeed, a magical place. It's imperative that we become better at recognizing and cherishing that magic when we encounter it and, most importantly, that we fight for it, particularly in times when it feels like we might lose it forever.



# PIONEERING SUSTAINABILITY: INDIAN BUSINESSES IN THE ERA OF ESG COMPLIANCE AND CLIMATE RESPONSIBILITY

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## Introduction

In the evolving landscape of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) compliance, Indian businesses find themselves at a crossroads. Recent developments, both on the domestic and international fronts, highlight the growing importance of ESG in corporate operations.

Recently, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has taken a significant step in shaping the ESG landscape for Indian businesses. As per a circular issued on July 12, 2023, starting from FY 2023 - 2024, the top 1000 listed entities by market capitalization are mandated to make ESG disclosures as per an updated Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report format within their Annual Reports, requiring additional disclosures on the value chain of listed entities. Simultaneously, the European

Union (EU) has taken a bold step in enforcing corporate sustainability. On June 1, 2023, the European Parliament adopted its position on the proposed Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). This directive signifies a monumental shift in how businesses operating in or trading with the EU must conduct due diligence to address environmental and social risks throughout their value chains.

At the same time, the Indian Government is making strides towards introducing a carbon trading market in India as the EU prepares to role out its much talked about Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

**The regulatory signals are clear: embrace sustainability or risk losing your competitive edge.**

As against this background, this article explores steps that Indian businesses should consider taking not only to keep up with the rapidly changing regulatory landscape but to effectively contribute towards sustainability goals.

**Compliance and Transparency:** To begin with companies must take steps to meet their own net-zero targets, by reducing emissions in their own operations and supply chains. Some of the companies in India have already implemented voluntary internal carbon pricing to reduce emissions and encourage innovation in the field of a low-carbon economy. At the same time, Indian companies at large, and not only those covered by mandatory reporting requirements, must embrace new reporting standards outlined in the BRSR. Compliance with ESG disclosure requirements is not merely a regulatory obligation but an opportunity to demonstrate transparency, responsibility, and commitment to sustainable business practices.

**Incentive and Competitive Advantage:** While India's regulatory environment is evolving, global markets are moving swiftly toward ESG-conscious investing. Early adoption of ESG practices can provide Indian businesses with a competitive edge in international markets and access to a growing pool of ESG-conscious investors.

Early adoption and onboarding will also help businesses minimize any effect on revenue, as well as build capacity for incisive decision-making when it comes to international expansion, where environmental regulations are much more developed, efficient and have a larger pool of players.

**Investment in Sustainability:** Meeting ESG goals often necessitates significant investments in sustainable practices. For instance, transitioning from fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources or adopting ethical supply chain practices. According to a 2023 report by Bloomberg NEF, India will need energy investments amounting to an annual average of \$438 billion, to meet its net zero goals by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Another report also finds that domestic sources continue to account for most of the climate finance in India, with the public sector being the most significant contributor.<sup>2</sup> Hence, there is significant scope for greater contributions and private sector participation in climate finance. The private sector's active participation in financing and investment can bolster the Indian Government's sustainability efforts.

**Innovation and Technology:** Innovation in clean technologies is paramount for achieving sustainability goals. The private sector can drive research and development initiatives, particularly in areas like renewable energy, waste reduction, and resource efficiency. Technology innovations such as electric vehicles, green hydrogen etc., have the potential to initiate a paradigm shift in lifestyles and climate policy and hasten the transition or create a pathway to a low-carbon business model. Technology need

not be just a tool to generate revenue and profit, but if leveraged properly, can also help with fulfilling ESG targets. Greater participation of the private sector to incubate, foster and invest in such initiatives or even financing promising projects through their CSR machinery can help spearhead such growth.

## Lead by example

In the burgeoning ESG framework, Indian businesses stand at the forefront of driving sustainable change. SEBI's BRSR and the EU's CSDDD underscore the global shift towards ESG-consciousness. Indian businesses have the opportunity not only to meet these evolving standards but to lead by example.

**Compliance, transparency, and investments in sustainability can be catalysts for positive change, ultimately aligning Indian businesses with the global trend towards responsible and sustainable corporate practices.**

By embracing ESG principles, Indian businesses can pave the way for a more sustainable and prosperous future, both at home and on the international stage.



# INSPIRATIONAL TALES FROM INDIA: PARTNERSHIPS FUELLED BY HOPE DURING PANDEMIC

By: Amrit Ahuja,  
Communication Consultant

As I sat down to contemplate the successful collaborations that have emerged in India, I was overwhelmed by a wave of emotion, thinking back to the two-year-long ordeal of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first image that flashed before my eyes was that of scores of migrants fleeing the cities, clutching their meagre possessions, their elderly parents, and children, as the three-week lockdown was announced. This heartbreaking moment laid bare the profound vulnerabilities faced by India's impoverished population and underscored the absence of effective policies to shield them from falling into the abyss of poverty.

In this context, let me share the inspiring story of Anita (name changed), a resilient 26-year-old woman who resides in Nashik, Maharashtra. Anita operates a modest beauty parlour that was severely impacted by the pandemic, leading to a drastic reduction in her income. Given her rented accommodation and the absence of physical collateral, securing a bank loan was an unattainable dream. Her only alternative was to borrow from private moneylenders, a perilous path that often results in crushing debt and inescapable poverty.

However, Anita was fortunate to have another avenue available: the Returnable Grant (RG) initiative. This innovative programme provided her with access to credit, enabling her to borrow money during the height of the pandemic to support her struggling family and to revive her beauty parlour once lockdown restrictions were lifted. What makes the RG initiative truly remarkable is its flexibility; Anita was not just a recipient but also a giver. She repaid the money, which was then passed on to another individual in a similar predicament, creating a chain of empowerment. Additionally, Anita received invaluable training and product support from esteemed companies like Lakme and Godrej to kickstart her business. This visionary RG initiative was spearheaded by Samhita under their Revive programme, and as time progressed, it garnered support from funding partners and training collaborators, resurrecting countless solopreneurs.

Revive is merely one shining example. The silver lining of the pandemic was the realization that capital, social resources, and government intervention were imperative components of a collaborative effort to alleviate suffering and provide relief in various domains such as livelihoods, healthcare, and education. While no single approach could cater to the diverse needs of all, numerous collaborations emerged, driven by a shared commitment, transparent communication, and a commitment to adjust course if necessary.

## ACT GRANTS

Another ground-breaking model was ACT GRANTS, a non-profit philanthropic platform, born in 2020 out of a collective desire to catalyse social change through collaboration among start-up founders, donors, and NGOs. They united to provide seed capital for incubating and scaling innovations that could address critical social gaps.

ACT swiftly mobilized its partners, including funders and start-ups, to focus on three vital areas: oxygen supply, home care, and vaccination.

In April 2021, at the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, ACT coordinated the procurement of oxygen cylinders and BiPAP machines from Singapore, thanks to the support of Amazon as a delivery partner. Tech experts developed a robust delivery tagging system, while a dedicated logistics team ensured that this life-saving equipment reached the most vulnerable regions across India. This was a shining example of the remarkable achievements that collaborative efforts could yield. Drawing on the insights gained from this experience, ACT has expanded its scope to encompass education, health, environment, and women's empowerment. Their mission is to provide seed capital to companies in these sectors and connect them with a collaborative network for mentorship and support.

## LEARNINGS

**What these two initiatives, along with several others, have taught us is that collaboration is the most potent means of making a meaningful impact.**

Five key learnings when working on a collaboration are:

1. Build a leadership that is invested in its working
2. Make partnerships the cornerstone of the strategy
3. Establish clear monitoring and evaluation systems
4. Form taskforces to work on various aspects
5. Seek government partnership for reaching scale, especially in a diverse country like India

By embracing these principles and sharing the burden, we can forge a brighter and more resilient future for India and the world.



# HEALING THE PLANET, HEALING OURSELVES

By: Aman Gupta,  
Managing Partner, SPAG FINN Partners



In the past, the health industry has treated environmental deterioration and human health concerns as separate policy and scientific topics. The focus has been on remedying problems, rather than preventing them. In reality, the health of the planet and the health of those living on it are interdependent signifying “EcoHealth”. Therefore, the health industry can and should take the initiative to bring about positive change that will improve public and environmental health.

At present, 23% of global mortality is attributed to environmental causes. The effects of climate change are a reality that all of us must confront. For example, the recent flash floods in Himachal Pradesh during this year’s monsoon led to 150 deaths and ₹10,000 crore of damage. This shows how the changing climate and man-made disasters can cause such colossal losses. While the need to address EcoHealth issues is greater than ever, there is also a strong resistance to change.

## Delivering impactful messages

Asia faces a range of environmental and public health crises, including air pollution, water contamination, deforestation, biodiversity loss, climate change impacts, and infectious disease outbreaks. Therefore, tackling crises of environmental and public health in Asia is a multifaceted challenge that requires concerted efforts from governments, communities, and international organizations. Hence, actionable change needs to be incorporated at public and policy levels to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The solution lies in perseverance and conveying the message positively and empathetically. People are more likely to act if they are confident that their actions will have a positive impact. Climate change debates that focus solely on melting ice caps or polar bear impacts are too remote for people to be truly meaningful.

**Therefore, healthcare companies can help educate people on the impact of their environment on the health and well-being of society, as well as lead community-based programmes that reduce local environmental degradation.**

## Coming together for a better future

The government should involve local communities in the decision-making processes related to environmental and public health, raise awareness about the link between environmental degradation and public health, and empower communities to take sustainable actions in their daily lives. Moreover, there needs to be an increase in investment in research and innovation to find sustainable solutions to environmental and public health challenges, promote environmental education in schools and universities, and encourage interdisciplinary research to address complex issues at the intersection of environment and health.

For instance, access to clean water is a basic human right, yet many communities in the Asian subcontinent suffer from water scarcity and contamination. The over-extraction

of groundwater, untreated sewage disposal, and industrial effluents have left millions without access to safe drinking water. In 2019, Chennai faced a severe water crisis. The city invested in rainwater harvesting systems and desalination plants to address this. Learning from Chennai’s experience, other cities across Asia can prioritize sustainable water management practices to ensure a consistent supply of clean water. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of public health infrastructure. Many countries in the Asian subcontinent struggled to cope with the crisis due to limited healthcare resources and inadequate healthcare systems. Apart from India, countries like South Korea and Taiwan demonstrated remarkable pandemic response strategies. Their effective testing, contact tracing, and public health measures served as models for the world.

## Our planet, our health

At the 18th G20 Summit, a final agreement called the G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration was adopted. As per the declaration, the leaders committed to pursuing low-GHG/low-carbon emissions, climate - resilient, and environmentally sustainable development pathways by championing an integrated and inclusive approach. They also agreed to accelerate their actions to address development and climate

challenges, promote Lifestyles for Sustainable Development (LiFE), and conserve biodiversity, forests, and oceans.

As we stand at the intersection of EcoHealth and public health, it is imperative that we take action. It’s tough to make changes, but it’s essential for our health and the planet. As health communicators, we can help spread the word and make a difference.

**In a world swamped with information, the power of persuasion rests on our capacity to put forward issues in ways that connect with people’s values, emotions, and aspirations.**

By prioritizing the health and well-being of communities, we can create a more resilient and sustainable future. It is critical to bridge the gap between the abstract concepts of EcoHealth and the tangible benefits it offers to individuals and society. The right messaging can turn apathy into action, making EcoHealth a personal and collective mission. Together, let’s protect the health of our planet and its inhabitants.



# COMMUNICATION: THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN VISION AND PROGRESS ON ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRIORITIES

By: Bob Martineau,  
Senior Partner, Environmental Policy and Communications, FINN Partners

**One could be forgiven for taking a pessimistic outlook on our world, given the current state of our global household.**  
Bob Martineau, J.D.

There's no ignoring the impact of climate change on our world. We watch the news. We see reports of record-setting temperatures and other extreme weather events leading to the destruction of property and worse. Global politics are increasingly polarized and meaningful positive change is slow to come if it arrives at all.

Surrounded by this kind of negativity, perhaps despair and hopelessness are reasonable reactions. How can we hope to effect positive change and confront the threats to our vision for a better future in this environment? I'm here to tell you that there is reason for optimism. Even though circumstances appear dire, we're starting to see leadership from a rather unlikely hero: corporations. **Many companies are pivoting their positioning on corporate purpose to champion solutions for the most pressing concerns.** They define their mission in terms of profit, purpose, and social impact.

As communications professionals, we're the lynchpin that helps them construct a strategy and build campaigns that can move the needle in meaningful ways, and it's critical that we get it right.

**Here are four ways:**

## 1. Be genuine about corporate culture

Any effective communications strategy around protecting the environment and supporting social justice causes must demonstrate that the commitment is real – that it comes directly from the C-Suite and Board and is ingrained in the corporate culture. The effort is doomed from the start if senior leadership isn't fully bought in.

We're seeing that corporations are increasingly defining their brand around sustainability and promoting their commitment to the environment, corporate social responsibility, and making a positive difference in the world. They tout ESG metrics as evidence and for many organizations, it's genuine and indicative of a culture shift from top to bottom. Others, however, are just trying to check a box because they feel pressure from the market or shareholders. That's when companies get into trouble.

Stakeholders, both internal and external, tend to see through the rhetoric and recognize it has no substance—this is devastating for the health of an organization. If employees and customers don't believe that senior leaders are invested and genuine in sustainability principles, they won't embrace any initiatives that get rolled out.

The modern workforce increasingly sees these efforts as critical factors when choosing who to work for. A study published in the Harvard Business Review found that 9 out of 10 American professionals surveyed across 26 industries would accept lower lifetime earnings in exchange for greater meaning at work. Gone are the days when salary was the only differentiator between prospective employers.

In fact, New York University's Stern Center for Sustainable Business finds that good sustainability programs yield millions in benefits, both in financial and less concrete terms. Their Return on Sustainability Investment (ROSI) metric identifies nine drivers of financial performance that can improve with good sustainability strategies:

**Innovation | Operational Efficiency | Sales and Marketing | Customer Loyalty | Risk Management | Employee Relations | Supplier Relations | Media Relations | Stakeholder Engagement**

Notice anything about that list? It includes every aspect of business operations. Clearly, focusing on sustainability is no longer a "nice to have"; it's a sound business strategy and a story worth telling.

## 2. Transparency and candor

I learned early on that the first rule of good media and public relations is "never, ever lie". Communications professionals must ensure that ESG reporting is transparent and candid and as the volume of companies doing this kind of reporting increases it only becomes more important.

There isn't a standard set of metrics for ESG, so it can get confusing when companies report on progress differently. Regardless of the metrics, they must be clearly articulated and independently verifiable. Investors, consumers, competitors, and even the company's employees will look at the report. Even more scrutiny gets levelled on publicly traded companies. Inaccurate or incomplete reporting can have serious consequences, both in the court of public opinion and at the hands of enforcement agencies like the SEC, particularly as they move to finalize formal disclosure rules.

I've heard arguments from some who don't want to report ESG performance unless mandated for this very reason. While I understand that inclination, even a caveated and qualified report is better than nothing. Every company starts somewhere, and if you're only looking at a few metrics in your first report, that's perfectly acceptable. However, the same rules apply – be authentic. It can't just be a marketing gimmick.

Another concern I hear is around negative legacy issues in an organization's history. Maybe that's a less-than-stellar record on environmental issues or problematic past hiring and promotion practices. The best policy is to acknowledge past sins and focus on the future.

As communicators, we can help organizations find the middle ground between risk-averse executives or lawyers (speaking as an attorney who has served in both State and Federal government positions) who might be hesitant to say anything at all and marketers whose enthusiasm to convert sales might lead them to overstate the company's action. We can help develop messaging to show how corporations have turned the corner and embraced a business philosophy and culture centered on doing good.

## 3. Finding the right message and messenger

It's not enough to have a compelling narrative. The person delivering the message needs to be equally attention-grabbing. Recent efforts to change behaviour in response to the global pandemic and climate change are instructive on this point.

### First, on climate change:

A study out of Great Britain looked at public engagement on climate change post-Brexit, focusing on those who identified themselves as being right-of-center politically. Participants appreciated an upbeat, positive tone around a clean energy future, but they didn't respond well to absolutes such as "we can have a 100% clean energy future". Messaging that indicated the need for a dramatic behaviour change was more challenging for them to embrace.

The core values of the focus group included a sense of fairness, protecting their families, helping others, and living a good life. Messaging consistent with those values was more likely to be well-received.

This is true of most people across the political and ideological spectrum. They're not as likely to embrace action to address climate change if they're told they must give up their ICE cars entirely. They're more likely to respond when given options such as driving a more fuel-efficient or electric vehicle. They'll take action to prevent illness in their children stemming from carbon emissions but don't mobilize based on academic discussions and data around rising temperatures and the polar ice caps.

### Second, on the pandemic:

During the early stages of the pandemic, we heard from politicians, media personalities, and scientists. Most of them white men. They were disseminating highly scientific and granular data combined with doom and gloom warnings on the dangers of the virus and the need for social isolation and vaccination. American vaccination rates stayed well below 50% and COVID rates continued to rise.

We changed our messengers and got different results, recognizing that not all audiences respond to the same message in the same way. We began to tailor messaging to the audience and deliver it through messengers they connected with. Professional athletes, country music stars, clergy, and social media influencers did their part to communicate with people. The result was progress. The lesson is that we can win over even the most skeptical listener with positivity and respect instead of domineering and demeaning.

## 4. Actions speak louder than words

To borrow a phrase from Nike, "Just Do It." Talk is cheap. To see real positive change requires action, one company at a time, one community at a time. Action is contagious. When one organization starts making an impact, others tend to follow. Those who act get the best talent to join, develop innovative products, attract the most desirable investors, and achieve the best financial results. Just getting started towards making a difference can inspire others to follow and when they do, we can change the world: save the planet, champion diversity, and achieve social justice.

As Margaret Mead put it, *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*



# CORPORATE REPUTATION, TRUST AND SOCIAL GOOD: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR ANY BUSINESS

By: Shipra Singh,  
Head-Communications, GE HealthCare South Asia

It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently. - Warren Buffett, American Business Magnate

The words from the 'Oracle of Omaha' have echoed over the decades for every brand with a story to tell and an audience to build trust with. Contrary to popular belief, the universal panacea to building a business isn't in the investments, the ROIs and profit-sharing margins alone. It's in two words—Corporate Reputation. Especially now, as we wade through an era of continuous disruption. The success measures lie in how we are equipped to understand, manage and react in aligning the business success to this fundamental picture of trust, both within and outside the business.

## The Value of Trust

Trust  
Noun

*assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.*

The world is witnessing a universal decline in trust. It's impacting people's attitudes toward business. If trust genuinely relies on a business's ability, character and strength, how many brands do we truly trust? The answer is ambiguous for most corporates. The real question is, where

do those components of trust in corporate biggies rest? The answer is 'looking beyond reputation management to embrace reputation marketing'.

For decades, we believed that customer reviews must paint a rosy picture. Customer reviews are one thing, but ensuring that you provide timely and even real-time coverage of your business is quite another. Instead of shoving the antagonists, the challenges and bad reviews under the

carpet, address them. It's a sign of authenticity. Corporations must leverage the power of social media to create a consistent and transparent story about the brand with paid advertising and organic marketing, reflecting your customer's needs and core values.

## The Storytelling Animal

Storytelling is rage. There is no rocket science why. Let's pause here and ask ourselves— Why is a customer putty in the hands of a storyteller?

Jonathan Gottschall, author of The Storytelling Animal, says, "Science backs up the long-held belief that a story is the most powerful means of communicating a message."

Psychologists worldwide have often underlined that the story of a fictional world can alter how information is

processed. When your audience is absorbed in a story, the story can change them. Stories must be created with the triumph of persuasion. Simple questions make or break a story- Is it human in nature? Is fiction more real than real for your brand?

We have come a long way from the banal beginning-to-end tale. Real stories now swing between the 'struggle between expectation and reality'. It's not about building a rosy—and dull—picture of the world. In fact, as a storyteller, you want to position the problems in the foreground and then show how the audience can overcome them. Interestingly, brands are also taking to the dark side of stories to engender a positive, however, a more real outlook in their audiences.

Corporate reputations rest on the kind of storytelling approach you take— 'Values-in-Action' stories which underline the values you want your audience to perceive, 'I-Know-What-You-Are-

Thinking' stories that allow you to address the challenges the customers or your people are facing, 'Vision Stories' that instill hope, and 'Why-I-Am-Here' Stories that build the trust, removing the doubts that people might have.

## Corporate Social Responsibility- Not Just a Policy on Paper

Carbon neutrality. Sustainability. Renewability. Clean energy.

**CSR is a brand's connection with the people. It instils a sense of belonging to a cause that scales beyond business. A sustainable business and a greener planet are realities that are mutually co- dependent.**

It resonated with people when Apple announced how they are cementing its commitment to making all its products carbon-neutral by 2030, including the entire supply chain. In fact, since 2015, the world's most revered brand has reduced its emissions by more than 45 per cent.

CSR strategies are a promise that a company is compassionate. It catapults the corporate reputation to new heights, attracting more talent and fostering a more productive employee culture, improving customers' perception of your brand.

## Reputation is Culture. Culture is Reputation.

The most integral tenet of a culture is how employees communicate with each other. How decisions are made, how people are promoted or let go, how employees are recognized and how a corporation celebrates its employees' work and each other are factors that build how employees communicate.

It's no longer about what makes you a 'Good Place to Work'. It's more about 'Are you a Great Place to Work?'

Conducting culture surveys that align with the overarching culture principles of your organization goes a long way in employee retention, innovation, and financial returns. Most businesses need a basic grasp of the subject.

Initiatives like encouraging conversations with your employees about what makes your workplace distinct, imbibing simple team values to encapsulate your 'culture' principles and cementing behaviours, such as transparency, go a long way. Most importantly, be a living example of your work culture.

**Corporate reputation thrives on consumers' conscious or unconscious choice between brands. And this reputation is incomplete without trust, values, a culture rooted in empathy, and integrity**





# AMPLIFYING PURPOSE AND DRIVING SOCIAL IMPACT: THE ROLE OF PR IN INDIA

By: Geetika Bangia,  
Head - Corporate Communications, Stryker India

In the diverse and dynamic landscape of India, the influence of Public Relations (PR) on purpose-driven initiatives and social impact is gaining increasing prominence and has evolved significantly over recent years. PR professionals have transcended their traditional role of merely managing corporate images; they have become instrumental in championing causes that not only align with a company's values but also contribute positively to society at large. Thus, it is imperative to delve deeply into the multifaceted ways in which PR in India plays a crucial and transformative role in shaping purpose-driven narratives, building trust, fostering collaborations, and, ultimately, driving change for a better, more sustainable future.

## Shaping Purpose-Driven Narratives

In India, a country rich in cultural heritage and societal complexities, PR plays a pivotal role in shaping purpose-driven narratives for businesses. It's about more than just marketing; it's about crafting a compelling story that resonates with the diverse population. Indian companies are increasingly realizing the importance of aligning with causes that matter to their stakeholders, such as environmental sustainability, education, and poverty alleviation. For instance, Tata Group, one of India's oldest and most revered conglomerates, has been instrumental in several social initiatives. PR efforts highlight the group's commitment to community development, education, and healthcare. Through well-crafted narratives, Tata positions itself as a socially conscious entity, winning the trust and loyalty of its stakeholders.

## Building Trust and Credibility

Furthermore, establishing and nurturing trust is paramount for businesses aspiring to make a meaningful social impact. In this context, PR professionals assume a pivotal role as they meticulously ensure that companies engage in transparent and authentic communication, resonating deeply with Indian consumers who are progressively attuned to the ethical and social dimensions of their purchases. A notable example is Amul, a cooperative dairy company, which has meticulously cultivated a reputation for trustworthiness and unparalleled quality. Their PR endeavours are strategically focused on showcasing their farmer-centric approach and unwavering dedication to rural development. Through a steadfast commitment to delivering on its promises and adeptly communicating its core values, Amul has not only cemented its status as a household name but also as a paragon of reliability and social responsibility, endearing itself to consumers nationwide.

## Fostering Collaborations with NGOs and Government

Collaborations between businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government entities are powerful vehicles for driving social impact in India. PR professionals act as catalysts, facilitating these partnerships and ensuring they are communicated effectively to the public. A shining example is the Clean India Mission, initiated by the Indian

government. Through strategic PR campaigns, both public and private entities have rallied behind this cause, resulting in significant progress towards improved sanitation and hygiene across the country. PR efforts have been instrumental in mobilizing resources and garnering public support for this critical initiative.

## Empowering Local Communities

India's socio-economic fabric is woven with diverse local communities, each with unique challenges and

on empowering these communities through initiatives that create sustainable livelihoods, promote education, and improve healthcare. For instance, Hindustan Unilever Limited's (HUL) Project Shakti empowers rural women by turning them into micro-entrepreneurs. Through strategic PR, HUL showcases the transformative impact of this initiative, not only in terms of economic empowerment but also in strengthening the social fabric of these communities.

In conclusion, it is evident that PR has not only emerged but has firmly established itself as a potent and indispensable force for advancing purpose and driving social impact in India. Through the meticulous crafting of purpose-driven narratives, the assiduous building of trust, the facilitation of meaningful collaborations, and the empowerment of local communities, PR professionals wield a significant influence in shaping a future that is not only more sustainable but also socially responsible.

As businesses across India increasingly acknowledge and embrace the intrinsic value of purpose-driven initiatives, the pivotal role of PR is poised to evolve further and expand. This evolution promises to bring about positive change that will not only benefit individual enterprises but also contribute significantly to the overall betterment of society at large. The transformative power of PR in India is set to leave an enduring legacy of meaningful social impact, underscoring its vital importance in the country's ongoing journey towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.





# CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY'S QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

**By: Bess Winston,  
Head - Senior Partner, ESG Strategy and Communications,  
FINN Partners**

"Do not allow the pursuit of perfection to hinder progress," is a widely accepted motto in management circles and among efficiency experts. However, in my perspective, it has increasingly become an excuse to give up, address problems only halfway, or offer superficial solutions under the guise of doing one's best. Personally, I find this clichéd phrase concerning, as it seems to be used more frequently to justify delivering subpar results across various domains.

This trend is particularly concerning in the business world, especially for companies and organizations striving to meet ambitious sustainability goals.

**When tackling issues like climate action, diversity and inclusion, poverty alleviation, responsible resource consumption, and other pressing global challenges, should we settle for anything less than perfection?**

Has the overuse of this uninspiring phrase allowed corporate boards to absolve themselves of responsibility for consistently falling short in the long run?

An analysis conducted in September 2021 on the climate commitments of Fortune Global 500 companies revealed some positive trends, such as a three-fold increase in net zero targets, a 50% rise in companies aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030, and a 25% increase in Science-Based Targets. These are undoubtedly positive developments. However, the data also showed that "more than 60% of companies in the Fortune Global 500 are not committed to delivering significant climate milestones by 2030," which is far from impressive.

What are the consequences when a company takes a mediocre approach to environmental, social, and governance initiatives like corporate climate action? One obvious consequence is the exposure to physical and financial risks due to failure in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. More importantly, without strong commitments to climate action, companies miss out on opportunities for innovation, which is an essential component of transitioning

to a less carbon-intensive economy. This oversight can affect growth, profitability, and even market positioning.

Another critical area where falling short of perfection can have significant consequences is in the oversight of sustainability commitments by corporate boards of directors. This is where action plans are developed, and accountability measures are established. While more boards are taking on this responsibility, there is a glaring lack of expertise and nuanced backgrounds in sustainability among board members.

A report from the NYU Stern Center for Sustainable Business found that in 2019, only 29% of the 1,188 Fortune 100 board directors had relevant ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) credentials, with a focus primarily on the social element of ESG. Just 21% had relevant social experience, while only 6% had governance and environmental experience. Additionally, PwC's 2021 Annual Corporate Directors Survey revealed that only 52% of directors regularly include ESG issues on board meeting agendas, and only 25% feel their boards have a strong understanding of ESG risks. These numbers suggest, at best, a "barely adequate" level of commitment when we should be striving for excellence.

Achieving perfection undoubtedly requires time and effort. **Innovation is not a quick or economical process, and changing behaviour is a complex endeavour.** However, no forward-thinking company should settle for mediocrity. Striving for perfection is a continuous journey that necessitates adjusting commitments and goals to match the scale of the problem, even in the case of challenges as monumental as climate change. The path to perfection begins with a shift in mindset and aspirations. Instead of accepting anything less than perfection, I propose that companies adopt a new mantra: "Why settle for good when we can achieve greatness?"





India and Asia are well-positioned to play a significant role in environmental sustainability and innovation in the coming years. Among the world's most populous regions, efforts of regional government, industry, and non-governmental organizations significantly influence global environmental trends.

FINN Partners is proud to have a substantial presence in this region, offering our expertise in corporate social responsibility, diversity, equity and inclusion, environmental issues, innovation, and sustainability. We unite this experience under the umbrella of Purpose and Social Impact. As we share in this digital e-book the thoughts of leaders who are driving change for a more sustainable future, embodying a commitment to environmental responsibility, societal progress, and building trust within communities to spark your ideas and inspire action.

India and many Asian countries have substantially committed to renewable energy sources like solar and wind power. Regional investment in clean energy infrastructure will accelerate in the coming years, reducing carbon emissions and fostering innovation in energy technology. The talent resident in the region and the imperative to shift from approaches that negatively impact people and the planet set the pace for Asia to be a global leader in sustainable agriculture, new paths to urban development, biodiversity conservation, and climate technology. FINN is a global communications and public policy resource to help advance these ideas and welcomed innovations.

As you read the words of these industry thought leaders, we welcome your thoughts and questions. Together, we can address the challenges, and when people lean into collaboration and commitment to make a difference, we find welcomed change.

**Be healthy,  
Gil Bashe**



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