



# Adopting LiFE Globally for a Sustainable Future

## Introduction

We are at a critical juncture in history when multiple challenges and crises, including a climate emergency are upon us. Together, these have halted or even reversed years of progress made on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Humankind's progress has so far been defined by its economic progress. Achieving this has been fuelled by unsustainable production and rampant consumption, that have had a detrimental impact on our planet. This misplaced notion of progress is why we are staring at a scenario where today nearly a million plant and animal species are under threat of extinction, with a ripple effect on countless others, disrupting nature's delicate ecological balance.

Humans wield more power over the planet than ever before. In the wake of pandemics, record-breaking temperatures, and spiralling inequality, it is time to use this power to redefine what we mean by progress, where our carbon and consumption footprints do not adversely impact the world around us and the planet that we leave behind for future generations. This can be done through transition towards a LiFE economy.

## The Concept of LiFE

The ethos of sustainable consumption and production is integral to the Indian culture and traditions. In the 2021 Glasgow COP Summit, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had articulated this Indian belief in sustainable lifestyles, starting the global mass movement encapsulated



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in the word – LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), aimed towards “mindful and deliberate utilization, instead of mindless and destructive consumption”. This was strongly supported by the UN Secretary General as he joined Hon’ble PM for launch of Mission LiFE in Kevadia, Gujarat in October 2022.

In the past, climate champions and warriors put the onus only on States and corporate actors to tackle the climate challenge. The LiFE approach is in a sense taking back of initiative by the people, for it encourages each one of us to align our lives with the well-being of our planet, encompassing diverse expressions and facets, and challenging prevailing norms by promoting growth that is both green and sustainable. The overall objective has been to mobilize not just 1.4 billion Indians but the global community at large to take individual and collective actions to protect the environment and engender sustainable development.

## **G20 Presidency of India**

The G20 made LiFE its own when the Development Working Group in 2023 formulated the Varanasi High Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development. These were later endorsed by G20 Leaders in the New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration, wherein they committed to promote Lifestyles for Sustainable Development and mainstream LiFE. The aspiration is

to move forward from LiFE inspired principles as endorsed by the G20 Leaders to a sustainable and inclusive development paradigm which addresses the fragmented challenges of sustainable development in an integrated manner.

As experts have consistently emphasized, achieving our climate goals hinges crucially on addressing demand-side measures. Our daily individual choices profoundly impact our planet. Consider this, around two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions stem from households. From the electricity we consume to the food we eat, what we wear and how we travel, and the products we purchase, all contribute to our carbon footprint. The imperative is to transition from a throwaway culture to a circular LiFE economy. According to the International Energy Agency, LiFE measures would save consumers globally around USD 440 billion by 2030, equivalent to around 5 per cent of all spending on fuels across the global economy that year; and that is just in monetary terms. Imagine the powerful impact that individual actions by 8 billion people could have on slowing and reversing the impacts of climate change!

As per the International Energy Agency, the worldwide adoption of LiFE – including behavioural changes and sustainable consumer choices – would reduce annual global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by more than 2 billion

tonnes in 2030. This is about one-fifth of the emissions reduction needed by 2030 to put the world on a pathway to net zero emissions.

According to the WHO, approximately 2.4 billion people globally still rely on highly polluting solid fuels for cooking and heating, leading to severe health impacts. Transitioning to clean fuels like electricity could drastically reduce household emissions and improve multiple developmental outcomes.

India has already implemented several large scale behavioural change programmes. Under PM Modi's visionary leadership, LPG cooking gas connections have been provided to 99.8 percent households, thereby enabling transitioning from fuels like wood and coal, reducing indoor air pollution, benefiting both health and the environment. Similarly, 100 million toilets have been constructed in rural India within a span of seven years. In terms of food consumption practices as well, almost half of India's population is vegetarian by choice, also worth emulating to the extent possible.

In terms of energy, perhaps the largest green transition in history is currently underway in India, and we have been amongst the leaders in G20 in terms of meeting our NDCs under the Paris Agreement. India has also included LiFE in its Nationally Determined Contributions

It is because of these and many such practices and initiatives that the average carbon footprint per person in India is a mere 40 per cent of the global average. The idea is for it not to grow even as development accelerates in the world's fastest growing big economy.

## The Way Forward

To build a future where decarbonisation is inevitable, we must rethink development models to emphasize synergies over trade-offs. We need evidence based policies with measurable impact built on the vision of LiFE. As we think of this new development paradigm, five important things need to be underscored:

First, promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns in terms of changes in both supply and demand, underpinned by favourable policy measures.

Second, reorienting development finance through non-discriminatory and ethical considerations, and prompting a larger push for resilient infrastructure financing, especially in the Global South.

Third, measuring wellbeing that goes well beyond GDP.

Fourth, embracing social enterprises and community participation for sustainable and equitable development, and promoting localization of efforts in the process.

Lastly, mainstreaming ethical and value-based economic systems,

technology development, and global governance.

When it comes to effectively managing climate change while ensuring growth and development, we know what doesn't work. We must now identify effective strategies that can work, involving stakeholders beyond governments and industries.

While individual actions are extremely essential in driving LiFE, the importance of the role of governments in facilitating and encouraging this behavioural transition remains invaluable. Upto 60 per cent of emissions savings through LiFE measures could be directly influenced by governments, according to the International Energy Agency. Therefore, progressive and sustainable national policies are an effective means in the path towards LiFE.

In March 2024, a resolution on promoting sustainable lifestyles was adopted by all participating Member States at the Sixth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in Nairobi, highlighting the importance of changing behaviours through the efforts of international, regional, and national initiatives

involving the private sector, local communities and indigenous peoples in supporting sustainable lifestyles.

RIS and the Global Alliance for LiFE Economies Research and Innovation (GALERI) are engaged in taking forward dialogue, research and innovation on the G20 Varanasi High Level principles on LiFE. This could bring about a paradigm shift in the way we seek to tackle climate change and achieve the SDGs. GALERI's efforts will help bridge existing gaps by fostering engagement, coordination, and collaboration in research and innovation among diverse stakeholders to support ideation and implementation of a new development paradigm built on LiFE Principles.

Implementing the LiFE approach globally can empower human-centered climate action and set a robust agenda for a Green Development. This moment presents an unparalleled opportunity to pivot towards sustainability. Let us move forward together, conscientiously making far-sighted choices about lifestyles, to safeguard and secure the collective future of our Planet and our children.

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