

The Blue Book

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it is created by the small and consistent actions taken
each day.



Written By Aarav Doshi



About the Project

The Blue Project is a youth-led social initiative working to improve water access and support environmental education for low-income communities in informal settlements across Mumbai.

The project combines science-based and community-driven solutions to help address the urgent need for clean drinking water. The Blue Project offers several solutions to this water crisis, including the distribution of household water purifiers and the development of technology that will help remove chemical contaminants and microplastics from local water sources. These solutions are designed to help ensure the health and dignity of all people living in Mumbai.

To help high school students learn more about the environment, the Blue Project has created a comprehensive guide on the topic of sustainability. The guide addresses environmental issues related to excessive energy consumption, waste disposal, climate change, and water quality. The Blue Project believes that when young people are educated and have knowledge about sustainability, they can successfully make positive contributions to the environment. This humble project provides students with the information and resources needed to understand their roles as advocates for creating a more sustainable future.

Message from the Author

Dear readers,

My goal in creating The Blue Project was to promote the notion that every human being, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographical location, should have access to clean and safe drinking water. In Mumbai's informal settlements, thousands of families struggle daily to obtain water that is both suitable for consumption and consistently available. When writing this guide, I had two main objectives: to develop resources that would be accessible to young people and to illustrate how sustainability is not just a global issue, but something that can be incorporated into every aspect of our daily lives.

I hope that these chapters will increase awareness of choices regarding the value of water and care for the environment. Sustainability does not have to be far away or abstract; it is created by the small and consistent actions taken each day. If this guide gives you even one moment of curiosity, allows you to create one new positive habit, or changes the way you view your role in the environment, then it has achieved its goal.

Happy reading!

Aarav Doshi

Founder, The Blue Project

CHAPTER 1

COMPREHENDING SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability today is a vital thread weaving the different facets of our ecosystem together. With climate change, resource depletion, and pollution consuming our planet in its entirety, scientists and various organisations across the globe are inspired to sit down and assess the human impact on Earth. Now more than ever, it is crucial to grasp what sustainability really is, down to its essence, and what it means for our planet and its ecosystem. As with anything, to do so, we must traverse through its bare bones – shedding light and understanding all the terms behind it, until we proceed to uncover the effects of sustainability in our world today.

Ecological Footprint

The ecological footprint refers to the indicator that measures how much nature we use compared to how much the Earth can regenerate. It covers the land and water needed to produce food, materials, and energy, as well as the planet's ability to absorb the waste we generate. The crux of it boils down to everything humanity requires – from croplands and grazing areas to forests and oceans – and positions it in comparison with the planet's biological capacity.

Components of the Ecological Footprint

- **Carbon footprint:** Makes up roughly 60% of the ecological footprint. It reflects the land required to absorb CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels.
- **Land for food and materials:** Includes agricultural fields and forests needed to produce crops, livestock, wood, and other goods.
- **Water use:** Covers the freshwater required for drinking, irrigation, and industrial processes.
- **Waste absorption and biodiversity:** Represents ecosystems' capacity to break down waste and support stable, diverse habitats.

Mathis Wackernagel, a crucial brain behind this concept, puts forward that merely zeroing in on carbon emissions does not account for the broader ecological scope of pressures societies tend to create. Climate change is just another symptom of an environmental crisis at a much larger scale; and it is the ecological footprint that opens our eyes to what all human activities draw strength from the Earth's capacity and, increasingly and inevitably, exceed it.

Carbon Footprint

When we look at a carbon footprint, we're specifically talking about what measures the greenhouse gases released by an activity, product, or lifestyle. It is expressed in tons of CO₂ or CO₂-equivalents and helps us quantify how much a given action can contribute to global warming.

Main contributors to carbon footprints:

- Transportation: Emissions from cars, planes, trucks, and ships that burn fossil fuels.
- Energy production: Electricity and heat generated from coal, oil, and natural gas.
- Industry and agriculture: Manufacturing materials such as steel or cement requires large amounts of energy, while agriculture produces greenhouse gases like methane and nitrous oxide.

When we look at carbon footprint, together with ecological footprint, we find ourselves confronted with a more comprehensive analysis, covering a much more complete assessment of the larger spectrum of planetary health.

Renewable and Non-Renewable Resources

Now, let us zero in on renewable and non-renewable resources, another set of concepts that pave the way for our understanding of human pressure on the environment through their distinction.

Renewable resources?

These are resources that tend to get replenished naturally within short timeframes. Examples may include:

- solar and wind energy
- water used for hydropower, drinking, and irrigation
- biomass and plant materials
- geothermal heat

If these resources are managed responsibly, they have the power and potential to support long-term human needs without being depleted.

Non-renewable resources

These are resources that take shape and form over millions of years and cannot be replaced easily, once they are consumed. Examples may include:

- coal, oil, and natural gas
- minerals such as copper, iron, and gold
- nuclear fuels such as uranium

It is the immense reliance on non-renewable resources that evokes consequences like pollution, environmental degradation, and resource depletion. For this reason, countries are now shifting toward renewable energy systems and more efficient technologies.

Sustainability - What can understanding it do for us?

At its core, sustainability is nothing but the practice of meeting today's needs while ensuring that tomorrow's needs, that is, the version of our planet that the future generations will inherit, is capable of supporting life. It identifies that natural resources are limited.

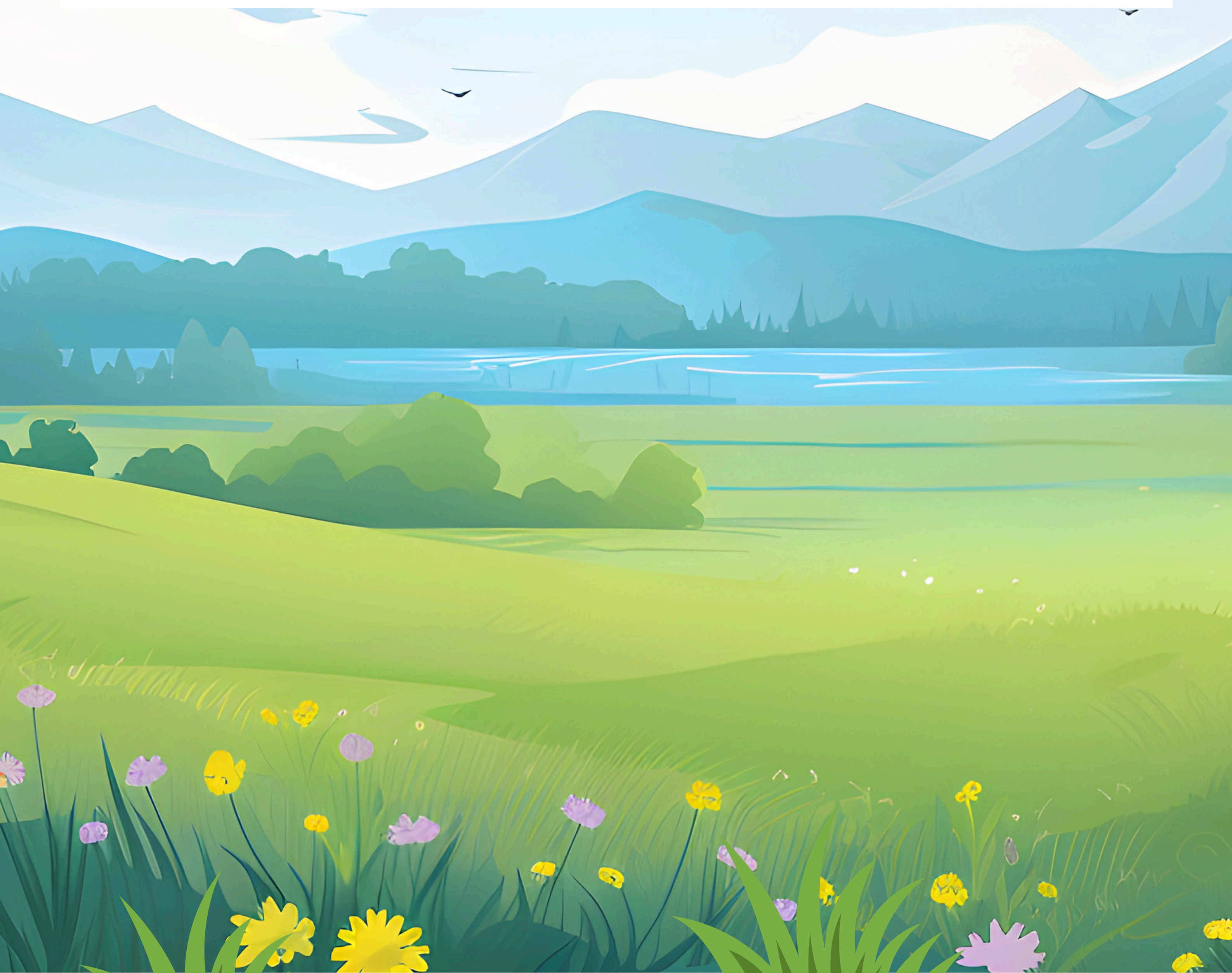
The pillars of Sustainability:

- Environmental: Protecting ecosystems, reducing pollution, and conserving resources.
- Economic: Encouraging responsible growth, innovation, and long-term efficiency.
- Social: Promoting health, equity, and safe living conditions for all communities.

Making sustainability a goal means improving water, air, and soil quality; preserving natural habitats; reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and cultivating more resilient economies. Social equity also ties into sustainability, particularly when you gaze over marginalized communities, who are frequently the sections of society that are most affected by pollution, climate risks, and resource depletion.

Criteria	Non-renewable energy resources	Renewable energy resources
Repetitively used energy sources	One-time use	Can use again and again
Perpetual sources	Vanish one day	Available for perpetual use
Eco-friendly sources	Emits gasses and pollute the environment	Do not emit gases and does not pollute the environment
Availability	Limited quantity	Unlimited quantity.
Production cost	High	Low
Maintenance cost	Low	High
Production quantity	Large	Less

By reducing emissions, shifting toward renewable resources, and adopting sustainable practices across communities, businesses, and governments, society can protect natural systems while ensuring that generations to come inherit a planet that is healthy and safe.



CHAPTER 2

HOW ENERGY IMPACTS THE PLANET

You use energy each time you turn on lights, charge devices, or travel on public transportation. Today's society relies heavily on energy to function, but the methods of producing energy have a direct impact on our environment. Learning how this relationship works will help us develop a sustainable future for planet Earth.

Fossil Fuels and Renewable Energies

Most countries around the world depend on the same two sources of energy: fossil fuels and renewable energy. The two sources vary significantly regarding their environmental effects and longevity.

Fossil Fuels: The Buried Energy

Energy sources such as coal, oil, and natural gas are fossil fuels that formed from the remains of dead plants and animals (particularly those from the ocean) over millions of years. By burning fossil fuels for various purposes (such as generating electricity or providing power for automobiles), we are putting carbon back into the atmosphere that was locked away in these fuels for millions of years. While it is a very reliable source of energy, it contributes to the pollution of our environment.

Other pollutants also released when fossil fuels are burned include methane, nitrous oxide, and other gases.

Renewable Energies: Harnessing Nature

Nature provides us with renewable energy. Renewable energy is derived from natural resources and will never run out. Unlike fossil fuels, renewable energy creates much lower levels of pollution when generating energy. The most common forms of renewable energy are solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal energy.

There is a tremendous difference in carbon released from using these renewable energy sources compared to using fossil fuels. For example, the amount of CO₂ produced by a coal power plant over one hour to power a single light bulb is so many times the amount produced by the solar farm to provide the same amount of energy. The difference between these two sources of energy illustrates the need for society to migrate to using renewable energy sources for the future sustainability of our planet.

The Energy-Climate Connection: The Greenhouse Effect

The greenhouse gases act as an invisible blanket that covers the entire Earth, trapping some of the sun's heat and maintaining the planet's temperature at a suitable level for life. This is known as the greenhouse effect.

The enhanced greenhouse effect results when we burn fossil fuels, resulting in the release of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere, which results in an increase of the thickness of this natural blanket of gases. This increase in thickness results in an increase in the trapping of heat from the sun, which leads to an increase in the average temperature of the Earth. This increase in temperature is referred to as global warming and has caused long-term changes to weather patterns or climates, resulting in increased occurrences of extreme weather, including very large quantities of rain and excessive heat.

Tracking and Reducing Your Energy Footprint

All students consume energy and have an energy footprint. The less we consume, the less fossil fuels are used to generate electricity required by energy-generating sources.

1 - Monitor Your Energy Consumption

Determine how you typically use energy:

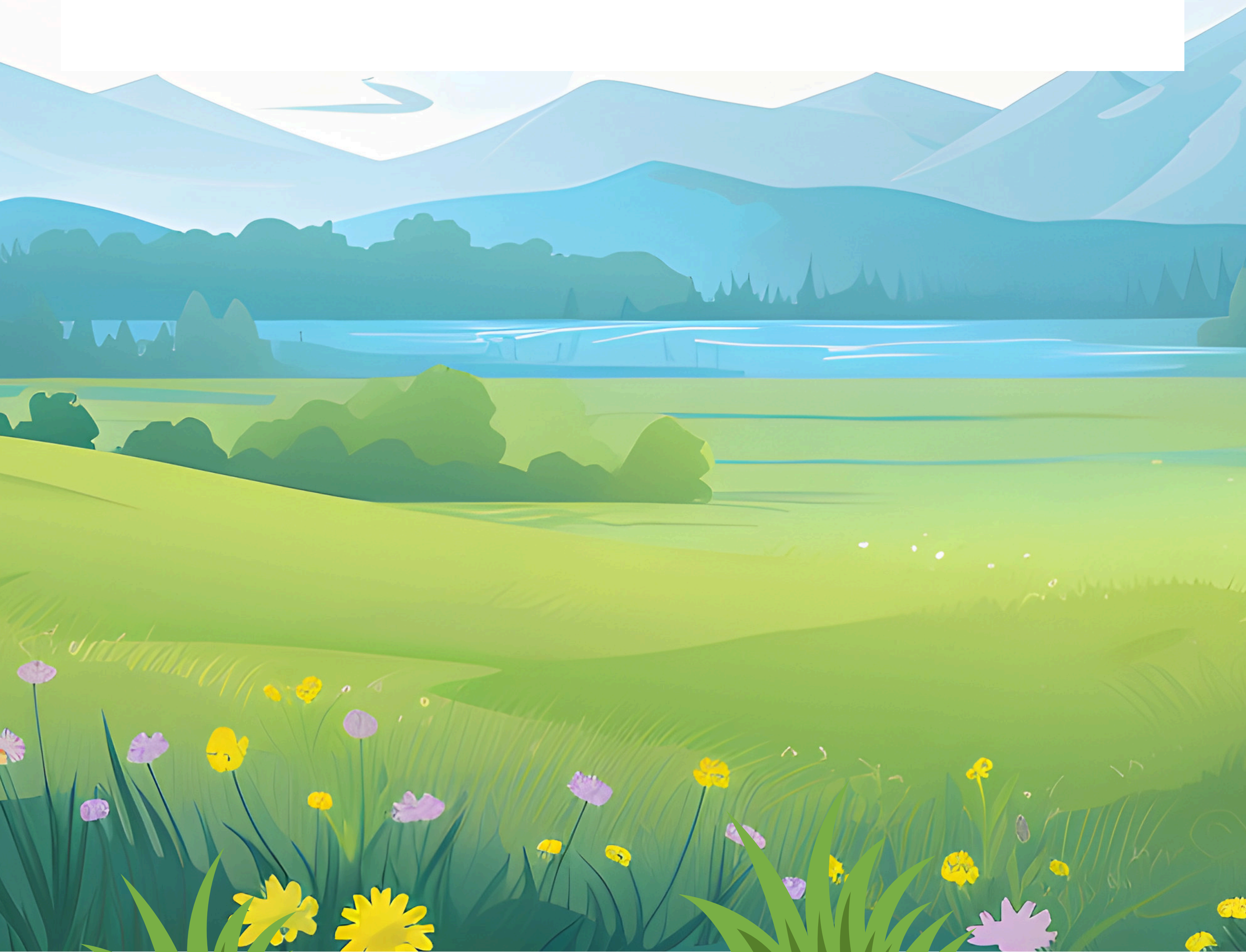
- Electricity - used to operate your devices, lighting, and appliances
- Heating and Cooling - typically make up the largest percentage of energy consumption in a home
- Transportation - fuel used by cars, buses, etc. to travel to school

2 - Practical Ways of Conserving Energy.

You can take immediate action here by taking one or more of the following steps:

- Phone chargers/game consoles use electricity when plugged in, even when switched off. Unplug when not in use, or plug into a power strip that can be turned off when not in use, to eliminate that phantom load.
- Ask an adult to replace traditional incandescent bulbs with LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs, which use approximately 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs.
- When you feel cold at home, consider wearing warmer clothing to save on heating costs rather than turning up your thermostat.
- Whenever you can, walk or bike to school rather than drive. You will save gasoline and lower CO₂ emissions.

We can create and implement better decision-making processes around how we're getting energy and how much energy we are using, which positively impacts the environment; therefore, we can help contribute to cleaner, cooler, and more livable environments for us all.



CHAPTER 3 - WASTE AND CONSUMPTION: THE INVISIBLE COST OF OUR DAILY CHOICES

More and more, sustainability and ethical consumption are becoming essential elements of our lives. An often overlooked part of this is an understanding of the journey products take before they arrive at our doorstep.

What is Life Cycle Thinking?

Beyond just understanding the manufacturing or distribution process, Life Cycle Thinking takes a broader perspective. By understanding the entire journey or “Life Cycle” of a product, both customers and businesses can make informed decisions that can be a net benefit to us all.

Why it Matters

A good way to understand the importance of Life Cycle Thinking is to think about recycling. While an incredibly noble concept, recycling has become a scapegoat in the world of sustainability. Individual consumers and businesses can use recycling as an excuse to manufacture and implement more fresh products. A Life Cycle Thinking approach makes us see that recycling also requires resources, particularly non-renewable fuels. With Life Cycle Thinking, we can start shifting our focus to elements like reusable components that customers can keep using, and long-term goals to refuse new materials outright.

Two areas where this type of thinking is most essential are plastics and e-waste, as they are outright harmful to the environment and our delicate ecosystem.

Plastic Pollution

According to a UNEP report, 9.2 billion tonnes of plastic have been produced since 1950, out of which 6.9 billion tonnes alone are simply waste. Previous concerns were focused on how to manage this waste, without considering the impact it had on the environment. But as newer research comes in, we know that plastic isn't as inert as previously thought. It harms the ocean ecosystem— every year, roughly 19-23 million tonnes of plastic end up in our water. We also know now that microplastics exist, and have invaded us all. And while we can't change the past, what we do with this information will define the future of our planet.

E-waste

Another rising threat to our planet is E-waste. Since 2010, E-waste has increased by 82%, with a predicted rise of 32% more by 2030 alone. And while the mention of the term “E-waste” provokes the image of a laptop in a trashcan, the biggest source of E-waste pollution comes from what is in it.

Rare Earth Elements are an important factor in making our devices function. Everything from lithium in our batteries to Neodymium in speakers and wind turbines. The term ‘Rare’, though, is misunderstood. It isn't its availability that makes Rare Earth Elements rare, but instead how hard they are to extract. “It's challenging to mine and process rare earths without harming the environment,” says an article by Earth.org. And while their ubiquity cannot be overlooked, if we continue to mine them as recklessly as we do now, we are on a path towards devastation.

Circular Economy

So what can be done? With an understanding of Life Cycle Thinking and the urgent need to curtail our headless production, a Circular Economy is a good antidote to the amount of waste being produced.

A Circular Economy is when products are a part of a closed-loop system. This implies that instead of constantly creating new products, businesses and customers will focus on reusing and recycling older products and materials. Laptops and phones can be used longer, instead of being upgraded annually. And when they are, the old devices should be given to entities that will recycle the elements in them responsibly and efficiently.

Existing plastic packaging should also be used for as long as it is safe and then recycled, but with a long-term goal of shifting away from its use entirely. As a result, they “circle” around in use, reducing the need for the manufacturing of new products using fresh materials.

What Can We Do?

It can feel overwhelming to see the statistics around pollution and environmental degradation, and ask ourselves how we can ever make a dent. But every drop indeed makes an ocean. And by implementing some simple steps that can be followed by us all, we can leave a beautiful world for those who come after us. A good principle to follow here is the 5Rs. They are:

- Refuse
- Reduce
- Reuse
- Repurpose
- Recycle

By refusing new materials or the use of plastics long-term, and reducing our use for now; by reusing whatever products and packages we can, by repurposing them; and by recycling everything we absolutely must use, we can make the world a better place. Leave it better than we found it.



CHAPTER 4 - WATER SYSTEMS: AN EXPLORATION OF HOW OUR TAPS AFFECT OUR PLANET

Every time you turn on a tap, water flows out, and we live with the impression that it is an unlimited resource. But it is far from the truth; the sources of our tap water beneath our ground and in the rivers are running out faster than nature can replenish them. In this chapter, we will pipeline to the source, and peek into how the water use impacts our present and future.

The Hidden Crisis: Groundwater Depletion

We assume that since we are surrounded by water, there's plenty to drink. But the treasure of drinking water is scarce. Currently, groundwater accounts for less than 1 per cent of all water on earth, and yet it manages to supply drinking water to billions of people and feeds agriculture across continents. Now, think of it like a bank account: if you withdraw money faster than you deposit it, eventually you'll run out.

Rainfall is the primary restoring agent of the groundwater, and if we pump water faster than it can be replenished, we move the water further down in the water level. This creates a serious problem as this forces us to dig deeper, exhausting more energy and money to reach the water.

Underground water affects every other source connected to it; rivers, lakes, and streams depend on groundwater to sustain themselves. In case of severe scarcity, the land itself can also collapse and sink, due to a process called land subsidence, when the soil below loses its water support and compacts down.

How Water Shortages Reshape Our World

Water shortages are no longer distant problems of the future. The signs of decline have started to show, with a number of cities announcing Day Zero, with adequate water supplies running out, resulting in the rationing of water in many areas. The shortage now is driven by a combination of climate change, poor management, and population growth, and it is imperative to understand how it affects our lives broadly and in day-to-day living.

Rainfall no longer follows the same age-old pattern; it has become erratic due to climate change. Warmer temperatures are causing the soil moisture to evaporate faster, making droughts more intense and longer-lasting. The world is currently experiencing its driest conditions in 1200 years. Major rivers globally rely on glacial meltwater, which has been declining since the 1990s. These incidents might appear isolated due to vast distances in their geography; nevertheless, the effects of water shortage are affecting a global population.

With a gradual decrease, water has become a commodity and has staggering consequences. If water runs short, food production will directly suffer. Approximately 70 percent of the freshwater goes to agricultural use, and a simple shortage can result in droughts that can devastate months of crops and livestock. Pollution is another culprit contributing to the problem. Over 80 percent of the world's wastewater flows back into the environment untreated, making it even less available for drinking and farming.

It can also spark a global conflict. Countries compete fiercely over water rights. India and Pakistan have clashed for decades over upstream dams and water distribution. In Egypt, the construction of Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam threatens to cut Egypt's water supply by more than one-third. It is not far-fetched to consider that water may initiate violence in an attempt to protect one's survival.

Taking Control of Our Water Footprint

Despite causes being beyond our control, we have the power over some domains. One of the measures is conscious use of water, taking control over how much water we use. This simple step can effectively and gradually reset the transaction and bring the abundance back to groundwater levels.

Water use often hides in our day-to-day life in brushing teeth, showering, and washing dishes. By paying attention to them, you can immediately make a difference. Some simple steps include:

In daily chores, you can:

- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth.
- Take five-minute showers instead of ten-minute ones.
- Fill a basin with soapy water for dishes instead of letting the tap run.
- Run full loads of the washing machine when washing clothes.

In making your food choices, you can:

- Eat less meat, as it requires more water than plants
- Choose locally grown, seasonal produce, being mindful of the water needed for transportation and storage.

At home, installing water-saving devices can:

- Reduce water in showerheads and toilets without sacrificing performance.
- Checking and fixing leaks immediately. One always underestimates the dripping tap's capacity to save water.

The measures sound simple, but with every conscious step, you become part of the solution and help ensure that future generations will have clean, flowing water in their taps.



CHAPTER 5 - THE WATER ACCESS CHALLENGE IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

The lack of access to potable water in informal settlements is a major health challenge in urban India. According to an article by India Today, Mumbai, one of India's largest metropolitan cities, is a city with over 2,583 slum clusters and 1.2 million informal structures. Historically, Mumbai was one of the first industrialised cities in India. People from around the country came seeking jobs in factories, particularly cotton mills. As the city grew in numbers, it struggled with housing solutions. It is through its long history that informal settlements became a norm. Today, people continue to seek jobs in the metropolitan area, especially due to the cyclical nature of the agrarian economy in India. Surrounded by agricultural land, Mumbai is a place where people seek opportunity between cultivation and harvest. Slums are thus a permanent fixture in the city.

One of the world's largest slums, Dharavi, is in Mumbai.

Despite the number of people that Mumbai's informal settlements house, these slums still struggle to attain basic water infrastructure. The issue begins with the recognition of a slum area, take for example Kaula Bandar. Kaula Bandar is a 'non-notified' slum, which means it is not recognised by any government body and therefore is unable to seek legal recourse to access public health services. This area lacks toilets within households, and a few blocks of toilets-for-pay are available. This means that many community members engage in open defecation. This leads to issues in infant mortality, nutrition, and literacy rates. In Dharavi, despite its legal status, daily water is supplied once across the vast slum area, at an unpredictable time between 6 am to 10 pm. This water, which is supposed to come from the Bhandup reservoir, is further circumscribed by unauthorized water connections. Those who are wealthier in the area are able to access the water first. This leaves residents at the mercy of tanker water, which is expensive and often of poor quality. Tanker water, supplied by private entities, is extractive and called the 'tanker mafia' by residents. They can charge up to 5,000 rupees per litre during times of emergency.

A study by the Praja Foundation shows that there are major disparities in water distribution around the city. While non-slum areas get 135 litres per capita per day, slum areas get around 45 litres per capita per day. Slum residents are thus either at the mercy of private water tankers or have access to contaminated water from local sources.

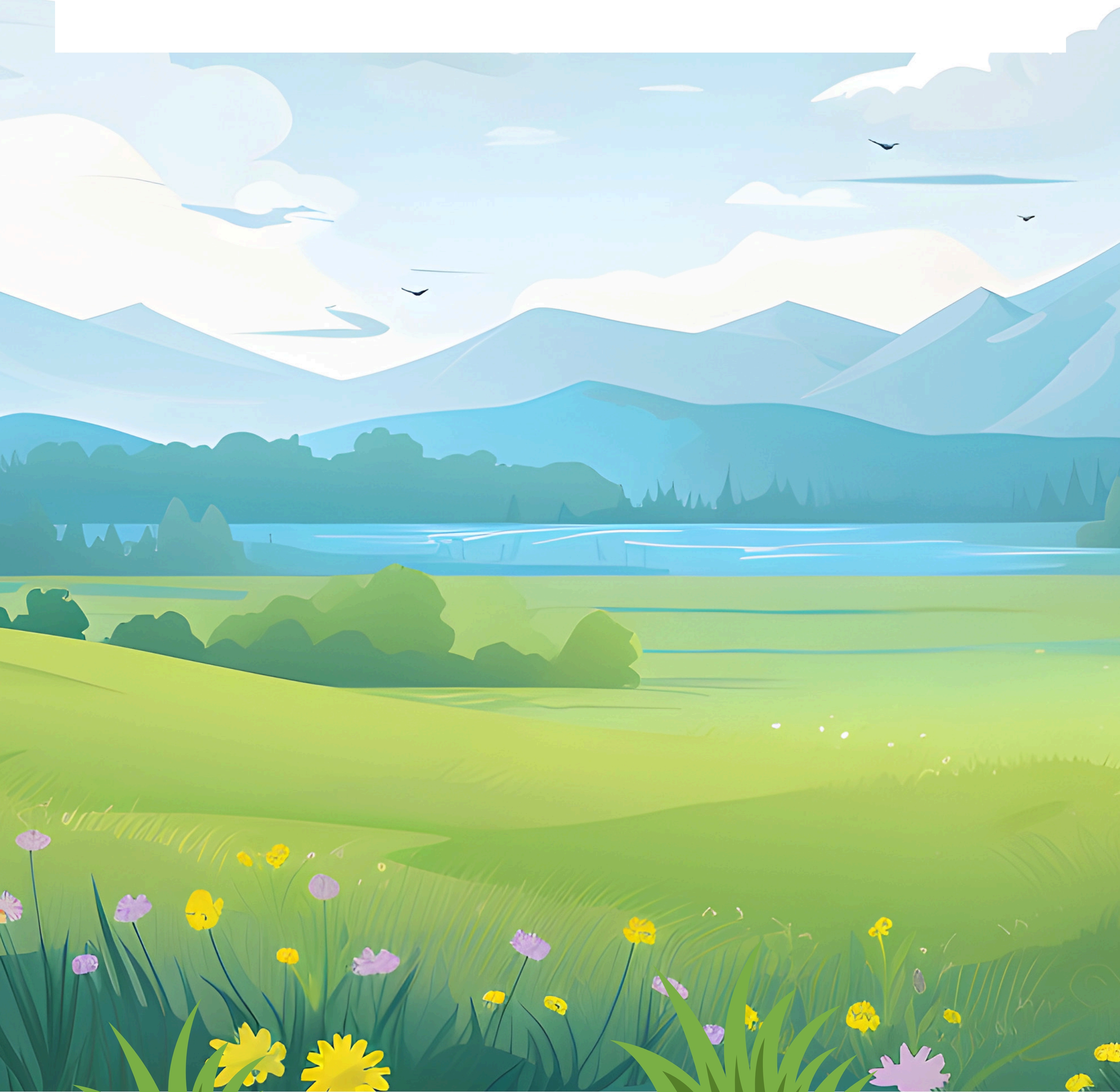
The World Health Organisation (WHO) has established the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Policy in an attempt to bring access to potable water for humans around the world. Water, sanitation, and hygiene go hand in hand. Access to safe drinking water is crucial for the well-being of children, for them to grow to be strong and free from ailment. Diarrhea caused by unsafe drinking water is a leading cause of infant death in India.

Safe water not only secures living and livelihood for adults but also ensures school attendance for children. Drinking water is such a basic human necessity that the lack of it permeates into all aspects of life. There is also a gendered angle to this; in many communities around the world, girl children are responsible for the procurement of water.

This duty is often circumscribed during menstruation, further jeopardising conditions of sanitation and hygiene for girls and women who need them the most.

The WHO works with government and non-governmental organisations around the world to educate people on the importance of safe drinking water. They organize active campaigns in vulnerable communities to help them gain access to potable water. In India, the WHO has supported the Swachh Bharat Mission, a mission to end open defecation in the country. The Indian government's Swachh Bharat Mission policy has built toilets around India and sensitised citizens on the importance of hygienic defecation. This has led to a massive drop in open defecation in the country.

As strides have been made, it is important to remember that there is a long way to go in order to ensure equitable water access. This is particularly true for the divide between informal settlements and formal settlements in urban India.



CHAPTER 6 - TAKING RESPONSIBILITY: ACTING AT PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

In this chapter, we'll dive into explaining how—in taking responsibility towards enacting change—small actions can scale towards big ones. Specifically, we'll cover how to balance sustainability initiatives with economic constraints; then, we'll elaborate on how small actions can multiply into community-driven action, and go over a few case studies of community and youth-led sustainability initiatives to serve as examples.

Sustainability vs. Economic Constraints

The sustainable versions of products can be prohibitively expensive. Energy-efficient appliances, rainwater-harvesting systems, or even organic foods: most versions are characterized by high upfront costs, making them barriers to implementing them in households within low-income communities.

Yet, costly upgrades do not always follow from enacting sustainability measures. Many practices can still be achieved through little or no money, even while resulting in long-term environmental and economic benefits. Such practices include:

- Reducing consumption
 - This can manifest in implementing a 'buy only what you need' mindset, thereby avoiding unnecessary purchases and minimizing the amount of waste you might generate.
 - To take a step further, consider switching off lights when not in use, using fans instead of the AC whenever feasible, fixing water leaks, and using only as much water as you need to reduce your energy and water consumption.
- Repairing & reusing
 - On the topic of buying only what you need, also consider repairing items to see if they can last longer instead of throwing them away. This 'upcycling' can result in both less waste produced and less money spent, as the 'upcycled' item may be of some use still.
- Home gardening
 - To supplement food costs—thereby reducing the amount with which you might rely on store-bought ingredients—consider cultivating a garden with home-grown herbs and vegetables.

Help is also available in the shape of governments and organizations. For instance, eco-friendly fixtures can sometimes be subsidized to help with the aforementioned upfront costs. Another example is the promotion of community-level sharing that such entities facilitate; tool libraries and community gardens serve as examples.

As such, enacting sustainable change isn't just reserved for initiatives that require a lot of monetary investment. Through small steps like the behavioral shifts outlined above, sustainability is achievable—even in low-income communities.

Multiplying Small Actions

Think of the things that one person can do. Reusing a water bottle, switching off the lights, fixing a leaky tap; while commendable, they can feel a bit insignificant due to it being done only by one person. However, when many individuals in a community follow suit, the cumulative impact is multiplied.

Take the following sustainable actions, for example:

- Switching from disposable water bottles to reusable ones.
- Waste segregation combined with composting of kitchen waste.
- Opting for walking, cycling, or using public transportation systems over private modes.
- Conserving water use by taking shorter showers or turning off the tap while brushing teeth.

If dozens—or even hundreds—of people in a community adopt the previously mentioned habits, the cumulative effects in terms of reduced water use, plastic pollution, and waste generation would become substantial. Reports indicate that community water use can drop as much as 20–30% through simple household water-conservation practices—all because, instead of one person harvesting rainwater or installing low-flow fixtures, the majority of the community does so.

This can be easily encouraged through the practices that transform into social norms. A typical case could involve neighbours witnessing activities like composting, rainwater harvesting, or even home gardening. Slowly, these habits start to become the new ‘normal’, with shared values and peers acting as major catalysts towards reshaping the community’s identity as a place where sustainable practices are the norm.

Economic benefits in the form of lower water and electricity bills follow from this. Subsequently, the potential savings can impact multiple families to ease their respective economic burdens. As such, savings accumulate over time, switching to a more sustainable form of living becomes more than the ethically better choice; it becomes the economically wiser choice.

Case Studies

There are a variety of case studies that document communities leading sustainability efforts; the following is an overview of some of them:

- A water conservation program in Gujarat named Gharna Pani Nu Budget successfully transformed people—specifically the youth—into climate-conscious citizens through UNICEF programs. They helped over 1.6 million students learn to manage their respective household water budgets.
- On the topic of UNICEF assistance, the organization’s youth-climate engagement scheme trains many young Indians across the nation to lead WASH (Water, Sanitation, Hygiene) initiatives and champion environmentally sustainable practices.
- Even efforts in other countries have borne fruit, as reports indicate that multiple youth-led groups have introduced eco-friendly cooking stores to reduce deforestation rates.

The examples showcase how communities can rally behind one another—catalyzed by youth-driven efforts—to champion sustainable change. Be it at the individual level or at the community level, implementing sustainable measures amounts to a commitment that can easily scale up through community action to build a healthier future.

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