

REPORT

A Report of the Online Course on “Climate, Community and Conservation”

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The interconnectedness of climate, community, and the environment is a subject of active interdisciplinary discourse against the backdrop of the current climate crisis permeating across prevalent social stratifications. It necessitates a thorough understanding of the relationship between climate and community, and consequently, the roles played by communities in environmental conservation. To tackle climate change, action is required at all levels of society, from businesses and policymakers to educators and individuals. As key providers of higher education, universities and colleges are important promoters and advocates of the global agenda at a local level for sustainable development.

With a commitment to building a sustainable future through education, the Centre for Earth Studies and the Department of Environmental Studies, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, organizes national-level online courses on related themes. Climate, Community and Conservation was the second national online certificate course conducted from 21 August to 17 September 2021 for undergraduate and postgraduate students, research scholars, and environmental practitioners. The course was conducted on the pattern of MOOCs with online seminars and

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Published by Indian Society for Ecological Economics (INSEE), c/o Institute of Economic Growth, University Enclave, North Campus, Delhi 110007.

ISSN: 2581–6152 (print); 2581–6101 (web).

DOI: TBA

presentations by the faculty of the host institutions and eminent experts from various universities and organizations, such as the University of Delhi, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), World Resources Institute (WRI) Bengaluru, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Dehradun, United Nations University, Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) Mysore, and so on. The course was spread over three sub-themes, namely, climate crisis, climate and community, community and conservation.

The course was inaugurated with a keynote address by Prof. Maharaj K Pandit, former Dean, Faculty of Science, and Head of the Department of Environmental Studies, University of Delhi. This internationally acclaimed expert on the Himalayas explained the uniqueness of the Himalayan ecosystem and the associated evolutionary divergence and migration of human populations. The negative impacts of various anthropogenic pressures require a trans-national effort involving due deliberations between policymakers and experts. Prof. NH Ravindranath, IISc Bangalore, provided information on the magnitude and impact of the climate crisis in the form of increasing extreme weather events that may have repercussions on food security, submerge coastlines, and enfeeble natural resilience infrastructure. Dr Mukunda Dev Behera, IIT Kharagpur, spoke about the role of climate in the evolution of biodiversity on the planet, the devastating impacts of climate change on biodiversity, and the possible solutions through coordinated global efforts and local actions. He highlighted the need to invest in early warning systems, implement disaster risk reduction strategies, and opt for nature-based solutions for climate and disaster resilience.

The second theme investigated the delicate relationship between climate and communities. Currently pressing issues like climate migration, sustainability of forests and rural and urban communities, and circular economy solutions for sustainable cities and communities were some of the major topics of discussion. Dr Architesh Panda, United Nations University, stated that it is the shared responsibility of governments and communities to tackle the growing challenge of climate disruptions, which is already affecting the sustainable development of communities all over the world. Climate-induced migration may have a significant impact on rural–urban dynamics and increase pressure on cities and metropolitan areas, which are powerhouses of economic growth, contributing about 60% to the global GDP while generating 70% of global carbon emissions and 60% of resource consumption. The lectures further brought forth the recent problems faced by cities concerning environmental quality, resilience, and

livability, thereby suggesting that tackling these problems requires collective action that brings together science, state, and society. India's progress in SDG 11 was assessed and key areas that require work identified. The lectures emphasized contemporary topics such as circular cities that apply the concept of a circular economy, becoming digitally enabled, generating sustainable prosperity, improving livability, and developing resilience. Dr Ulka Kelkar, Director of the Climate Program at WRI India, talked about low-carbon development pathways for India that are economically robust and environmentally sound. She used a systems dynamics model to illustrate energy consumption and emissions if circumstances proceed in a "business as usual" manner for the next 30 years. The suggested pathways to a low-carbon future and climate change mitigation include decarbonization of electricity, energy conservation, circular use of materials, emissions sequestration, etc. The lectures specified that there is a need to focus on enhancing our developmental strategies to make economic growth climate-resilient.

The third theme aimed at discussing the role of the community in conservation efforts. That community participation along with scientific interventions can play a pivotal role in environmental conservation was established through the lectures delivered by experts and practitioners. Prof. Ruchi Badola, WII, elucidated the crucial role played by indigenous knowledge and indigenous communities in the revival and restoration of degraded ecosystems. Special reference was made to the National Mission for Clean Ganga. The lectures in this series provided fundamental principles and methods of working on conservation projects. Various case studies of environmental conservation involving communities through conservation projects were discussed. Dr M Ananda Kumar, NCF, described human–elephant conflicts as a major conservation issue across Asia. He showcased how long-term research may enable scientists to understand the relationships between people and wildlife while identifying the reasons for human–wildlife conflicts (Kumar *et al* 2014). Ms Karishma Pradhan presented a case study on the Hornbill Nest Adoption Program (HNAP) conducted in collaboration with the Ghora-Aabhe Society and Arunachal Forest Department in Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh—a haven for hornbills in Northeast India, which has four of the nine identified species. The role of long-term research and monitoring (LTRM) was also deliberated as a significant tool for testing and developing theories and understanding complex ecological and evolutionary processes.

The month-long course aimed at sensitizing, training, and mentoring a diverse cohort of interdisciplinary students, researchers, and practitioners

and equipping them to find innovative solutions to environmental challenges. It was curated to shape and train future decision-makers and thereby help bring about positive societal transformations for the impending challenges of the current century.

REFERENCES

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