

INSIDE



Celebrating 15 Years of People, Purpose and Process

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This is the print version of ***Inside CEEW*, a long-form digital-first social storytelling series launched to mark CEEW's 15th anniversary—part oral history, part portrait project**. Each post went beyond titles and tasks to surface the purpose, process, and lived experiences of the people who have shaped the organisation. The ~40 stories were gathered through deep, documentary-style interviews spanning anywhere between 45 minutes to 3 hours and published weekly across CEEW's social media handles. It performed especially well on LinkedIn, where CEEW members regularly shared posts about colleagues and institutional milestones, extending reach through personal networks in a way that only such organic stories can.

I N S I D E



Celebrating 15 Years of People, Purpose and Process

Arunava Banerjee

Shreya Kapoor

Neera Majumdar



AN INSTITUTION IS ITS PEOPLE

by Arunava Banerjee, curator and author

15 YEARS IS AN AWKWARD AGE FOR AN INSTITUTION: OLD ENOUGH TO HAVE ACQUIRED HABITS, LEGENDS, ARGUMENTS, SCARS, AND A PREFERRED MODE OF OPERATION; YOUNG ENOUGH FOR MANY WHO BUILT ITS EARLIEST SYSTEMS TO STILL BE WALKING ITS CORRIDORS AND DISPUTING HOW EVENTS OUGHT TO BE REMEMBERED.



Most people encounter the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) through its reports, datasets, policy recommendations, partnerships, and programmes. *Inside CEEW* began by looking beyond that public record to ask who made the work possible, and what the work made of them.

The Council began without an inherited campus, endowment, or archive, but with intent: to build a world-class public policy institution from India, make research from the Global South speak with analytical authority, create careers in public policy, and pursue questions without convenient answers.

Intent, however, does not become an institution by proclamation. It must pass through people.

It passes through a researcher moving between a ministry in Delhi and farms in Rajasthan, water-reuse systems in Chennai, homes in Kolkata, or municipal offices in Thane because a number cannot be understood from a spreadsheet alone. It passes through an editor stress-testing a claim the evidence cannot bear; an administrator accounting for every visitor and courier; a finance officer making projects across states credible to partners and auditors; an IT professional keeping data secure through an office move. It passes through those who build teams, repair processes, ask uncomfortable questions, and stay long enough to see a tentative idea acquire institutional form.

Launched during CEEW's 15th anniversary year, the series was conceived neither as an official chronology nor as a roll call of achievements. The idea was simple: speak to the people who had made and continued to make CEEW, and tell their stories honestly, personally, and close to the ground.

Institutional memory, however, is distributed among people who experienced its growth from different cities, programmes, functions, and positions. Some remembered high-stakes policy meetings or the moment they earned the trust of a rural community. Others reminisced about carrying furniture into a new office, or coaxing stubborn printers. Most credited the families that made the commitment possible: parents who once questioned a career in public policy, partners who shared the risks of return and reinvention, and children growing up alongside late drafts and long journeys.

We decided to not impose a hierarchy upon these memories. Institutional consequence rarely maps neatly onto designation.

Over 10 months, I interviewed around 40 colleagues in conversations lasting between 45 minutes and several hours. Each profile then passed through at least four rounds of editing before its weekly Saturday publication. I arrived with question banks, but the best material often emerged from the conversations themselves: a father wondering why an IIT graduate had joined a non-profit; an electric auto driven from the Golden Temple to the Wagah Border to test whether its battery could last the journey; a two-bedroom flat doubling as CEEW's first Lucknow office; a solar-irrigation project no one initially volunteered to lead.

The task was to listen until these fragments began speaking to one another.

In classical rhetoric, *ethos* is the character that makes an argument credible. CEEW's ethos has accumulated through repeated acts of intellectual seriousness and practical care. Immanuel Kant condensed the Enlightenment into a challenge: "Dare to know." The scientific spirit asks something harder of an institution: dare to be corrected. Facts must withstand scrutiny. Research must meet the people whose lives its data describes. Evidence matters because lives do.

This sounds solemn. It often is. It is also frequently funny.

At CEEW, a morning spent modelling national emissions can end in a skit rehearsal; a discussion about climate finance could give way to impromptu stand-up; and sustainability means designing national policy while waging patient office campaigns against paper towels. As the inimitable Homer Simpson put it, "Just because I don't care doesn't mean I don't understand." CEEW has generally operated on the opposite proposition: understanding something deeply makes indifference difficult.

Across the anniversary year, these stories travelled through CEEW's platforms and the personal networks of those who recognised colleagues, mentors, former teammates, or parts of themselves. But while the internet is excellent at circulation, it fares poorly at memory. A book slows the encounter down. It permits these profiles to coexist: the founder beside those who joined yesterday and are already asking how the place could work better.

Inside CEEW also became my own route into the institution's history. An editor is trained to look for cold opens, revelations, callbacks, and lines that carry more weight than their word count allows. But people do not arrange their lives for publication. Stories had to cohere without being flattened. The project became my own exercise in translating complexity without pretending to resolve it.

Looking ahead, CEEW is not the institution that began in a borrowed room. Scale has brought reach, expertise, recognition, and the ability to work across problems no single vertical can solve. It has also brought an obligation to guard against complacency, fragmentation, and the false confidence that can accompany institutional success. Scale must not be confused with arrival.

This volume closes one year of stories. It does not exhaust the stories inside CEEW. It gives some of them somewhere to rest and leaves the door ajar for the many still unfolding.

Institutions, after all, are living inheritances. These pages hold some of the people through whom the Council became itself. **The rest of the story belongs to those still writing it.**

PADARBINDA SAMAL

“WHEN INDIA ANNOUNCED ITS NET-ZERO TARGETS, SOMETHING CLICKED INSIDE ME”

Joined CEEW in 2018



In 2021, when India announced its ambitious net-zero targets to the world, Padarbinda Samal felt something shift.

For long, he was a pillar running CEEW's operations with his team—be it the office, the files, or the staff. “But that moment made it clear,” he says. “I wasn’t just keeping an institution running. We were holding up something that could shape the future.”

He had seen The Council's reports and the research on India's low-carbon pathways, emissions, and energy transitions shape up in front of him. Admin work is often invisible, but India's goal wasn't. It made Samal proud.

“I am part of an organisation that has contributed to a landmark moment,” he says.

Since joining CEEW in 2018, Samal has shaped our operations. The Council has expanded from 40 to over 370 during his tenure, but his routine hasn't changed. By 8:30 a.m.—usually in a red or orange shirt—he walks the floors, checks the rooms, and fixes what's off. Visa issues, backend glitches, urgent deliveries, ambassador visits—he smooths them all into motion.

“Everyone who built the organisation left something behind,” he adds. **“We have to protect it, nurture it—and be ready for what comes next.”**

Running operations with a trusted team



“EVERYONE WHO BUILT CEEW LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND. WE HAVE TO PROTECT IT, NURTURE IT AND BE READY FOR WHAT COMES NEXT.”

Always ready for what comes next



A critical mineral for CEEW

RISHABH JAIN

“POLICY MOVES
BECAUSE YOU SHOW
UP, AGAIN AND AGAIN,
WITH SOMETHING
SOLID.”

Wondering if solar could be the answer!



From childhood summers in Bihar to mapping India’s solar hotspots during college internships, Rishabh Jain’s life has quite literally revolved around the solar panel. “It was never hardship,” he recalls of vacations in rural Bihar. “But when it got dark by 6 pm, I wondered—why couldn’t solar be the answer?”

By 2012, he was chasing energy access data across rural Karnataka. The trip, with Arunabha Ghosh, took them through the Udupi district—into schools lit by solar-charged lamps and shipping containers retrofitted to power them. It was a reminder that real energy transitions straddle both worlds—the field and the forum, the ground and the policy room.

A decade later, Rishabh and his colleagues were helping shape India’s inputs to the G20 energy transition agenda. The journey in between tells you everything about how institutions and people grow.

That range only works, he notes, because of the way people here say yes. “Yes, I’ll jump in. Yes, I’ll learn. Yes, I’ll trust you.”

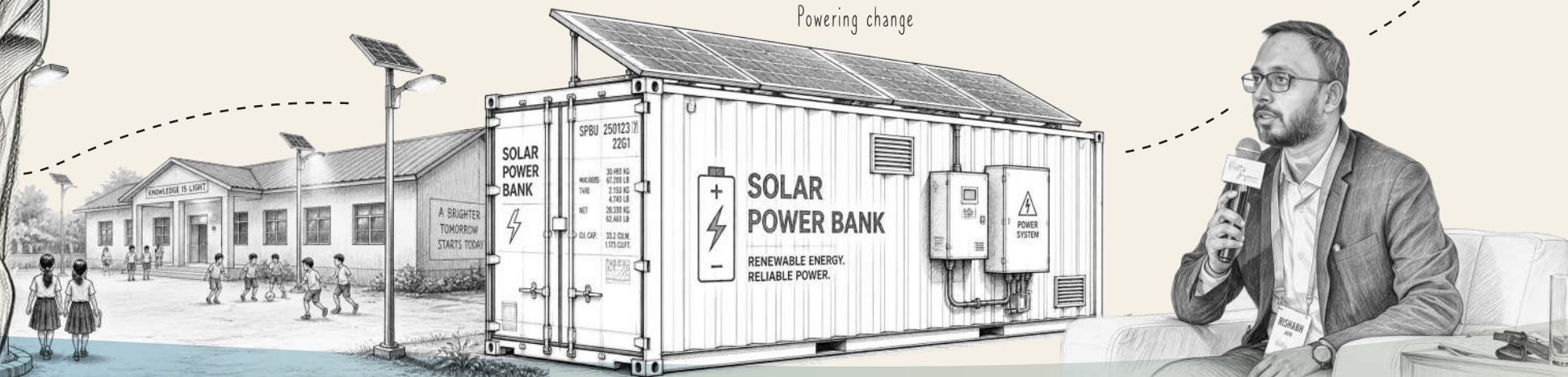
Across two innings at CEEW, Rishabh has worked with teams that co-authored India’s first clean energy jobs estimate, helped launch the Centre for Energy Finance, redesigned frameworks for renewable energy auctions, and built policy strategies for critical minerals. One day you’ll find Rishabh teaching health insurance, and on another, explaining to young, bright-eyed joiners how to offer a visiting card with intention.

Trust—earned slowly and humbly—matters to him. “Policy doesn’t move because you shout. It moves because you show up, again and again, with something solid.”

“You may start out collecting data,” he says, “**but if the analysis is rigorous, that data might someday shape how the country thinks.**”

“YES, I’LL JUMP IN. YES, I’LL LEARN. YES, I’LL TRUST YOU.”

From data to impact



Decoding smoke signals since 2018

KURINJI KEMANTH

“WHAT WE SAW ON THE
GROUND CHANGED WHAT
DATA ABOUT STUBBLE
BURNING MEANT.”



Joined as an intern



Kurinji came to Delhi from Neyveli, Tamil Nadu to chase a UPSC dream. Instead, she joined a research team tracking air pollution across northern India, and stayed. Soon she was crisscrossing farms across Punjab with her team—installing nearly 50 low-cost sensors in places like Ludhiana and Sangrur, and sitting with farmers to understand why stubble was burned, and what made alternatives harder to adopt.

They were asking questions that satellites couldn’t always answer.

That was 2018. She had joined CEEW as an intern just as the team was deepening its explorations of air quality.

By 2022, at just 25, she was the youngest member on a committee of national experts on curbing air pollution, whose recommendations would inform protocols adopted by the Commission for Air Quality Management. “When you don’t come with a PhD or grey hair,” she says, “the work alone has to speak for you.”

“I STARTED STUDYING POLLUTION PLAYFULLY. NOW I WORK SO MY DAUGHTER AND OTHERS
CAN GROW UP BREATHING BETTER.”

In office, Kurinji is usually a woman of few words. But last year, she and her team spoke to nearly 1,500 farmers across Punjab’s high-burn districts, asking why stubble was still being burned. They found that the picture had changed: over 1.2 lakh machines had been deployed in the last seven years, and many farmers were using them—but still burning straw partially to help the machines ‘run smoother’.

That insight, captured in a CEEW report, is now helping shape how policymakers respond on the ground. The work ahead lies in shifting behaviour and helping farmers see crop residue as value, not waste.

“I started studying pollution playfully. **Now I work so my daughter and others can grow up breathing better.**”

Fields of Punjab



1500+ farmers spoken to



Youngest member of the expert committee



Sakhi in spirit, Engineer by training, Reformer at heart

RASHI SINGH

“INDIA’S POWER SECTOR HAS ROOM FOR WOMEN NOT AT THE MARGINS, BUT THE CENTRE.”

Grew up across borders



Seven border towns. Thirteen schools. A father in the Border Roads Organisation. For Rashi Singh, growing up meant constantly crossing state lines—and learning, very early on, what last-mile access really meant.

From Nagaland to Sikkim, from the Andamans to Leh, she saw how hard infrastructure met people’s lives. “The roads often reached,” she says. “But services wouldn’t always follow.”

The last thing on her mind when she returned from the US as an energy systems engineer in 2018 was tackling the long-standing issue of unpaid electricity dues. But a meeting at CEEW’s Lucknow office in 2022 changed that. It was about a new initiative by India’s most populous state: women collecting electricity bills in their villages—a model that could significantly ease DISCOM losses if it scaled.

That meeting would define her next three years. The Vidyut Sakhi programme was a bold effort by Uttar Pradesh. Now, it needed tools, training, and trust to reach its full potential.

The team hit the ground running to support the initiative—scripting explainer videos, designing training manuals, piloting modules, and building tech-backed systems. “Once the women understood what arrears or surcharge meant,” Rashi says, “they could move with confidence.”

They began walking farther, collecting faster, earning more. One Sakhi who had never left her village now owns a scooter. Another paid off a long-standing family loan. Others enrolled their children in good schools.

By 2025, more than 30,000 Sakhis had been trained across Uttar Pradesh. Over INR 2,000 crore in electricity dues has been collected so far. Similar approaches are now powering solar payments and banking services.

Once fluent primarily in kilowatt-hours, Rashi now brings that precision to conversations across contexts. Whether it’s a colleague in Lucknow, a Sakhi in training, or a schoolchild at an awareness drive, she speaks with the same calm clarity.

For someone who once thought policy was too far from people, it’s been a shift in more ways than one. “Technology tells you how much to pay,” she says. “But trust decides if you pay. **That’s what the Sakhis bring to the grid.**”

“TECHNOLOGY TELLS YOU HOW MUCH TO PAY. BUT TRUST DECIDES IF YOU PAY. THAT’S WHAT THE SAKHIS BRING TO THE GRID.”

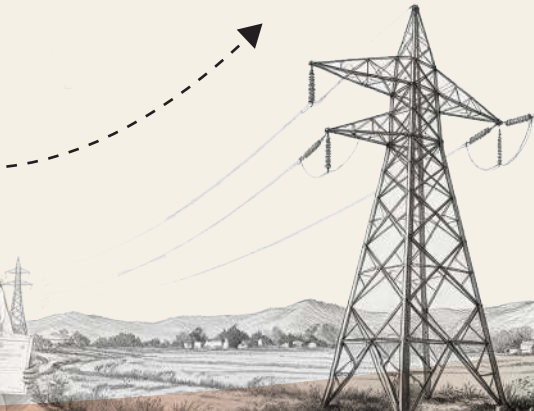
Joined the Vidyut Sakhis in their mission



Trained Sakhis, built trust



Powering livelihoods, building grid resilience

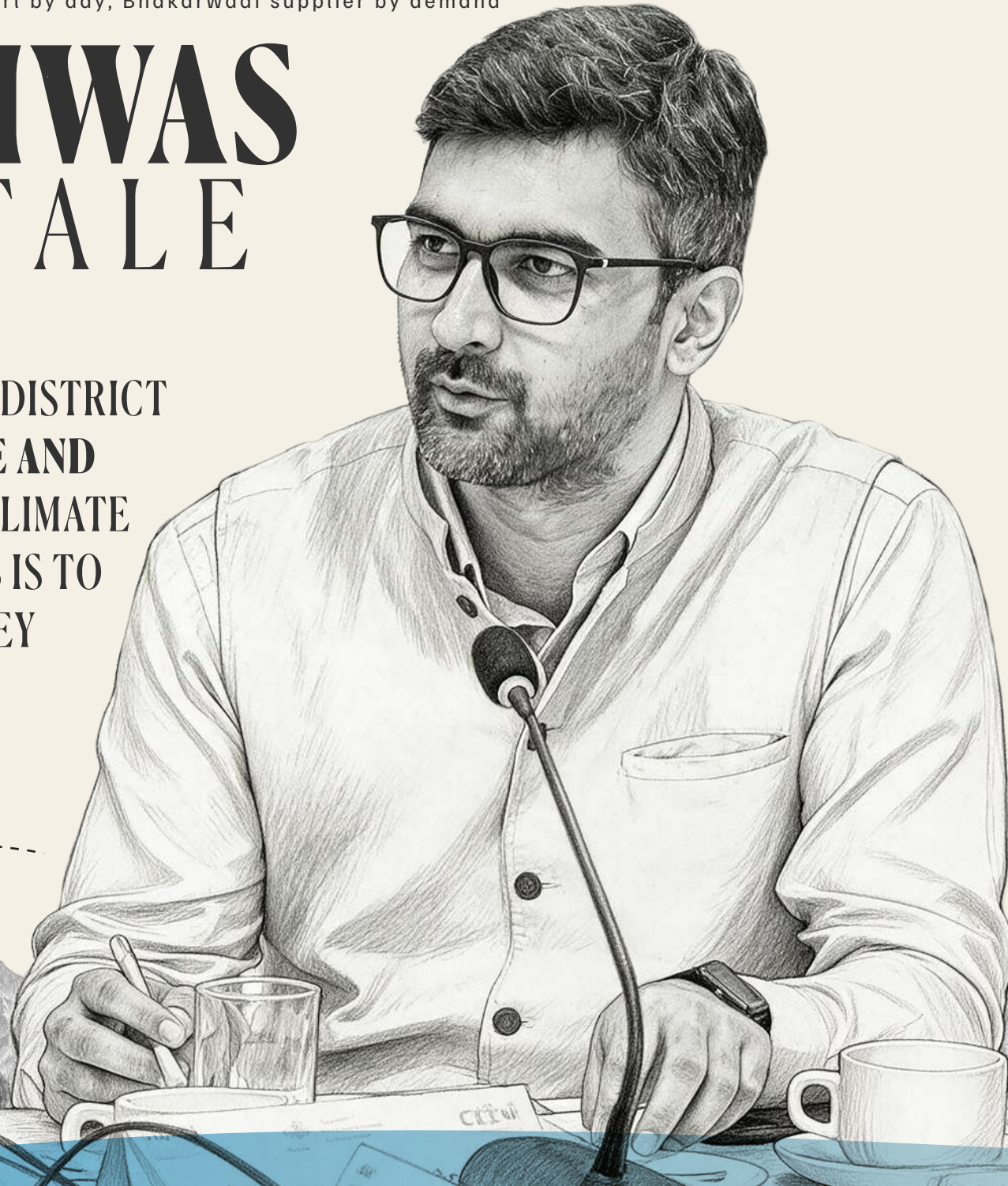


Climate resilience expert by day, Bhakarwadi supplier by demand

VISHWAS CHITALE

“EVERY INDIAN DISTRICT
MUST PREPARE AND
RESPOND TO CLIMATE
RISKS. OUR JOB IS TO
MAKE SURE THEY
CAN.”

Ferns to mountains



Sixteen years ago, Vishwas Chitale wasn't tracking climate risks—he was studying ferns at Garware College. But the questions soon outgrew the lab.

Turning to satellite data and remote sensing, he began tracing the deeper shifts—disappearing forests, erratic rainfall, rising heat—across South Asia, from the Himalayan foothills to Kathmandu and Kabul, Bhutan to Myanmar. The signs were undeniable: we must adapt to climate change.

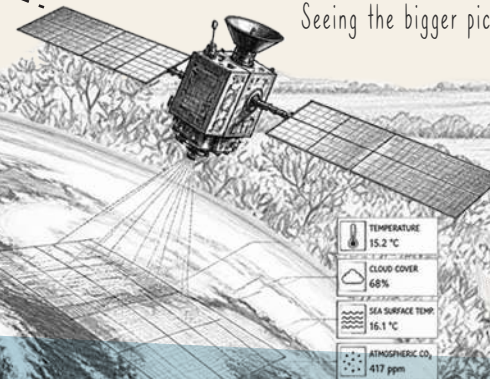
But something kept tugging at him: “Why wasn't I doing this for home?”

Home was Pune, Maharashtra, where water ran low in April, and summer days meant shade, stillness, and waiting. At The Council, that memory became a mission.

When Vishwas joined CEEW in 2023, he made a quiet suggestion: Call the team Climate Resilience, not Climate Risks. “Our work can't stop at identifying problems,” he said. “It has to strengthen how we respond.”

Today, Vishwas leads a young, multidisciplinary team promoting nature-based solutions, unlocking finance for climate adaptation, and building Heat Action Plans (HAPs). Each plan is rooted in local consultations and granular data tailored to how people live and work. “When your own street could be a case study,” he says, “you realise it's not theoretical. It's home.”

Seeing the bigger picture



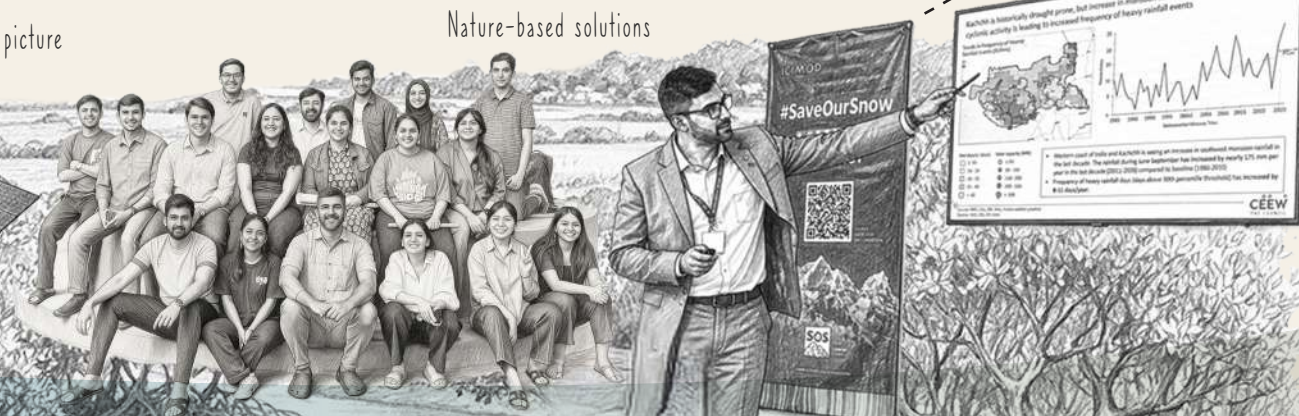
So far, CEEW has helped shape 40 HAPs across five states in under 18 months. The next step: scale to over 300 cities by 2028. “Every Indian district must prepare and respond to climate risks,” he says. “Our job is to make sure they can.”

Towering over most but always easy to talk to, he is the kind of leader who buys samosas on field days, never misses a birthday, and keeps a blazer tucked into his bag—just in case the day ends in a media interview. He shares credit easily, builds trust quietly, and keeps his team focused on what matters. “If someone finds a better way to tackle climate risks,” he says with a smile, “that's the win.”

Vishwas has travelled to more than 11 Indian states in the last 6 months. But some stakes are harder to ignore than others. “My children will be outdoors a lot more than me in the next five years,” he says. “**We all need to act now.**”

“WHEN YOUR OWN STREET COULD BE A CASE
STUDY OF CLIMATE RISK, YOU REALISE IT'S
NOT THEORETICAL. IT'S HOME.”

Building resilience



What on Earth would we do without her?

ALINA SEN

“MANY SAW THE BIG
PICTURE. BUT SOMEONE
HAD TO THINK ABOUT
THE FRAME.”

Structure, process, clarity



Alina Sen believes in punchlines. And processes.

When she joined The Council nine years ago, she arrived with 17 years of navigating between visuals and words, rigour and storytelling. Here, she brought it all together. “Structure is what I love most,” she says. Words had always been her way in. But it was structure—of visuals, sentences, systems—that held her attention.

And that’s what she’s helped build at CEEW: a culture where visuals and values go hand in hand.

That love shaped *What on Earth!*®—the fortnightly cartoon strip. What began as an office chat about a shared love for *Calvin and Hobbes* became something much more. “When I first imagined the strip,” she smiles, “I saw a hoarding on Mumbai’s Marine Drive. Big, bold, unmissable.” That old ad-world dream—she was a copywriter for years—is now a beloved climate strip, at home and around the world.

After 150+ editions, debuts at the Hyderabad Literary Festival and the Jaipur Literature Festival, it has cemented its place as a key CEEW initiative — now celebrating six impactful years. Its recurring character—the Pale Blue Dot—is a nod to how Carl Sagan saw our planet from space. “You have to meet people where they are,” Alina says. “A witty line can sometimes open the door that data can’t.”

Opening doors with stories, humour and heart



Archiving institutional memories



For our tomorrow



Perhaps that’s why *What on Earth!*® mugs, bags and bookmarks now adorn the offices of ambassadors, government officials, and the books of young children — being an entry point to tough conversations about sustainability and urgent reminders for climate action.

That lens has shaped more than just the strip. Alina and her colleagues have guided hundreds of research publications to print, made films that carry The Council’s stories further, and mentored young storytellers and designers. “A process done well isn’t just internal,” she says. “It shapes and sticks out in how the world sees you.”

Every research publication must not only pass peer reviews but also clear the Alina test of publication SOPs. Over the years, she has focused on making systems stick and diligently archiving institutional memory. Alina is among the first to arrive at the office, cheer the loudest in meetings, and is the tallest sentinel guarding a formidable wall of research.

“CEEW can be anything you want it to be,” she remembers hearing in her early days. “**I took that literally.**”

“YOU HAVE TO MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY
ARE. A WITTY LINE CAN SOMETIMES OPEN
THE DOOR THAT DATA CAN’T.”

Has an enviable collection of handloom sarees and people skills

REMAN SINGH

“PEOPLE GROW FASTER THAN YOU THINK IF YOU GIVE THEM ROOM.”

The map was drawn and an idea was born

Seven years ago, Reman Singh arrived at The Council with a mandate: build the foundations a fast-growing institution would need to thrive.

But the vision she embraced was much larger: to build the kind of place where ambition didn't come at the cost of empathy; where people could shape the world while feeling anchored to their work.

In 2020, at an off-site in Tijara, Reman took a marker and drew a map as part of a group exercise: a structured pathway to help researchers grow—with milestones, feedback loops, and coaching baked in. “It was just an idea,” she says. “But it stuck, because we needed it.”

That idea became the CEEW Academy, a cornerstone of The Council's continuous quest for learning, running targeted cohorts across levels, from research analysts to team leads. Driving it is the question that keeps her going: What does it mean to truly shape a place and see it through? “If research here meets world-class standards,” she says, “so should the systems that support the people behind it.”

She's helped mould these systems: performance reviews, mutual accountability, fellowships, inclusive benefits, gender-neutral hiring, and queer-positive health coverage. At a place where 400+ minds share a median age of just under 30, she and her team know that careers are being formed, not just managed.

Her impact criss-crosses the institution—solving problems with quiet leadership, supporting managers, and fine-tuning systems before most even realise they need fixing. Ask Reman how that happens, and she doesn't hesitate: “Boring consistency,” she jokes. “But with discipline and rigour.”

At the CEEW office, she listens first, jokes often with a straight face, and never flinches from a tough moment. She sees HR as strategic and embedded—not invisible. “People don't come to HR,” she says. “They come to their managers first. Our job is also to help them show up right.”

Her second home in the hills of Himachal gives her the pause that Delhi often forgets. Maybe that's why, whether she's steering through crises, talking swimming tips, or diving into Holi colours, she moves through it all with the same balanced confidence.

After all, we spend nearly one-third of our lives at work. As Reman puts it, “That time should add up to more than KPIs. It should energise us and mean something.” That's what she and her team show up for everyday: a workplace where **young people can build public policy careers that don't just exist, but endure.**

“WE SPEND NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF OUR LIVES AT WORK. THAT TIME SHOULD ADD UP TO MORE THAN KPIS. IT SHOULD ENERGISE US AND MEAN SOMETHING.”

Accountability, inclusion, care and more

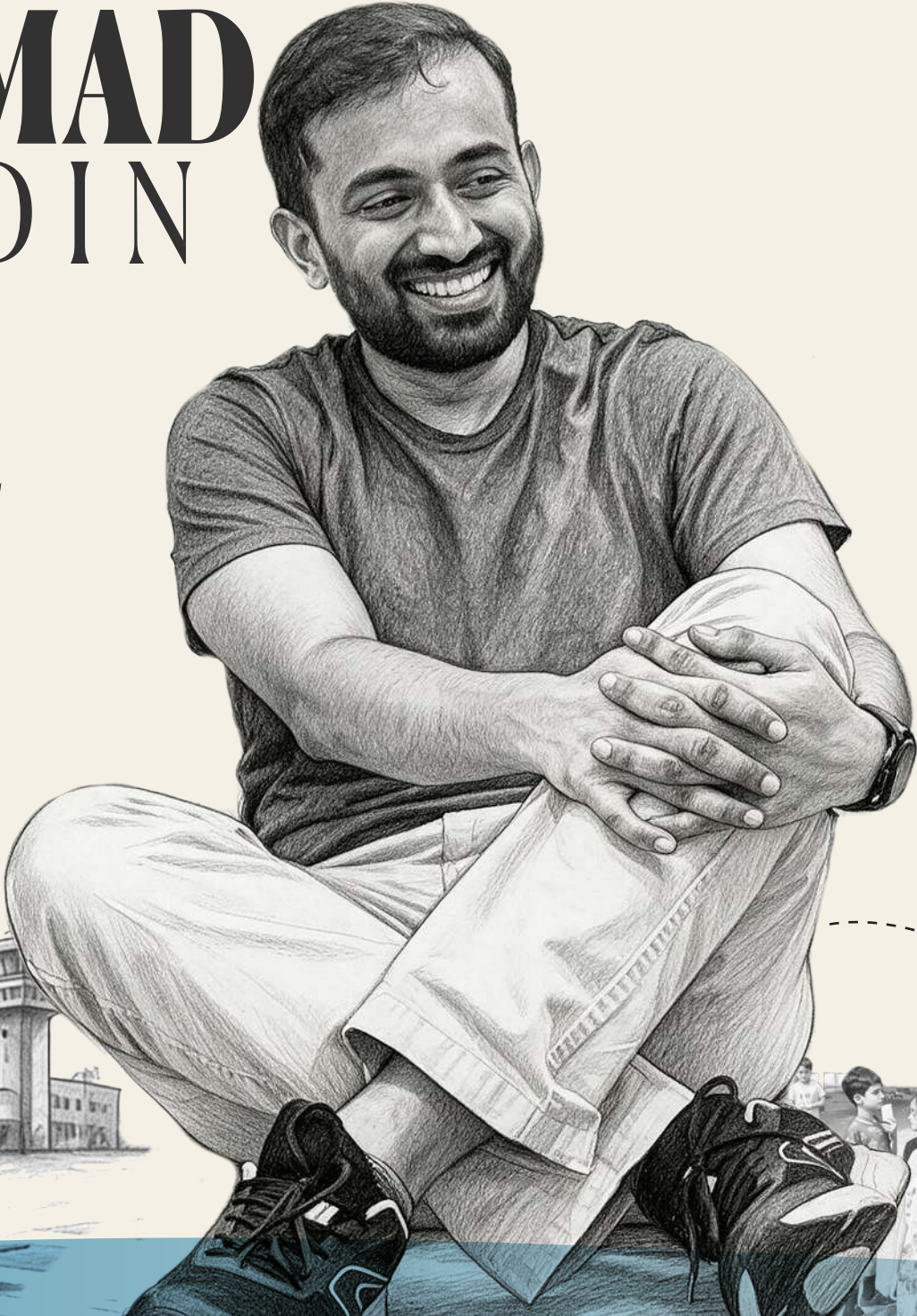
400+ minds, median age just under 30

Balance is paramount

The OG Air Quality Decision Support System, also defensive about Hyderabad Dum Biryani

MOHAMMAD RAFIUDDIN

“WE REJECT DIRTY WATER
ON SIGHT, BUT WE BREATHE
POLLUTED AIR AND SAY
NOTHING.”



Mohammad Rafiuddin started out in Hyderabad as a mechanical engineer—on track, he jokes, for a life on the factory floor. But a PhD in atmospheric sciences turned him skyward. He helped build a fog forecasting system for Bengaluru’s Kempegowda airport, mapping droplets to plane delays.

That obsession with systems—how they work, where they fail, and how they affect people—has driven his journey ever since. From fluid dynamics to particulate matter in the air, from weather models to satellite feeds, Rafi followed big data wherever it asked the next hard question.

At The Council, those questions got sharper.

First came renewable energy. Then crop residue burning. Then real-time pollution mapping including building an Air Quality Decision Support System for Thane and helping Delhi’s government pinpoint its pollution sources through big-data analysis. Over four years, Rafi’s work found its pulse in air quality—where the science of the skies meets needs on the ground.

The freedom to fail and the room to rebuild. The tolerance for complexity. These, for Rafi, are not just hallmarks of CEEW—they’re how science should work. “If your science forgets people, it becomes technocracy,” he says. “We build tools, but we also ask: who uses them? And who gets left out?”

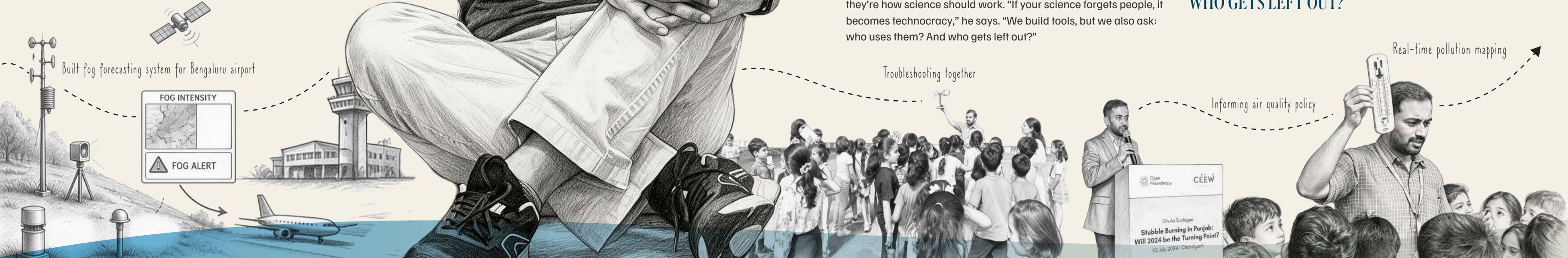
“We’ve gone from being commentators to informing air quality policy,” he continues. “That responsibility means knowing our research can shape decisions that affect real lives.”

What he brings to the job goes beyond technical depth to a way of working that straddles scholarly camaraderie with rigour. Rafi’s desk has long become a commons: researchers pull up chairs to troubleshoot broken code, test an idea, or just talk through a hunch. “It’s not mentorship,” he smiles. “It’s the kind of collaborative mess that makes a good lab.”

Beyond the models that crunch thousands of numbers every day, Rafi maps other worlds too. He reads speculative fiction, reconstructs Delhi’s forgotten histories from old maps, and gets curious about how people lived 10,000 years ago. “Good science and good fiction do the same thing,” he says. “They ask: What if?”

At CEEW, he’s doing just that. **With care, with curiosity, and with a community that never stops asking questions.**

**“IF YOUR SCIENCE FORGETS PEOPLE, IT
BECOMES TECHNOCRACY. WE BUILD TOOLS,
BUT WE ALSO ASK WHO USES THEM? AND
WHO GETS LEFT OUT?”**

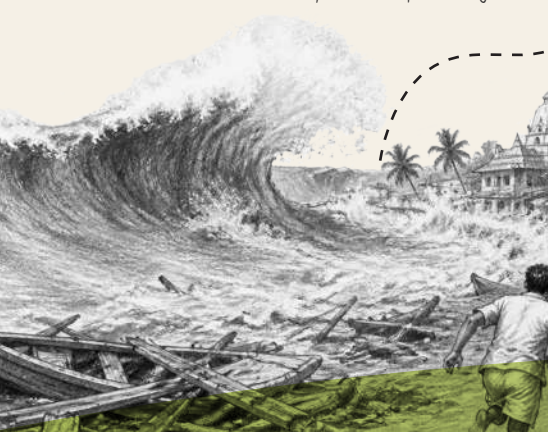


The Strategic Glue

GANESH DILEEP

“WHAT IF THE
INSTITUTION IS
THE INNOVATION?
THAT’S THE BET I
SIGNED UP FOR.”

A childhood memory that shaped things



Ganesh Dileep was six when the 2004 tsunami struck the coastal town of Thiruvananthapuram. Sheltering at a relative’s house, they remember their three-year-old sister asking, “Will our house still be there?”

That moment seeded a quest to understand resilience—from coordinating student-led projects across dozens of countries, tracing data and narratives from panchayat floors to policy tables, to studying development at IIT Madras. How do you turn lived experience into lasting change?

At The Council, that question met its match.

“By my final year at IIT Madras, and in my early roles after, it felt like someone would mention CEEW by the third sentence of any serious climate conversation,” they recall. “It seemed like a rare institutional experiment—a place that fused Indian lived experiences with world-class analytical rigour”

By 2022, when Ganesh joined, the foundational lift of The Council had already been done. Sustaining it was the next challenge: to scale with integrity, without losing trust, depth, or coherence.

“THE JOB IS TO HELP OUR SMARTEST MINDS TACKLE THE MOST COMPLEX PROBLEMS FACING INDIA AND THE WORLD, WITHOUT GETTING CAUGHT IN THE BASICS.”

Ganesh jumped straight into it: helping coordinate research across teams while also working on the ground with the Energy Transitions team as a research analyst. That wide-and-deep entry would soon sharpen into a role at the heart of it all. As Chief of Staff today, even before they turned 30, Ganesh holds a wide-angle view now.

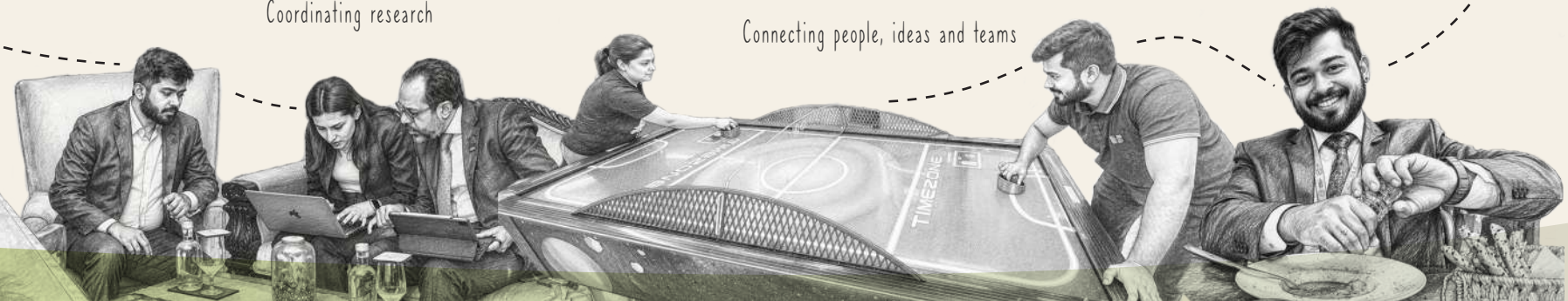
“The job is to help our smartest minds tackle the most complex problems facing India and the world—without getting caught in the basics,” Ganesh says. “That’s how we continue to stay intellectually independent, publicly trusted, and deeply human.”

On the job, Ganesh is in constant motion—zipping between teams, tuning into quiet cues, and zooming across floors. They’ve recently taken to dapper blue and grey suits, and their electric scooter is often among the last to leave the building.

Their mother—a practising lawyer who always made space for pro bono cases— had embodied a simple truth: **purpose and sustainability can coexist.**

Coordinating research

Connecting people, ideas and teams



Doesn't just go with the flow, reshapes it

NITIN BASSI

“WATER FLOWS FIRST,
ONLY THEN CAN ENERGY,
RESILIENCE, AND
SUSTAINABILITY FOLLOW.”

River basins and wetlands



Some careers are built project by project. Nitin Bassi's has been built river by river and basin by basin.

He began not as a water specialist but as a botanist, tracing how living systems connect. That curiosity widened into a near-two-decade career across India's waterscapes—river basins, wetlands, irrigation networks, and city systems.

Before joining The Council, he spent fifteen years rooted in field research—contributing to the India–EU Water Partnership, supporting national task forces on basin planning and water quality, and writing on water governance. That work carried him across the country: chasing aquifers in Rajasthan, mapping flows in the Gangetic plains, studying wetlands in Odisha, and walking canals in the Godavari and Krishna basins.

The journey also revealed a gap: research too often stayed with specialists. “It didn't always find its way into public or political imagination,” he says. At CEEW, that lesson found a new stage. “Here, evidence is not allowed to sit on shelves. It travels. It shapes dialogues at G20 tables, it informs ministries, and gets debated in city halls.”

For Nitin, the story of water is never only about scarcity, but how cities learn to live with it. In Thane, his team helped craft a Flood Risk Management Action Plan from half a century of rainfall records, turning raw data into early warnings and safer wards.

Treated used water reuse



Water solutions



The same city then launched India's first Treated Used Water Reuse Plan, reimagining wastewater for construction, cooling, and care for local water bodies. Ahmedabad and Varanasi are next.

That range also carries an unexpected playfulness: he is a passionate singer, quick with humour, always game for a last-minute city consult or an office skit. That mix of seriousness and levity makes him a bridge—between data and people, research and policy, India and international forums.

Across these efforts runs a single thread: India produces enough treated used water to irrigate millions of hectares, yet stigma and distrust still stand in the way. “The science is clear,” Nitin says. “We reject reuse not because it doesn't work, but because people don't always trust it.”

That is why his team works with everyone: ministries and farmers' groups, municipal engineers and plumbers' associations. Because without trust, even the best-designed systems cannot flow. And **without water, there is no energy, no resilience, no sustainability.**

**“THE SCIENCE IS CLEAR. THE REAL BARRIERS
ARE SOCIAL. WE REJECT WATER REUSE NOT
BECAUSE IT DOESN'T WORK, BUT BECAUSE
PEOPLE DON'T ALWAYS TRUST IT.”**

An anthropologist with a seat at the policy table

CHRIS TERESA VARGHESE

“DON’T JUST SAY BETTER
PUBLIC TRANSPORT HELPS
WOMEN. ASK HOW.”

Curiosity for human behaviour



Chris hit the ground running at CEEW with a field trip to Amritsar in 2022. She and her colleagues at the mobility team had been studying an ambitious policy for the city to scrap diesel autos and get a subsidy on electric ones. But conversations with more than 50 auto drivers showed why the shift was slow. “What if the battery dies mid-route?” one asked. “How many rides will I lose in a day?” another worried.

Chris and the team tested some of those fears: could an electric auto go from the Golden Temple to the Wagah border? The vehicle not only could — but it came back with charge to spare, quiet and steady. A myth was broken. Passengers also told her how different it felt to sit inside an electric auto, without the rattle and fumes that came with diesel.

That mix of listening, talking and testing has marked her journey. With a background in psychology and anthropology, Chris brought an instinct for asking questions about human behaviour and belonging. At The Council, that curiosity became participatory research on mobility: helping drivers test drive e-autos at melas, explaining features, and talking to policymakers and loan-givers alike.

“Listening is also data,” she insists.

It was listening that exposed a deeper gap: women auto drivers could not claim subsidies, since they owned no diesel vehicles to scrap. Chris and her colleagues worked with women to design a way in—through self-help groups, the National Urban Livelihoods Mission, and community savings.

Testing, listening, breaking myths



Policy dialogues



By February 2024, over 200 women gathered at a city convening in Amritsar. Policy responded: a 90 per cent subsidy was extended, and Amritsar’s streets welcomed a new colour: pink e-autos. “Don’t just say better public transport helps women,” Chris says. “Ask how. Ask who benefits, and who doesn’t.”

A qualitative researcher by training, she taught herself coding over two years at CEEW to analyse surveys, marrying transcripts with tables, and conversations with counts. “Policy needs both: numbers and narratives.”

At The Council, Chris finds kinship in colleagues who live what they study—cycling to work, tracing transit routes abroad, spotting the smallest design choices that shape access. She carries that same instinct home: baking elaborate cakes, turning a painting into a puzzle, stress-testing horror films to see what fears still hold. Work or play, it is all practice in listening, trying, and connecting.

For her, the EV transition goes beyond vehicles. It is about connection and dignity: **who gets to drive, who feels safe to ride, whose work the city makes room for.**

“THE EV TRANSITION GOES BEYOND VEHICLES.
IT’S ABOUT DIGNITY AND CONNECTION. FOR
THAT, LISTENING IS ALSO DATA.”

Inclusive mobility

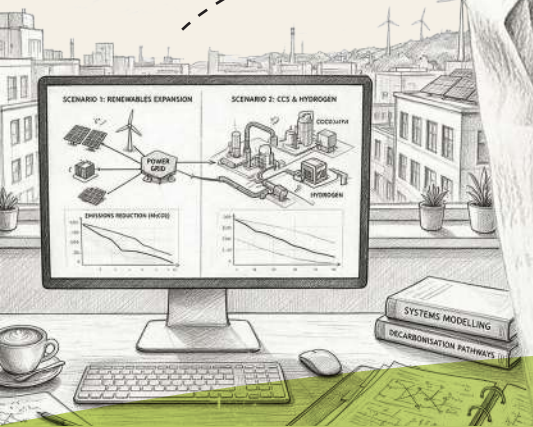


Has modelled 18+ futures for India

PALLAVI DAS

“I’VE LIVED IN THE EAST,
SOUTH, NORTH AND WEST.
IMAGINING MULTIPLE
FUTURES FEELS
NATURAL.”

Modelling multiple scenarios



For Pallavi Das, science often begins when the city sleeps. Models run through the night, silent loops of code sketching possible tomorrows. By morning, she checks results, rewrites assumptions, and reruns scenarios. It’s a rhythm that has shaped her four-plus years across two stints at CEEW.

“An energy system modeller,” she laughs, “is a physicist, a coder, an observer, a troubleshooter, and infinitely patient.”

That patience was forged early in Pondicherry. In classrooms without exams, that tolerance for trial became the grammar of her modelling. “Multiple scenarios feel natural to me,” she says. “You don’t fear uncertainty—you work with it.”

At The Council, Pallavi and her colleagues adapted the Global Change Analysis Model (GCAM) for India and later extended it to states. The team has helped chart net-zero transition pathways for Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and is still working with more states. The model is fed with reams of data on energy use, technologies, prices, efficiencies, and lifestyles—and it shows how choices ripple through emissions and the economy. For instance, it can project how shifting city commuters to e-buses over the next decade would cut fuel demand, reduce pollution, and create new jobs.

One by one, governments began seeing not just growth or emissions, but the choices they had.

“We kept showing up,” she recalls. “And over time, we were able to help them think differently, about how decarbonisation could drive development, not delay it.”

Equity, access, dignity, and connection



A game of choices and trade-offs

18 futures. One better India

Today, these pathways let policymakers weigh futures: EV adoption, rooftop solar, and investment needs. “Modelling is never about numbers. It’s about insight,” she says. “This is a trailer for the energy system, a glimpse of choices still open.”

The work has expanded with the team she helped build: eleven of them are modellers, many of whom she has helped mentor. They’re now also tackling industrial decarbonisation, water-energy nexus, carbon markets, and macroeconomics—all grounded in equity. She remembers how her first direct report was a shock: “Suddenly you realise: you’re not just learning anymore. You’re teaching.”

Through it all, Pallavi remains grounded and constantly fascinated by her life. In Pondicherry, she found calm in ocean walks; in Mumbai, she’s discovering the monsoon and street food while pursuing her PhD, where she now explores how India’s net-zero journey could reshape GDP, jobs, and investments. For her, India’s decarbonisation is a marathon. Net-zero is a long game of choices and trade-offs. “Short-term goals matter, but if you only chase the short term, you lock yourself in. **The long game is where you win.**”

“MODELLING IS NEVER ABOUT NUMBERS. IT’S ABOUT INSIGHT. THIS IS A TRAILER FOR THE ENERGY SYSTEM, A GLIMPSE OF CHOICES STILL OPEN.”



CEO of the Calvin and Hobbes Fan Club

ARUNABHA GHOSH

“INDIA WAS THE ONLY PLACE FROM WHERE AN INSTITUTION LIKE CEEW COULD EMERGE.”

For many of Arunabha Ghosh's peers in the West, returning to India to build a think tank was an abstract ideal—something you discussed, not bet your life savings on.

Early on, he decided not to leverage contacts at Oxford, Princeton, or the UNDP for seed funding. No shortcuts. “I am throwing away my crutches,” he told his wife. “CEEW needed to be independent and build its credibility from the ground up”.



On day one of The Council in 2010, a carpenter helped him assemble a desk adapted for his carpal tunnel, in a borrowed one-room office in Gurgaon. The first 10-day plan was written out on a whiteboard, beside a *Calvin and Hobbes* strip.

Yet the ambition was clear: build a world-class institution from India and build careers in public policy.

Within two months, CEEW's first climate finance report shaped debates in New Delhi, Brussels, and Washington DC, followed by the Maharashtra-Guangdong partnership. The Working Group on India and Global Governance laid early groundwork for India's G20 role a decade later.

“The early years focused on building research credibility and understanding how policy is shaped, from the capital to global negotiations,” Arunabha reflects. He describes an almost meditative precision: peeling back complexity to find clarity.

“The idea of strategy is often misunderstood,” he tells us. “It is not retrospective rationalisation. It is a deliberate choice – a willingness to try something and fail.”

That also meant ownership of the hardest calls. To stay the course without adequate funding. To refuse to let any colleagues go during the pandemic. To let go of big-ticket initiatives and partners that compromised on principles.

This also meant confronting the horsemen of public policy: “There's ageism, sexism, classism, racism, nepotism, and plagiarism,” he says. A farmer's daughter should be able to work with a global banker. “In the setting of global agendas, our lived realities must be reflected.”

Through it all, what gives Arunabha the most confidence is his colleagues' work. “I can speak at an international platform with conviction because my colleagues are solving challenges on the ground – devising energy access for a rural enterprise or flood prevention for a small town.”

Today, CEEW is nearly 400-people strong and supporting 21 states. Arunabha was also appointed Special Envoy for COP30, representing South Asia, tasked with bringing the region's actions and challenges to the global stage.

When he finds the time, he lives the life he has exactly worked to build and sustain: he dances, runs marathons, bakes, sings, and rides horses with his daughter Nandita. **But he does not promise blueprints.**

“CEEW MUST KEEP ITS EYE OVER THE HORIZON TO ANTICIPATE THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE YET TO BE ASKED. WE DO NOT HAVE A MONOPOLY ON THE TRUTH. WE MUST INVEST IN BUILDING TRUST AND BUILDING BRIDGES.”

From a one-room office

To informing policies

To shaping global agendas

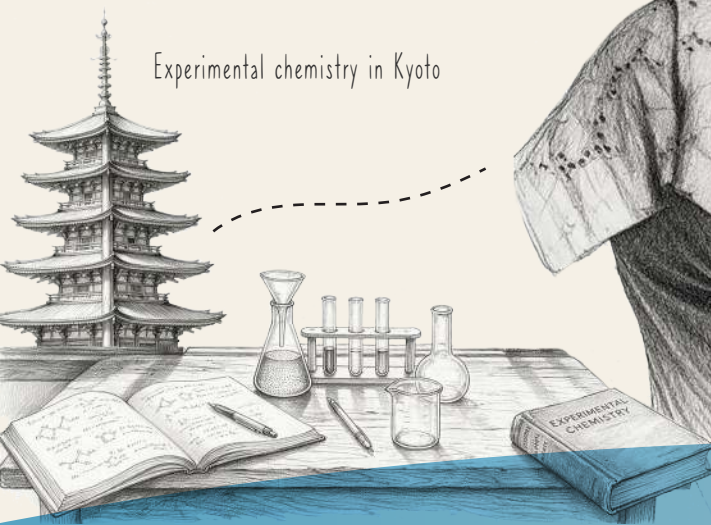
The journey continues...



Seeing silver linings in every solar panel

AKANKSHA TYAGI

“EVERY SOLAR PANEL
WILL FAIL ONE DAY.
THAT’S NOT A CRISIS,
IT’S AN OPPORTUNITY.”



Experimental chemistry in Kyoto



Sunlight had always been Akanksha Tyagi’s element. She began as an experimental chemist studying in Kyoto, designing photocatalysts that could split water or fuel new reactions. “It wasn’t alien when people started speaking of solar modules or batteries a decade ago,” she recalls.

Returning to India in 2018, while waiting for her postdoc to begin, restlessness steered her, almost by accident, into CEEW. “I didn’t even know what a discom was,” she laughs. Within a year, she was delivering a masterclass to seasoned utility veterans, explaining a rooftop solar valuation tool. “I was terrified,” she admits. “But steadied by the fact that the tool was ours—I knew it inside out.”

From there, the arc widened: Calculating India’s first clean energy jobs estimate (then projecting one million jobs from 100 GW of solar by 2022) that policymakers still quote, and strategies for batteries and critical minerals. But the more she worked on solar, the more she wondered: what happens when today’s megawatts become tomorrow’s waste?

That question led her back to a stubborn idea on recycling waste that she and her team pitched as a “startup” within CEEW: “Every solar panel will fail one day. That’s not a crisis: it’s value waiting to be recovered.” There’s silver, silicon, and other precious materials inside every panel. What began as a proposal is now a full programme on circular supply chains.

“THE CLEAN ENERGY SECTOR MUST BE THE FIRST TO GO FULLY CIRCULAR, CLEAN AT SOURCE, RESPONSIBLE TO THE END. OTHERWISE, WHAT TRANSITION ARE WE EVEN TALKING ABOUT?”

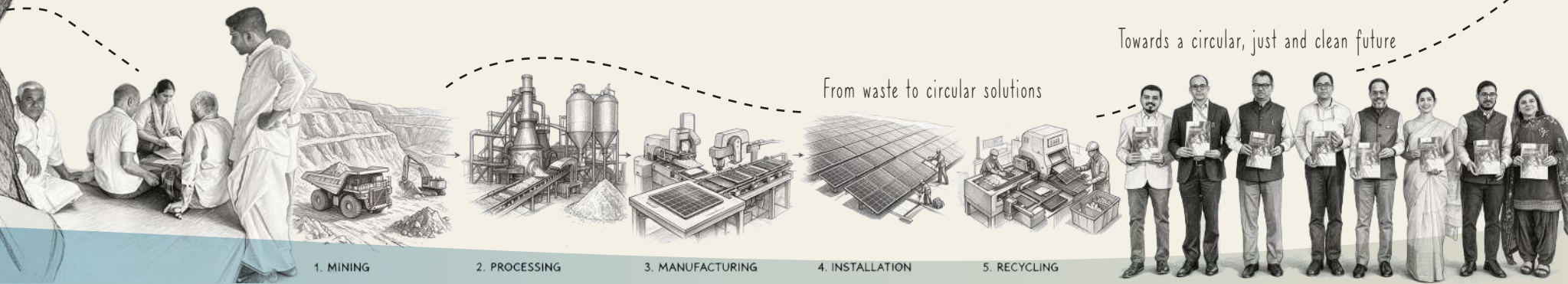
The same instinct soon stretched further: responsibility. Stricter audits for environment regulators, resilience for mines and materials, and social trust for state utilities. In Karnataka, that trust went further: the state authorised her team to ask villages near solar projects the hardest questions—who took the land, what compensation was given, and whether people felt heard.

“That was monumental,” she reflects. “It showed we could speak for science, but also for trust.”

The discipline behind that tact was minted in Japan. As the first Indian in a dorm of 70 nationalities, she learned punctuality wasn’t odd, difference was normal, and sometimes not over-reading bias keeps you moving. Kyoto gave her patience, confidence, and a love for table tennis, lasagna, and Agatha Christie.

Parenthood is sharpening the rest: “My son thinks and answers in first principles. Why do we complicate what is simple?”

That clarity makes her a steady voice in rooms that often second-guess women. “Once credibility is built, the questions change,” she smiles. Inside CEEW’s growing floors, she now mentors nine colleagues, nudging them to ask, to show up, to be seen. Her vision is uncompromising: the clean energy sector must be the first to go fully circular—clean at source, responsible to the end. **“Otherwise, what transition are we even talking about?”**



Towards a circular, just and clean future

From waste to circular solutions

1. MINING

2. PROCESSING

3. MANUFACTURING

4. INSTALLATION

5. RECYCLING



Bending steel, Building trust

DEEPAK YADAV

“HARD-TO-ABATE
DOESN'T MEAN
IMPOSSIBLE. IT JUST
MEANS THE WORK HAS
TO BE HARDER.”

Helped build India's first MW scale
solar thermal plant in Gurugram



Deepak Yadav began his career on the ground, helping build India's first megawatt-scale solar thermal power plant in Gurgaon with a small crew. He joined The Council seven years ago with a PhD from IIT Bombay, choosing to trade pure engineering for a stake in proving that even the hardest industries could change course.

But this meant staring down India's hardest-to-abate sectors. Steel, fertilisers, cement: so central to everyday life, yet so dependent on fossil fuels. In 2021, the team released the Greening Steel report, now archived in the US Library of Congress, making a pragmatic case: use natural gas as a bridge while building towards cleaner alternatives. Validation came when major players announced millions of tonnes of new gas-based steel capacity.

With the Ministry of Steel, Deepak and his colleagues spent three years shaping a 436-page roadmap that led to India's first green steel taxonomy. A government-approved yardstick for what counts as “green” in steelmaking. “The definitions we helped coin,” he says, “ensure investors, companies, and the public speak the same language.”

Back when he started, however, the idea of green hydrogen—a clean fuel made from water and renewable power—still felt remote. “I remember thinking this is too expensive. Why are we even talking about it?” he recalls. Excitement outpaced reality for a while but the promise is returning.

Greening steel report archived in US library



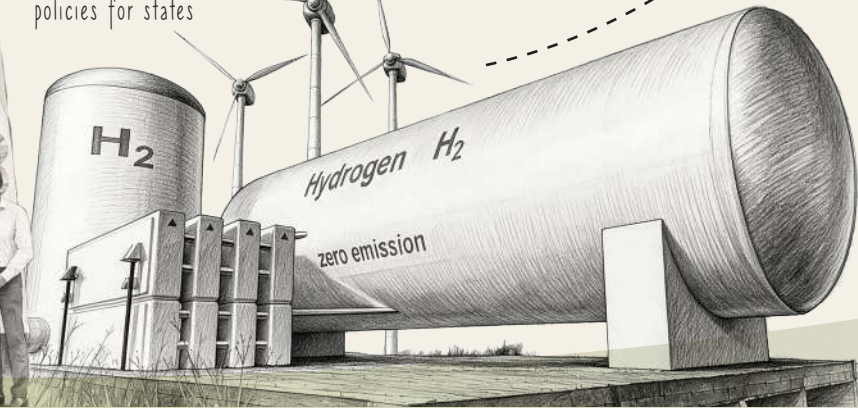
Recent auctions for green ammonia—made from green hydrogen and used in fertilisers—cleared at record-low prices, finally proving that clean alternatives can finally compete with fossil-based imports. Meanwhile the team has already helped states like Rajasthan and Gujarat draft green hydrogen policies. When the fuel is ready at scale it will have rules, buyers, and a path to market. “Transitions need pace,” he adds. “But they can't come with shocks. You go steady, you go long.”

Through it all, Deepak has grown with the institution. What began as a three-person unit is now one of the strongest industrial sustainability teams. He mentors younger colleagues the way his mentors once nudged him, insisting on rigour, and on speaking plainly.

Deepak still runs every morning, meditates, cooks, and tries to keep up with his reading. “**Even steel bends when you apply pressure at the right point,**” he smiles. “**That's policy too.**”

“EVEN STEEL BENDS WHEN YOU APPLY
PRESSURE AT THE RIGHT POINT. THAT'S
POLICY TOO.”

A cleaner, stronger, industrial future
Green hydrogen policies for states



LHS must always equal RHS

ABHISHEK GARG

“THE FUTURE OF AN
INSTITUTION IS WRITTEN
IN THE CREDIBILITY IT
BUILDS.”

Building trust



For Abhishek Garg, finance is far from endless ledgers and Excel sheets alone. It is the quiet architecture that keeps a think tank steady through the daily hum of research, fieldwork, policy, and communications.

When he joined in 2019, The Council had just 50 people. Today, it has around 400. Behind that growth, behind the scale of projects and the trust of donors, runs an invisible current: clean records, reliable systems, and credible audits. “What you do matters only if people trust the ground it stands on,” he says. “That trust is what finance protects.”

From the start, he knew this was about more than accounting. In his final interview round, Arunabha asked him not about balance sheets but: What is institution building? That question stayed. Finance, he realised, is also culture: systems that are transparent, processes that are fair, and audits that prove accountability. Those foundations allow CEEW to keep shaping South Asia’s energy transition through evidence, action on the ground, and global engagement.

Colleagues see his calm first: a steadiness honed over years of freelancing with non-profits, building compliance systems, and from a childhood lived across states like Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Assam as the son of a paramilitary officer, where uncertainty was normal. “Finance can’t afford panic,” he says. “It is about anticipation. You build for storms, not just sunshine.”

Protecting The Council from uncertainty



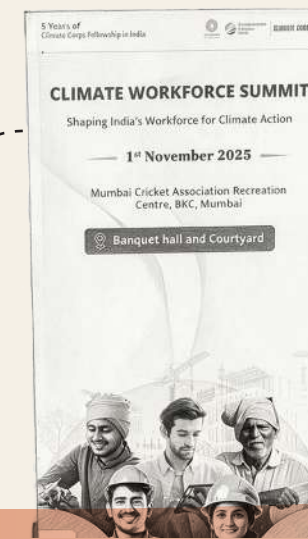
For him, finance is the backbone: every reliable process is an act of freedom, freeing colleagues to focus on ideas and impact.

Between storms, he’s reached across silos to help build systems for calmer days. Payroll cycles that once took three days now run in three hours. Automations replaced manual Excel sheets. Appraisals, audits, and monthly time-sheets found their flow. He was also part of the team that built the new ISID office, which he still calls “our baby.”

Outside CEEW’s office, he builds in gentler ways: badminton rallies in his society, composing poetry with his wife Pratibha, mouth organ tunes he hopes to pick up again. Every trip he takes—at least two a year—is a reminder that life, too, is architecture. “Don’t be serious,” he grins. “**Enjoy life as it comes.**”

“WHAT YOU DO MATTERS ONLY IF PEOPLE
TRUST THE GROUND IT STANDS ON. THAT
TRUST IS WHAT FINANCE PROTECTS.”

Sincere not serious!



Current affairs expert

PRATEEK AGGARWAL

“I’VE SOLD POWER, REGULATED IT, PRICED IT. NOW I AM WORKING TO CLEAN IT.”



In the long relay of India’s power transition, Prateek Aggarwal has run almost every leg: from selling electricity to informing reforms that will decide how it’s made, moved, and measured. He began in the field, selling electricity from coal-based plants to industrial clusters across Gujarat.

It was technical, transactional work, but it sparked a bigger question: India’s grid was coal-heavy, fragmented, and strained — how could it change without breaking?

That curiosity led him to the Uttar Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission, where he analysed tariff petitions and advised on reforms that shaped the state’s power prices. “Regulation taught me that every number hides a human,” he says. “You can’t design policy if you don’t understand who it touches.”

He joined The Council in 2018, just as CEEW began extending its presence beyond Delhi to the states where transitions are playing out. Lucknow became the testing ground — and Prateek, one of its first two team members. “If I had known it was a 2BHK, I might not have joined,” he laughs. But that modest start — two rooms, one kettle, and an open door — soon grew into something much larger: a model for how research could live closer to reality and scale reforms. “Most policy happens in Delhi,” he says. “But power is a state subject. If you want to matter, you have to sit with the states.”

That proximity shaped everything that followed. CEEW’s power work was no longer parachuting in with policy memos from Delhi; it was co-writing them with regulators and utilities across Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu. In Rajasthan, he and his team helped inform the state’s first Energy Transition Roadmap 2050 — a plan built with 16 departments around one table, now a blueprint for others. Today, CEEW actively works with state departments across 21 states, bridging the gap between national ambition and local action.

Today, he’s driving one of CEEW’s next bets: corporate clean-energy procurement. The goal is simple but urgent: to make clean power not just greener, but cheaper and more reliable for the industries that drive India’s growth. It is a bridge between the once-competing interests of industries and DISCOMs to make renewable power both viable and profitable. “We’re past the blame game now,” he says. “Everyone realises the future grid must work for all.”

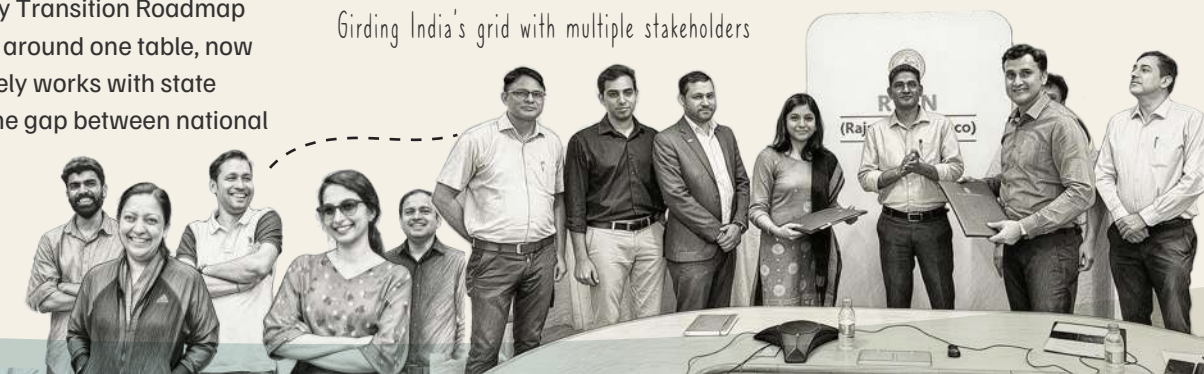
In the office, colleagues know him as a patient mentor who quietly connects dots between teams, helping them think together rather than apart. That balance between engineering and empathy, ambition and realism also runs through his life otherwise.

He begins most days in quiet reflection, reads widely at night, and tells his son 20 bedtime story variations before sleep. “He never lets me repeat one,” he smiles. “That’s a good reminder for policy too. Some problems may look familiar, **but the solution must always be local.**”

“WE’RE PAST THE BLAME GAME ON CORPORATE CLEAN ENERGY PROCUREMENT. EVERYONE REALISES THE FUTURE GRID MUST WORK FOR ALL.”

At all power tables, centre and state

Girding India’s grid with multiple stakeholders

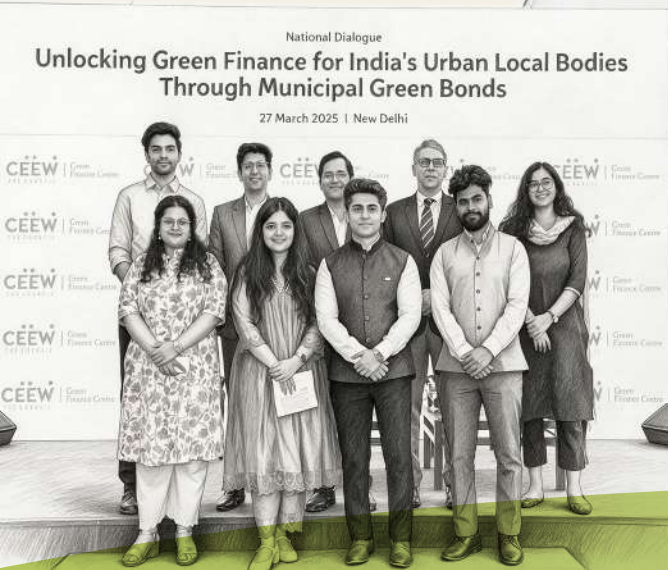


Markets, music, and making sense of climate finance

RIDDHI MUKHERJEE

“EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT
CLIMATE AMBITION.
WE WORK ON HOW TO
FUND IT.”

Brings sustainability to spreadsheets



From her desk in Delhi, Riddhi follows the money behind India's sustainability transition. Her spreadsheets track markets, bonds, investors, and policies, feeding into a handbook that captures the pulse of India's renewables every quarter.

She joined The Council in 2023 after citing its work in her master's thesis from TERI on just transitions. “I remember quoting Gagan Sidhu's paper on India's ten-trillion-dollar climate finance gap,” she laughs. “Now I work directly with him.” She found that age mattered less here than ideas, if you had a question worth asking, you would have help chasing it.

India's climate ambitions have never lacked vision—net zero by 2070, clean power, resilient cities—but meeting them demands capital, scale, and credibility. For Riddhi and her colleagues at CEEW's Green Finance Centre (GFC), that's where the work begins.

They now help build frameworks that give structure, and sometimes language, to India's green economy. GFC's Market Handbook became her initiation into the world of renewables and money. Every data point told a story: how renewables were overtaking coal additions, how foreign investors were betting big on India's clean energy market, and how the bond market was warming to solar and wind.

Earlier last year, those trends culminated in an eightfold surge in foreign direct investment since FY21 — touching a record USD 3.4 billion in FY25. “It's like a report card for India's transition,” she says. “The grades keep changing every quarter and for the better.”

From there, the questions she and the team explore have only deepened: How could cities finance their climate needs? How could corporations disclose their emissions honestly? How could India attract global investors while remaining aligned to regional priorities?

The journey of her team mirrors her own — from the Centre for Energy Finance to the Green Finance Centre — expanding its lens from energy to water, cities, and resilience. “You cannot finance climate action in silos,” she says. “It's one balance sheet.” What excites her most is how quickly ideas move here: in just two years, she's watched so many move up the ladder. “It's wild,” she says. “Things that were slides in a deck are now schemes in the field.”

A trained Hindustani classical musician and avid basketball player, she finds rhythm in data: the way one column echoes another, the way balance creates harmony. Outside work, she sings, devours thrillers in one sitting, and hunts for Delhi's best food lanes.

For a young researcher, the thrill is in being heard—and in seeing your analysis travel beyond your desk into ministries and budgets. She's pragmatic, not cynical: “In the long run, we're all dead,” she jokes, quoting Keynes. Then she pauses. **“But in the long run, markets do correct, if you give them direction.”**

**“YOU CANNOT FINANCE CLIMATE ACTION IN
SILOS. IT'S ONE BALANCE SHEET.”**

From slide decks to schemes in action



Just wants walkable, inclusive cities

SOURAV DHAR

“MOBILITY IS A TEST OF INCLUSION, IT SHOWS WHO A CITY MOVES, AND WHO IT LEAVES BEHIND.”

Making public transport aspirational



Sourav Dhar has spent 13 years reading cities through how they move. From bus depots to policy tables, he sees mobility as a measure of aspiration and access.

He began his journey supporting Karnataka's cities at the Directorate of Urban Land Transport in Bengaluru, helping design India's first city-scale Public Bicycle Sharing system in Mysuru and planning non-motorised transport corridors. Over the next decade, he worked with government officials across Bengaluru, Mysuru, and other cities in Karnataka, translating ideas into bus lanes, pedestrian-friendly streets, and multimodal mobility hubs.

That experience gave Sourav a front-row seat to how Indian cities move and why they stall. He saw what happens when infrastructure arrives without governance, or when convenience outweighs clean air. “Electrification is important,” he says, “but we also need to make buses reliable, streets walkable, and introduce policies that shift people towards public transport. Otherwise, we'll have cleaner air but even more traffic.”

He joined The Council in 2022 to turn those field lessons into frameworks. His on-ground experience met data and design in a team helping cities rethink mobility: cleaner fuels, yes, but also better systems, fairer streets, and smarter governance.

In Uttar Pradesh, they studied how accessible bus stops could shift commuter habits. In Delhi, he contributed to strategies by national agencies to reduce transport emissions. In Punjab, the

team is shaping bus routes and charging plans for 450 electric buses. Their e-bus scheduling tools for medium-sized cities are set to guide how cities across India electrify their new fleets responsibly.

For Sourav, public transport is more than an environmental question, it's a social one. “To get people to shift from private vehicles, we must first give them reliable public transport options,” he says. Mobility decides who can reach work, who breathes clean air, and who gets left waiting on the footpath.

He calls buses India's most democratic vehicle. “You can't build a city around cars,” he adds. “You build it around people.” That belief shapes everything — his research, his ongoing PhD on public transport route planning, and his mentorship at CEEW, where colleagues describe him as calm, steady, and patient.

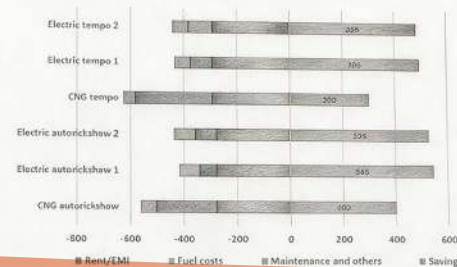
Outside work, he follows Indian league football, dotes on his dog Cookie, and still plans his travel around East Bengal matches: proof that the planner in him never stops optimising routes.

“The best cities,” he says, “are those that move their people without leaving anyone behind.”

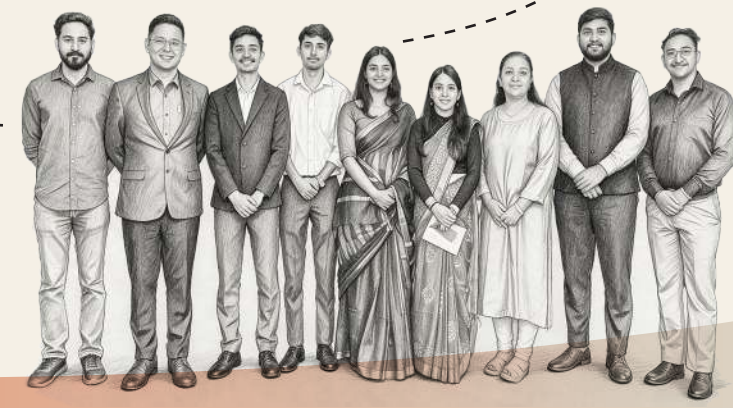
“TO GET PEOPLE TO SHIFT FROM PRIVATE VEHICLES, WE MUST FIRST GIVE THEM RELIABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPTIONS.”

Cities should care for people more than cars

Transition of existing vehicles to electric variant can increase the savings of auto-drivers by 31-35% and tempo drivers by 60-63%



Where policy meets perseverance



The firewall behind the think tank

AJIT MISHRA

“EVEN IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, DECENTRALISATION BUILDS RESILIENCE.”

IT is foundation, not a fix!



Ajit Mishra's work rarely courts the spotlight. But it powers the research and keeps the data safe. He holds up the virtual walls and bridges that let evidence travel from field surveys to climate models for 2050.

A virus crashed his family's first computer in 2006. Most would panic; Ajit spent hours finding it. That curiosity led him to work as virus researcher for years, cataloguing thousands of samples for McAfee, Symantec and Microsoft, learning how threats evolve and how they can be stopped. But the thrill of chasing bugs eventually gave way to something steadier. "I wanted my work to matter to people," he says.

He joined The Council in 2022, just as the organisation moved offices. His first mandate was a foundation, not a fix: fresh internet lines, secure servers, reliable systems for a team that has since steadily grown to nearly 400. Protect research data. Enable collaboration. Keep institutional memory safe. "In IT, centralisation gives you control," he admits. "But here I learned that decentralisation builds resilience."

From there, the muscle was built quietly. SOPs and explainer videos gave colleagues the tools to solve problems themselves. Phishing drills became a kind of office sport: at first, spam links and fake emails fooled many; with each rerun, fewer took the bait. Once, his team even scattered compromised pen drives to test reflexes. "You don't build security with jargon," he says. "You build it with practice."

For him, IT is always hardware and software in tandem: laptops, cables, servers that work every day and the habits that keep them trustworthy. This frees researchers to model rooftop solar, analyse air quality, or draft net-zero pathways without worrying too much about downtime. "Strong IT isn't invisible because it hides," he quips. "It's invisible because it works."

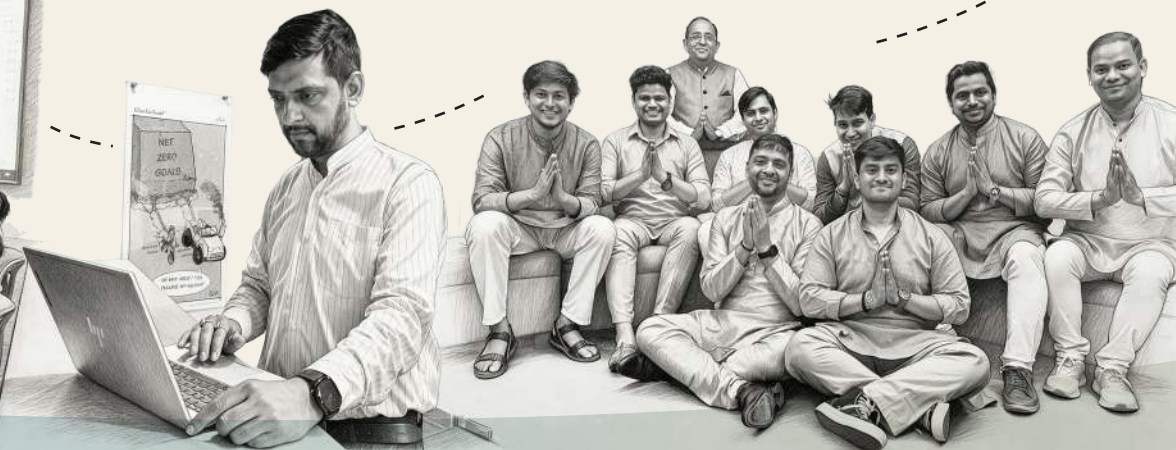
Beyond servers and systems, Ajit cooks for his family, teaches math to children, rereads his favourite books, and dabbles in shayari. His daughters are readers and storytellers in their own right: one spinning tales about artificial intelligence, the other filling notebooks with ghost stories. "**They remind me,**" he smiles, "**that imagination is also infrastructure.**"

“STRONG 'IT' ISN'T INVISIBLE BECAUSE IT HIDES. IT'S INVISIBLE BECAUSE IT WORKS.”

Software + hardware
+ curiosity =
enablers of all
solutions



Making networks safer!



UNOFFICIAL CEEW!

100% Red
Pie chart of Samal Ji's T-shirts

452
All time high of quick commerce deliveries in a day



4
Number of jackets per square meter of MoU signing

8278179287
Happy birthday wishes on CEEW's WhatsApp group

8
varieties of fruits offered across the year, every Tuesday

4
Average number of report versions before print



29.8
The team's median age, up from 27

128
Cups of coffee consumed in a day

7
Honest average number of report versions before print

0
Meeting rooms available on a Tuesday

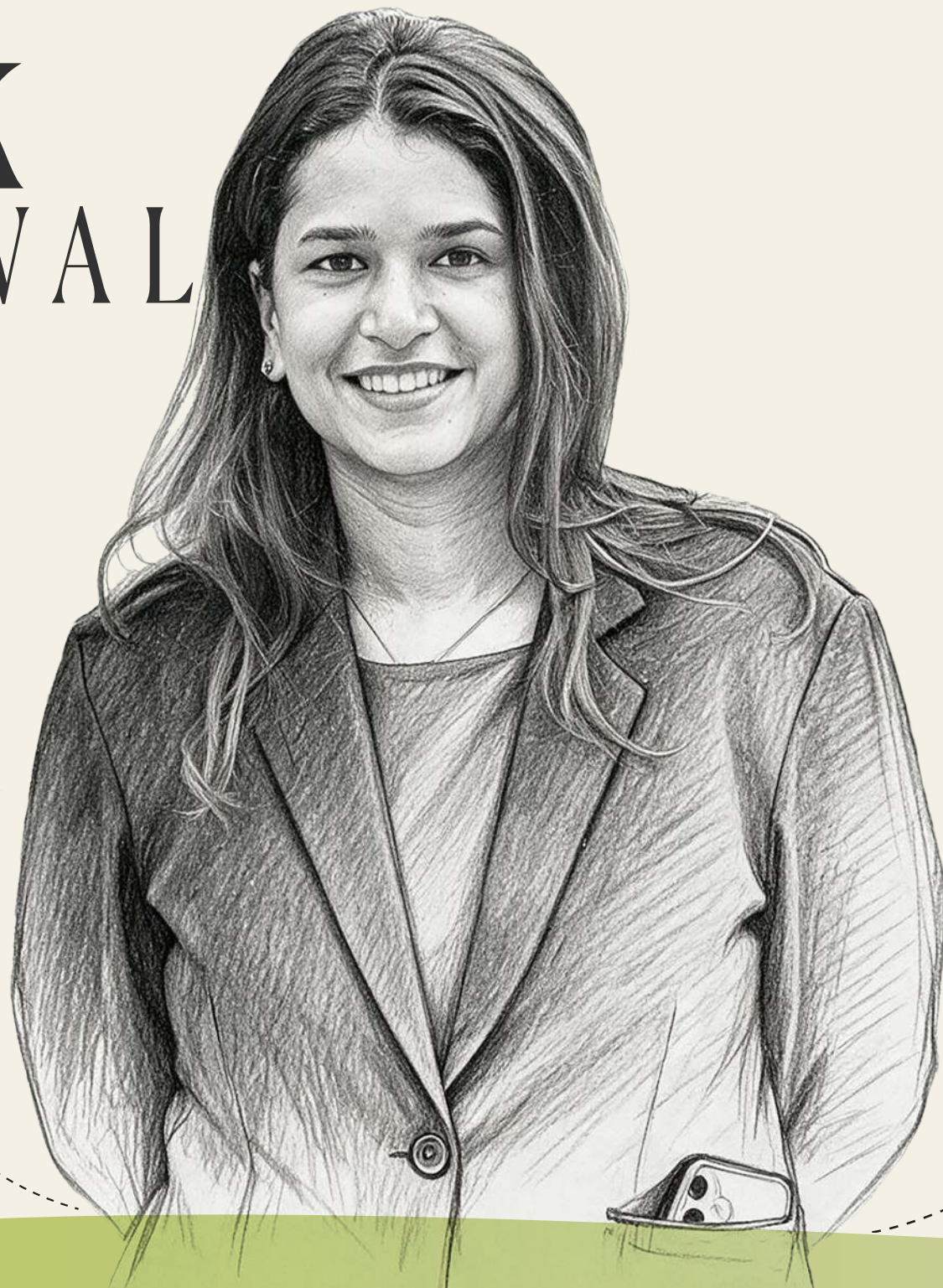


Resident COP-y editor

JHALAK AGGARWAL

“IN CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS, CLARITY IS CURRENCY.”

From literature to diplomacy



Jhalak Aggarwal came to policy through prose. A graduate in English Literature, she was first trained to listen: to rhythm, to silence, to what words leave unsaid. Working in public policy later gave her the platform to put those skills towards understanding climate negotiations.

Before she was parsing climate clauses, she was evaluating government schemes across rural India—tracking why some worked and others failed to scale. In Gujarat’s water-stressed districts, while studying the *Jal Jeevan Mission*, she saw that local knowhow — and the way policy captured it — could decide whether a family received clean water. Language meeting life: the idea never left her.

At The Council, those lessons travelled with her into the multilateral arena. Joining as an intern in 2021, she entered the space around the time when promises from developed countries were becoming plentiful but parameters were not. Her first brief: follow how the Paris Agreement’s transparency rules were being implemented—reading draft decisions like poetry, where one phrase could tilt billions in finance.

As she began attending the UN’s annual climate summits, she learned the grammar of diplomacy. “Every word in a COP text carries weight,” she says. “A comma can shift responsibility. The difference between shall and should can be decisive.” Precision, she realised, was how the Global South could assert clarity in spaces where such ambiguity long favoured the North.

The linguistics of climate negotiations



By COP29 in Baku last year, she was co-author of the Climate Accountability Matrix — the first Global South framework measuring whether the world’s biggest economies were matching ambition with action. CEEW’s follow-up study on the Loss and Damage Fund applied the same logic to finance: quantify fairness, and you make it harder to avoid. “Facts need framing,” she says. “Without language, data can’t travel.”

Despite the global scope, the work is never abstract for her: “We’re defending fairness, one word at a time.” It’s evidence that travels from field realities to negotiation rooms, and comes back as larger frameworks and targets for countries.

In the off hours, she finds balance in motion: travels, trying new cuisines, mixed martial arts, and as many films (and genres!) a week as time allows. “In policy and in life,” she laughs, “clarity is an endurance sport.”

Just last November, Jhalak and the CEEW delegation were in Brazil for COP30 — supporting the Special Envoy for South Asia and **helping ensure that India’s voice, and that of the Global South, was heard clearly.**

“WE’RE DEFENDING FAIRNESS, ONE WORD AT A TIME. IN POLICY AND IN LIFE, CLARITY IS AN ENDURANCE SPORT.”

What’s in a word? Everything!

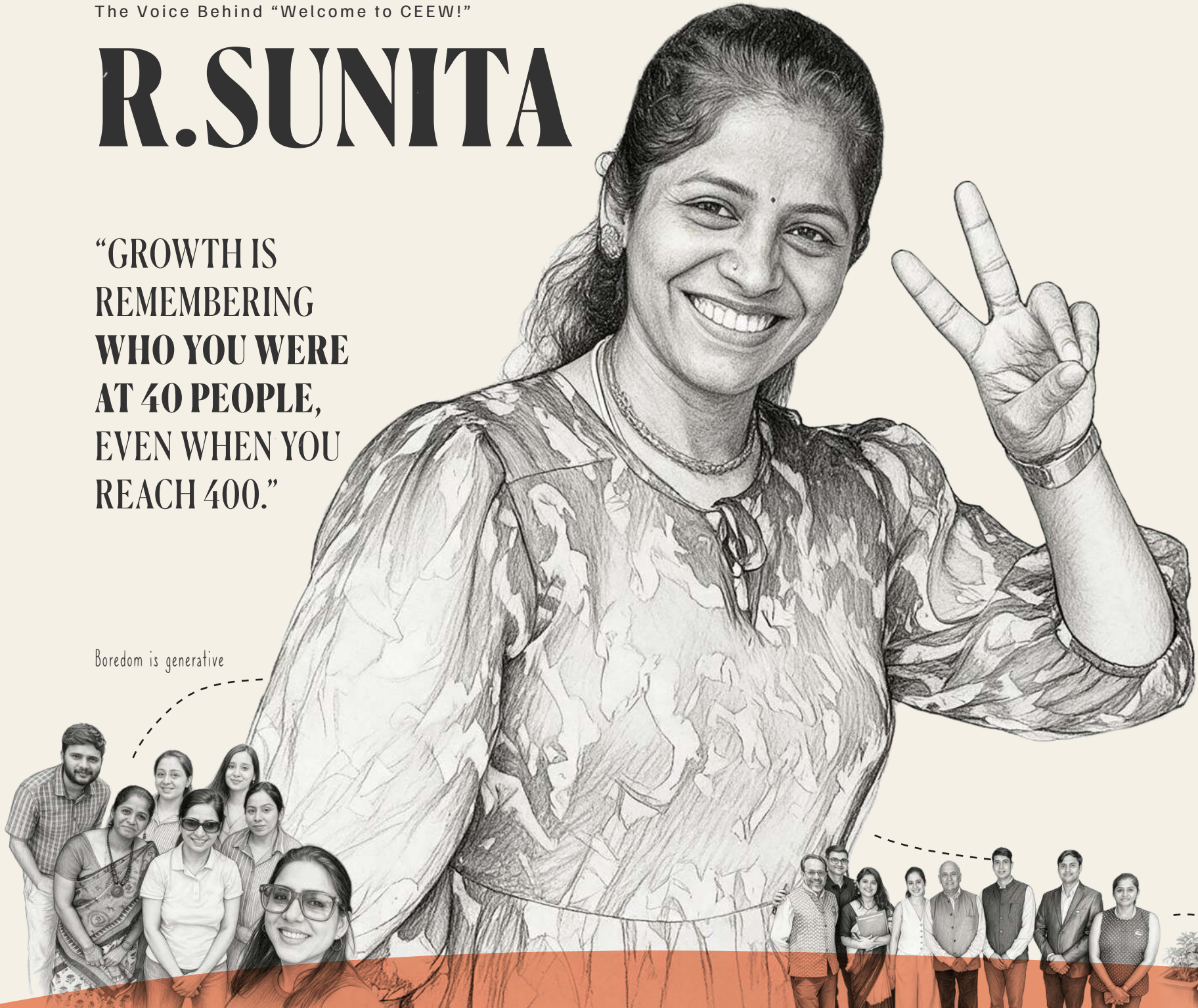


The Voice Behind “Welcome to CEEW!”

R.SUNITA

“GROWTH IS
REMEMBERING
WHO YOU WERE
AT 40 PEOPLE,
EVEN WHEN YOU
REACH 400.”

Boredom is generative



Sunita’s career reads like someone refusing to stand still. She began with a commerce degree and a government job she left because she was “too bored.” Then an Embassy. Then a global health consortium where she worked with 12 countries, toggled between night and day calls, and learned how large systems breathe.

By the time she joined CEEW, she had already lived several careers. She came in as part of the admin function, not HR. Her work was hands-on and often invisible—setting up offices, coordinating moves, managing everyday operations in a young institution still finding its feet. “We were tiny,” she says. “You just figure things out.”

Her first surprise was how mission-heavy this place was. “Researchers weren’t just writing reports,” she recalls. “They were travelling to farms, negotiating in ministries, preparing for COPs.” The demands on people here were different; the systems would have to rise to match that purpose.

For years, she drafted every offer letter by hand, ensuring that every new person who walked in had what they needed. It was only after a great deal of self-doubt that she finally stepped into HR. “I wasn’t sure I could do it,” she says. “I didn’t come from that world.” Patient mentoring helped her build her confidence, one small task at a time.

Her approach to HR was thus shaped by her admin years: practical, grounded, and deeply people-first. As The Council’s research deepened, she and her colleagues created scaffolding that matched that ambition—onboarding that felt human, recruitment that protected culture, workflows that reduced errors, follow-ups that kept complex teams in sync across fieldwork, modelling, and diplomacy.

As the organisation scaled from 40 to nearly 400, she shifted from speaking to one team lead to checking in with hundreds of individuals herself. “Follow-up is not pressure,” she smiles. “It’s a new connection.” She makes sure to sit at different lunch tables every day, listening for the things people don’t say in forms. Her remote stint in Surat taught her how trust feels when an institution extends it first; now she works to offer that trust back.

She knows that in a place working on everything from heat stress to green hydrogen, people carry heavy mandates. Her job is to make sure they never feel like they’re carrying them alone.

Outside work, she resets through long conversations with her family, yoga, and cheering on her two children—one a Bharatanatyam dancer and academic topper, the other a national-level table tennis player. “‘They centre me,’ she beams. ‘And that grounding is what I try to offer others as well.’”

Sunita carries a piece of CEEW’s early intimacy into its new scale, **quietly ensuring that the people working on India’s future feel supported, seen, and grounded.**

“FOLLOW-UP IS NOT PRESSURE, IT’S A NEW
CONNECTION.”

The Atlas who’ll never shrug
people, purpose or process

HR as sentiment and systems



Decoding smoke signals

PRIYANKA SINGH

“THE SMOKE YOU SEE IS
OFTEN WASTE THAT WAS
NOT HANDLED.”

Walking in every stakeholder's shoes



When Priyanka joined CEEW, something clicked into place. She had spent years watching India treat air and waste as two separate crises. Here, she finally found the freedom to stitch them together. “Pollutants don’t stay in their lane,” she quips. “So, why should we?”

A quick rewind: After starting as a researcher in atmospheric sciences at IIT Kanpur, she found herself walking granite mines in Kerala, climbing conveyor belts in cement plants, and assessing emissions at ports and metallurgical units. “But you learn quickly that impact takes more than that,” she said, explaining why she moved on from environmental impact assessments.

Her stint with the Central Pollution Control Board gave her empathy for government systems: officers buried under mandates, monitoring stretched thin, and action plans struggling to match ambition. “Most of the time,” she explains, “cities need structure, evidence, and someone willing to walk with them.”

Encountering The Council at an event, she realised that these strands of her career could finally meet.

In 2021, CEEW had a seven-member team working on air quality. Solid waste wasn’t a research focus. The idea of mapping how waste, land and air intersect was still scattered across conversations. Priyanka began quietly: walking dumpsites, pairing PM data with waste flows, mapping how a city breathes beyond its AQI.

She and the team helped redesign hyperlocal dispersed source mapping, grounding it in field checks and lived realities. It now informs how cities understand their own pollution sources, and how teams across clean air, circular economy, mobility, and industrial sustainability approach systems.

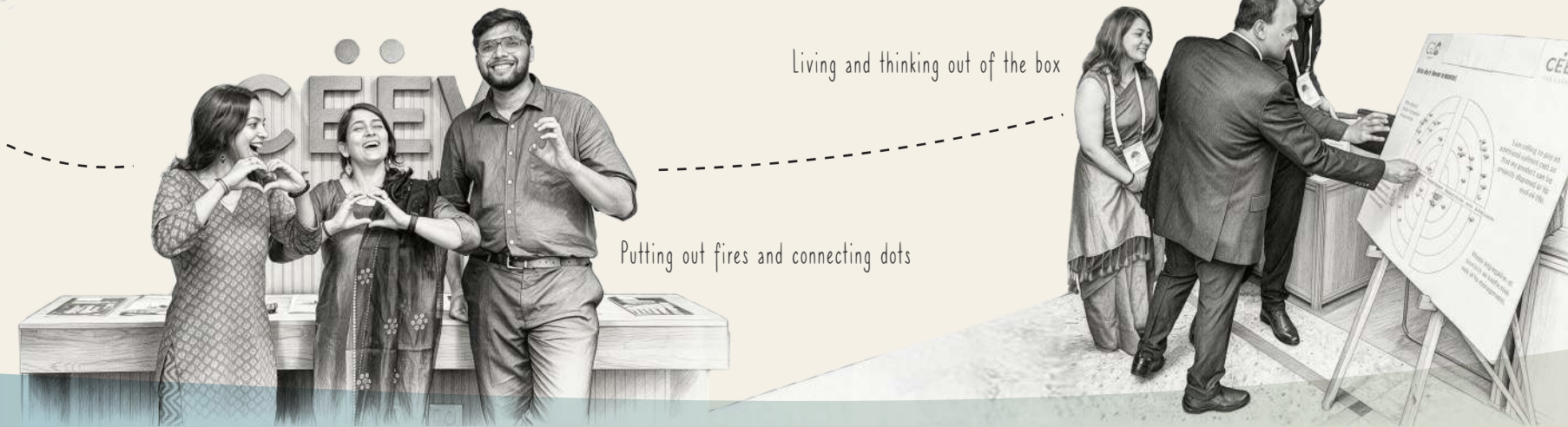
Colleagues say she reads PM2.5 like an atmospheric scientist, waste streams like a municipal engineer, and governance bottlenecks like someone who has sat inside the system.

Her steady approach to work shows up in her day-to-day too: 4:30 a.m. mornings, dance sessions three times a week, relentless LOTR marathons, and family treks that reset her mind. She laughs easily when she talks about her son recounting his day or the family treks that help her reset.

Priyanka’s gift is synthesis, the ability to see that burning garbage and burning stubble are not separate problems. **The fires we fight are connected, and only by understanding that can you start to put them out.**

“MOST OF THE TIME, CITIES NEED
STRUCTURE, EVIDENCE, AND SOMEONE
WILLING TO WALK WITH THEM.”

Living and thinking out of the box



Putting out fires and connecting dots

Unafraid of transitions. Antelopes... depends on the day

GUNJAN JHUNJHUNWALA

“BEFORE YOU PROPOSE
SOLUTIONS, THINK IF
YOU’RE EVEN ASKING THE
RIGHT QUESTION.”

Listening not lecturing



Gunjan entered the energy transition by walking across coal seams. Long before she was mapping India’s green economy, she was asking miners something few had paused to ask: What are your skills? “Everyone had an opinion about reskilling workers,” she says. “But few could name what a miner already knows.”

A political scientist trained to decode how states think, she had left academia for the field, spending six years as a qualitative researcher across India and Africa. In Zambia, while discussing intimate partner violence with women she’d met minutes earlier, she realised something about herself: she realised people were willing to trust her, even in difficult conversations. “There’s a soft skill there,” she says. “And I wanted to use it where it mattered most.”

Climate change made that calling sharper. If a flood or drought could undo decades of work in health, education, or livelihoods, why weren’t we treating climate as the heart of the problem? That question brought her to The Council—“a place unafraid to punch above its weight,” as she puts it—an institution whose research prefers to shape impact rather than just populating shelves.

Her instinct to step back before stepping in shaped one of CEEW’s most consequential bets. In Odisha, she and her colleagues led with possibilities: how a high-extraction state could diversify into green industries. The results startled many: the state is projected to create one million green jobs and attract USD 42 billion in investment by 2030, boosting its GDP by 23 per cent.

Gunjan sees the state as a mirror for India: a reminder that transitions must begin where the economy already is, not where we wish it were. This week, the team’s national analysis broadened that horizon. By 2047, India’s green economy could unlock USD 1.1 trillion in market value, draw USD 4.1 trillion in investments, and employ 48 million people.

Gunjan calls this political realism. “You can’t lecture a state out of fossil fuels,” she says. “You can only offer a future it sees itself in.”

At work, this pragmatism is wrapped in warmth. Colleagues describe her as someone who checks in without being asked, who dissolves silos naturally, and who makes big questions feel human. And in the off hours, she carries that same blend of courage and humour, whether travelling solo across continents or telling the infamous story of when she mistook a real antelope for a statue and slowly backed away whispering, “Do. Not. Run.”

Her touchstone remains the ground she and her team walk on. “If you can feel the heat under your feet,” she says, “**you design transitions that work for the people standing on it.**”

“IF YOU CAN FEEL THE HEAT UNDER YOUR
FEET, YOU DESIGN TRANSITIONS THAT WORK
FOR THE PEOPLE STANDING ON IT.”

Green is the way forward

Research + lived realities =
enduring solutions



Moves between spreadsheets and self-help groups

DIVYA GAUR

“GENDER INCLUSION ISN'T CHARITY. IT'S SMART ECONOMICS.”



Divya Gaur joined The Council in 2021 to measure impact. She didn't expect she would end up shaping it.

She grew up in Delhi wanting to study architecture, but found herself routed instead toward economics—a “safer” choice, everyone told her. Environmental economics taught her the grammar of sustainability: valuation, externalities, and shadow pricing. She discovered that development is a series of trade-offs, and that evidence can change the terms.

Before CEEW, she travelled across more than 20 Indian states as an impact consultant, studying how programmes land on the ground. She interviewed women in self-help groups, farmers in drought-hit blocks, and district collectors balancing impossible priorities.

At CEEW, she found a place where these ideas could scale. Powering Livelihoods, a joint initiative by CEEW and Villgro Foundation, has been bringing together rural enterprises, financiers, policymakers, and communities from 2020 around a simple idea: “Clean energy shouldn't just power appliances, but incomes as well. And not just in urban India.”

The team helped build one of India's largest datasets on decentralised renewable energy (DRE) livelihoods, helping enterprises refine product design, financiers understand risk, and ministries frame policy. In one survey, women reported

avoiding the use of a Solar Hydroponic Vertical Fodder Grow Unit because it was too tall. One small redesign later, adoption rose, and incomes followed. This wasn't a one-off story: 70 per cent of women and farmers using clean-tech tools — from solar silk-reeling machines to micro-pumps and food processors — reported income gains.

“It's never just income,” she explains. “It's agency. Dignity. Choice.”

“Powering Livelihoods felt like designing a system,” she says. “It has foundations, beams, and pathways. You build it so people can rise.” True to her words, their work now extends beyond field sites. She is contributing to gender-inclusive frameworks, communication pilots with rural influencers, and ecosystem-building efforts that help DRE enterprises reach new markets.

Outside work, she travels with the curiosity of an economist and the soul of an artist, wandering through museums, sketching ideas, and cooking elaborate meals “for fun.”

“Impact,” she says, “is when the numbers finally begin to match the stories.”

“IT'S NEVER JUST INCOME. IT'S AGENCY. DIGNITY. CHOICE.”

Inclusion is economics

Livelihoods as agency and dignity



The curious economist



Always up-to-date on the latest climate (and Bollywood) news

VAIBHAV CHATURVEDI

“TRANSITIONS AREN'T
MADE BY MODELS.
THEY'RE MADE BY PEOPLE
WHO LEARN TO ASK
BETTER QUESTIONS.”



Many describe Vaibhav Chaturvedi by what he knows; his colleagues know him better by the questions he asks.

He joined CEEW in 2013, when the institution was still proving a brave hypothesis. Energy transition was not yet a political idiom, net-zero was a distant slogan, and India's modelling ecosystem could fit into two conference rooms. "We were 17 people at The Council," he recalls. "No verticals, no overbearing legacy. Just questions."

For Vaibhav, that canvas was the invitation of a lifetime. His path here had been shaped by three worlds: the fieldwork of his forest management years, the early questions he pursued on carbon markets at IIM Ahmedabad, and the deep modelling discipline he absorbed within the US research establishment.

Early on, he worked on hydrofluorocarbons, shaping India's position for the Kigali Amendment, followed by modelling that informed a national cooling action plan. Then they turned to what he calls "the core": low-carbon economic pathways and the deep mathematics of India's net-zero future.

Each of these, he says, is a "half-degree turn"—small, deliberate, cumulative—quietly bending India's emissions curve.

Through these years, he was constructing grammar: the frameworks, the scaffolding, the analytical discipline and rigour that allows countries and states to argue, negotiate, and plan. "Institutions grow only when many people pull in the same direction," he says. "And good research must be structured thinking."

That philosophy has shaped CEEW's thinking from the early years, including peer review systems, analytical frameworks, and dialogue loops with stakeholders. This is underpinned by an insistence on clarity, not to impress policymakers, but to equip them. When India announced a net-zero target in 2021, CEEW followed up by helping states too. Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan: state by state, India is surgically shaping its future.

Along the way, VC mentored a generation of young modellers who now lead teams across think tanks, universities, and government bodies. "The ecosystem had to be built," he says.

His personal rhythms mirror these intellectual ones: reading 20 abstracts weekly, revisiting old papers, listening to the endless rumour mill of Bollywood to decompress, and disappearing into the Himalayas to reset his sense of scale. "**Numbers look different after the mountains,**" he laughs.

“INSTITUTIONS GROW ONLY WHEN MANY
PEOPLE PULL IN THE SAME DIRECTION. AND
GOOD RESEARCH MUST BE STRUCTURED
THINKING.”



Turns field stories into frameworks

ABHISHEK JAIN

“SCALE IS NOT SIZE. SCALE IS RESPONSIBILITY.”

Fuels - food - futures



Abhishek Jain's foray into public policy began with a single, stubborn statistic: In 2010, one in four Indians still relied on kerosene or candles for lighting. At Nestlé, fresh out of IIT Roorkee, he was doing what good engineers do: running between boiler rooms, energy audits, and water systems. “I realised,” he says, “I could spend my life making two-minute noodles better, or try to dent those numbers.”

A Master's in Sustainable Development at Cambridge gave him the vocabulary for what he already felt: engineering had to serve the bottom 80 per cent, not just the top 20. He found CEEW on the fourth page of a Google search, wrote in without an opening, and joined in 2014. He wanted to move the needle on energy access.

That work culminated in 2015 with India's then-largest energy access survey, spanning over 8,500 households. Access to Clean Cooking Energy and Electricity Survey or ACCESS was launched in Delhi by Minister Piyush Goyal. Its data helped inform Saubhagya and Ujjwala, two major government schemes that transformed how Indians light their homes and cook their meals. For Abhishek, it was proof that careful evidence could transform millions of lives and uplift aspirations.

For CEEW's next big bet, he and the team explored how decentralised renewable energy could transform rural enterprises. That idea grew into Powering Livelihoods, co-led with Villgro—a programme backing entrepreneurs using clean energy to build viable businesses in rural India.

As the programme scaled, it opened another seam: agriculture and food systems. How should India produce, distribute, and consume food? Abhishek helped incubate CEEW's sustainable food systems work—today, a 40-member team building evidence on how India thinks about nutrition, agriculture, and sustainability.

Scale with impact



Designing these initiatives forced him to confront the mythology of scale. “Scaling a product is not the same as scaling impact,” he says. “You can flood a region with solar pumps and damage water tables, showing how even good solutions can end up straining fragile systems.” His insistence: any experiment must have a plausible path to scale, or it isn't worth doing.

That philosophy now anchors his latest frontier: the green economy. From textiles to bioplastics to new battery chemistries, Abhishek and the team are building an ecosystem where common barriers for enterprises—regulation, markets, skills—are solved collectively.

On hard days, he returns to persistence, celebrating every win with the team: a policymaker who finally “gets it,” or a farmer who pays off a loan.

You'll always find him climbing stairs, rushing between meetings with his earpods, scribbling systems diagrams, or heading home for an evening to be hijacked by his son's stories. “I don't think of this as just work,” he says. **“It's one long effort to make sure big ideas don't forget the people they're meant for.”**

“I DON'T THINK OF THIS AS JUST WORK. IT'S ONE LONG EFFORT TO MAKE SURE BIG IDEAS DON'T FORGET THE PEOPLE THEY'RE MEANT FOR.”

Always putting public first in public policy

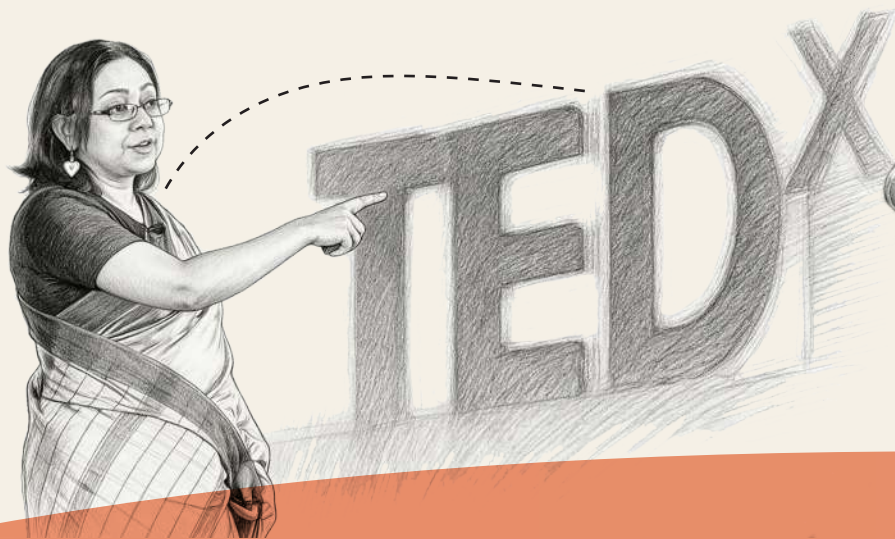


Every step is strategic...and she powerwalks 10,000 a day

SHUVA RAHA

“INDIA IS NOT A FOOTNOTE.
IT IS A PRECEDENT.”

Foresight is statecraft



Never tell Shuva Raha the odds. She has spent decades in the machinery of India’s tech boom and clean energy rise—from the dotcom era, to mobilising early green investments, supporting the formative years of the International Solar Alliance, and helping India scale from 1.5 GW of solar, to over a 100 GW. Which is why, when she speaks of India’s evolution and our place in the world today, she speaks with the calm conviction of an insider.

When she walked into CEEW’s Energy Horizons event in 2019—buzzing with young researchers and policymakers debating macroeconomics, climate risk, and global governance with fluency—she realised that she was at the next frontier. “The intellectual weight,” she recalls, “showed an institution thinking—and moving—with the alacrity the world now demands.”

She joined in March 2020. The next day, India locked down due to the COVID pandemic. Her first project: within a fortnight, marshal CEEW’s research—spanning years and sectors—into a Jobs, Growth, and Sustainability blueprint to inform India’s pandemic recovery. “It was chaos. Beautiful chaos,” she recalls of the all-teams report, now archived at the US Library of Congress. “That’s when I internalised how CEEW delivers at the sharp edge of the frontier.”

Her view of India’s climate journey is unapologetically clear: India didn’t wait for Paris to act. We were investing in biofuels and trying to scale solar—as policy—since the early ‘80s. “We are not reacting,” she says. “We are constantly imagining forward.”

At CEEW, she began shaping that imagination into institutional muscle—from inside the CEO’s Foresight team—well before tariff wars and geopolitical games became social media chatter. This evolved into CEEW’s International Cooperation programme in 2024: leading its work with foreign governments and global institutions, and taking the India Story beyond our shores, from the G20, to COPs and BRICS, into a brave new world.

Representing India at the contentious high tables of the world is equal parts pressure, and pride. The world usually misreads emerging economies: seeing scarcity where there is scale, presuming compliance without respecting sovereignty. Shuva and her team use facts and eloquence to flip these narratives.

In quieter moments, she turns to the passion that has shaped her worldview since childhood: video games. Strategy games taught her to seize the brief and plan her resources. City builders convinced her that infrastructure is destiny. “Gaming,” she says, “is foresight disguised as fun.”

She is a fast-paced detailer, often spotted walking the corridors, eyes on her watch, chasing 10,000 steps and calculating her next win. Ask what keeps her going and pat comes the response: “We’re not a boutique climate shop. **CEEW is developing critical thinking as a national resource. This is rare, and must be valued and protected.**”

**“WE’RE NOT A BOUTIQUE CLIMATE SHOP:
CEEW IS DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING AS
A NATIONAL RESOURCE. THIS IS RARE, AND
MUST BE VALUED AND PROTECTED.”**

Moving the critical thinking needle

Evening the odds for India



If you're looking for a man in finance

GAGAN SIDHU

“THE ENERGY TRANSITION
IS THE LARGEST CAPITAL
MOBILISATION WE’LL
SEE IN OUR LIFETIME.
WE CAN’T GET IT
WRONG.”

Capital enabler



Gagan Sidhu has seen capital from every angle: Arranged it as an investment banker, mobilised it as a CFO, and now shaping how it could move next at CEEW. Across financial centres from Tokyo and London to Singapore, Dubai, and Delhi, he learned how money behaves when risk is clear, and how it retreats when it isn't. What initially drew him to clean energy finance was the magnitude: financing the energy transition might just be the largest capital mobilisation in his lifetime.

Gagan saw its first surge up close in the mid-2010s, as India's solar story soared. Solar panel costs were falling, transparent reverse auctions replaced opaque price discovery, offtake risk was mitigated and solar parks reduced land risk. “You can't expect hundreds of gigawatts of clean energy at high pricing,” he says. “You have to choose one or the other.”

India did, and capital followed. Renewables flipped the traditional model. Contracts came first. Resources—sun and wind—were abundant. And yet, even as projects scaled, questions resurfaced: Why does capital still hesitate?

By the time he began advising CEEW's Centre for Energy Finance in 2019, those questions had found a home. “I didn't plan to join a think tank,” he admits. Writing became his way in: papers and frameworks that translated financial logic into policy language. He then embraced the chance to lead the Centre full-time: “In banking, you execute transactions,” he says. “With policy, you can inform the whole ecosystem.”

Making finance respond to climate



Today, as Director of the revamped CEEW Green Finance Centre, Gagan and his colleagues are focused on bridging green financing gaps. Their approach is multi-pronged: Tracking market trends, publishing research, developing financial solutions, offering technical assistance, and fostering coherence. He is candid about the myth that green or climate finance is always costly or high-risk. “It's not always the case that capital isn't flowing,” he says. “It's not flowing fast enough.”

The rhythm of a think tank suits him. “In banking, most of your time is spent doing the same thing but better,” he reflects. “Here, the canvas is constantly expanding.” One week it's EV incentives. Another, the harder question of financing climate adaptation.

In the office, Gagan leads with calm precision. He listens closely, speaks sparingly, and mentors with the quiet confidence of someone who has sat on every side of the table. In his off hours, he returns to simple motion: long walks, badminton, a swim in summer, and the occasional round of golf with his father or son.

India's renewable surge was not inevitable. It was designed. “Capital responds to clarity,” he says. “**Our job is to create that clarity.**”

“CAPITAL RESPONDS TO CLARITY. OUR JOB IS
TO CREATE THAT CLARITY.”

Building, not burning bridges



Doesn't need a world-clock to calculate timezones

KAKOLI ROY

“YOU GET USED TO THINKING MORE THAN JUST A FEW STEPS AHEAD.”

From social justice to public policy

She joined The Council in 2022, drawn by the urgency of its work and the clarity of its purpose. “Climate change is not tomorrow’s issue,” she says. “It’s already here.” What she stepped into was an organisation that had achieved escape velocity—where decisions travel fast, and consequences travel farther.

The CEO’s office is where these currents converge. As Executive Assistant to Arunabha Ghosh, Kakoli coordinates the invisible architecture that allows leadership to focus outward: preparation, sequencing, continuity. Her work sits at the threshold between CEEW’s research engine and the world it engages: ministries, diplomats, partners, peers, and global forums.

That instinct was earned long before climate entered her vocabulary.

For over 16 years, Kakoli worked across India’s social justice ecosystem. She worked directly with survivors of human trafficking—coordinating rescues, supporting legal processes, and counselling women through rehabilitation. Later, for prison rights, she travelled across more than 20 states and sat across from hundreds of inmates from Tihar to Yerwada, documenting gaps between legal rights and lived reality. The work taught her what systems look like when they strain—and what happens when follow-through fails. It also taught her how dignity survives inside bureaucracy.

Those lessons carry into her work at CEEW. Kakoli and the Foresight team track schedules and build context: which meeting leads to which decision, what brief must precede a call, what follow-up cannot slip after a COP intervention. Working closely with Arunabha, she has learned to anticipate, always staying several steps ahead of engagements. “This isn’t static admin,” she says simply. You’re carrying context across many moving parts.”

She has supported successive COPs and G20-related engagements, witnessing firsthand how global exposure changes how CEEW is heard and how much preparation that presence demands.

Yet Kakoli is also a culture-keeper. She organises potlucks, leads Durga Puja pandal-hopping plans, remembers birthdays, and brings warmth into days shaped by deadlines, whether through a shared snack or a perfectly timed joke. “Everyone works better when they feel connected,” she says.

Outside work, she resets through travel, music, and rooftop gardening (plants that need daily care, much like institutions do). Time with her family grounds her; time working with children restores her energy. Both remind her why big missions must still feel human.

Her workdays may sometimes end late, but what sustains is knowing that the “last mile” to a breakthrough is sometimes just a follow-up away.

“THIS ISN’T STATIC ADMIN. YOU’RE CARRYING CONTEXT ACROSS MANY MOVING PARTS.”

The troubleshooting ninja

Building trust and a tribe!

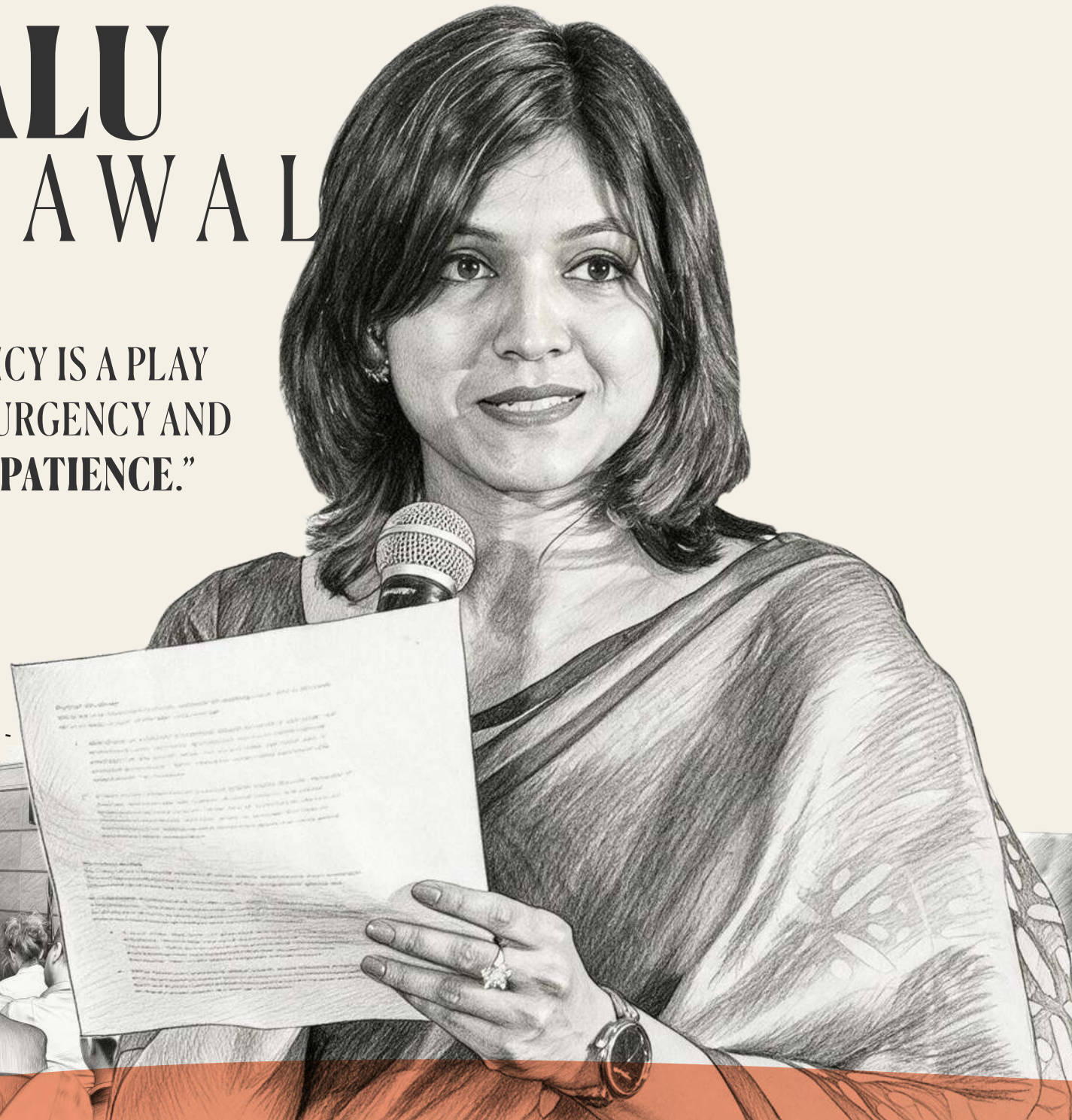


Bijli ki Raani

SHALU AGRAWAL

“PUBLIC POLICY IS A PLAY OF INFINITE URGENCY AND BOUNDLESS PATIENCE.”

Taking sustainability places



Shalu Agrawal did not arrive at CEEW with a five-year plan, but now, as Director of Programmes, she holds together research across 16 verticals in a fast-growing institution: asking the uncomfortable questions, tightening systems, and making sure rigour keeps pace with ambition. “I own the conditions under which research could transform into impact,” she says.

That ability to move effortlessly comes from having worked across every layer of the organisation. Shalu joined in 2014 as an intern, between UPSC attempts. An IIT engineer impatient to get things done. The institution was barely 25–30 people then.

In August 2014, that intensity crystallised. CEEW was asked to deliver four reports for the PMO within a month. Shalu worked on the renewable energy analysis that fed into a cabinet note on what 100 GW of solar would cost India. Weeks later, the national target for renewables jumped to 100 GW for solar. “That was the moment,” she says, “I realised how credible research could play a catalytic role in the development trajectory of the nation.”

Over the years, she developed a habit that colleagues still recognise: raising her hand when work needed owning. But the same breadth also made her want to go deeper. She stepped away to study environmental economics at University College London as a Chevening Scholar, then spending 18 months researching rural power systems by pairing econometrics with lived context.

Intensity with ownership



She returned to CEEW in 2019 to tackle a Goliath: power distribution. While deploying smart meters to study electricity consumption, she and a new power markets team realised how even such technical interventions demanded care. The calls from people began: “Is your smart meter making my bill higher?” New tech led to tensions in people’s homes. “Research cannot be neutral,” she says. “People should feel benefits, not just supply data.”

That principle now travels with her into every programme review, across sectors and states. She is as comfortable discussing tariff reform with senior policymakers as she is speaking to farmers or Vidyut Sakhis on the ground. Credibility, she argues, is multi-lens: research depth, articulation, ground truth, and macro awareness. “You have to be ready to meet others where they are.”

Shalu also insists on joy itself as infrastructure. She remembers offsites where people sang ghazals, performed skits, rehearsed dances: proof that you can face hard problems without getting hardened yourself. Outside work, she returns to rhythm—yoga, dance, reading, and the habit of pressing the right book into the right colleague’s hands. Time with her two children and a close-knit family keeps the pace sustainable.

Her journey from intern to Director shows **what it takes to grow with an institution, not just within it.**

“RESEARCH CANNOT BE NEUTRAL. PEOPLE SHOULD FEEL BENEFITS, NOT JUST SUPPLY DATA.”

The best she can be, everyday



Always in flow state

SAIBA GUPTA

“THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ‘WASTE’ AND ‘USED’ WATER MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.”

From cities to rivers



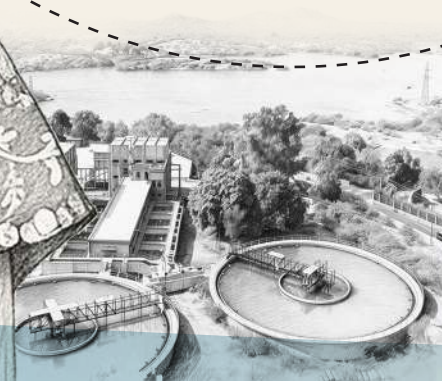
Saiba Gupta's water story begins through cities, not rivers—through the things urban life depends on, and rarely notices: piped networks, storm water drains, treatment plants, development norms, and the quiet governance that keeps them all running. At CEEW, she helps lead our work on city-level treated used water reuse plans, making circularity a system cities can actually operate.

After an exacting architecture degree, her Master's at Politecnico di Milano sharpened her interest in urban planning and policy. An early stint contributing to Delhi's Master Plan 2041 taught her the nuts and bolts of how ambition negotiates with reality. “By the time I joined CEEW,” she says, “I knew the problem wasn't only engineering. It was imagination and institutions.”

That realism became method. Early on, Saiba and her colleagues did something strategically rare in India's urban water conversation: they treated circular water as an economy, with numbers. “No one was equating used water with the economy at that scale,” she recalls. This was leverage: evidence travels faster when it can sit in a budget line.

Then came the proving grounds: cities. Working with urban local bodies, the team helped develop one of the early city-level reuse plans in Thane: Who will buy the water? What quality is needed? What tariffs can hold? Who maintains it? What happens when the pilot ends? Other cities followed—Ahmedabad, Varanasi, Panaji, Chennai—each with different questions, but the same underlying puzzle: “It's not ‘should we reuse,’” Saiba says. “It's ‘how do we make reuse work?’”

Everything's in a word:
Used water, not waste



The barrier is rarely only technical. “Freshwater is often not priced,” she notes, “so pricing treated used water becomes difficult.” Water is rightly seen as a social good, but that logic can weaken cost recovery and deter investment. She and the team flipped this narrative recently, revealing how India's treated used water could unlock an economic opportunity of up to USD 35 billion by 2047. Sometimes credibility begins by making value visible.

Even vocabulary becomes policy. ‘Wastewater’ wasn't working. As ‘used water’ entered wider policy usage, the team leaned into it. “Words shape what officials can defend, what residents can accept, and what institutions can fund.”

In the office, Saiba is often the only urban planner in a room of hydrologists, environmental scientists, and policy analysts. Approachable and widely trusted, she listens closely and translates across disciplines—city by city, decision by decision.

In the off hours, she insists on long walks, quick hilly escapades, time with animals, and baking when she can. “I should also get back to reading more fiction,” she laughs. Cities were built to move waste away. Saiba is helping CEEW redesign that forgetting: **so what was once discarded becomes planned, priced, and possible.**

“WORDS SHAPE WHAT OFFICIALS CAN DEFEND, WHAT RESIDENTS CAN ACCEPT, AND WHAT INSTITUTIONS CAN FUND.”

Planned, priced, and possible



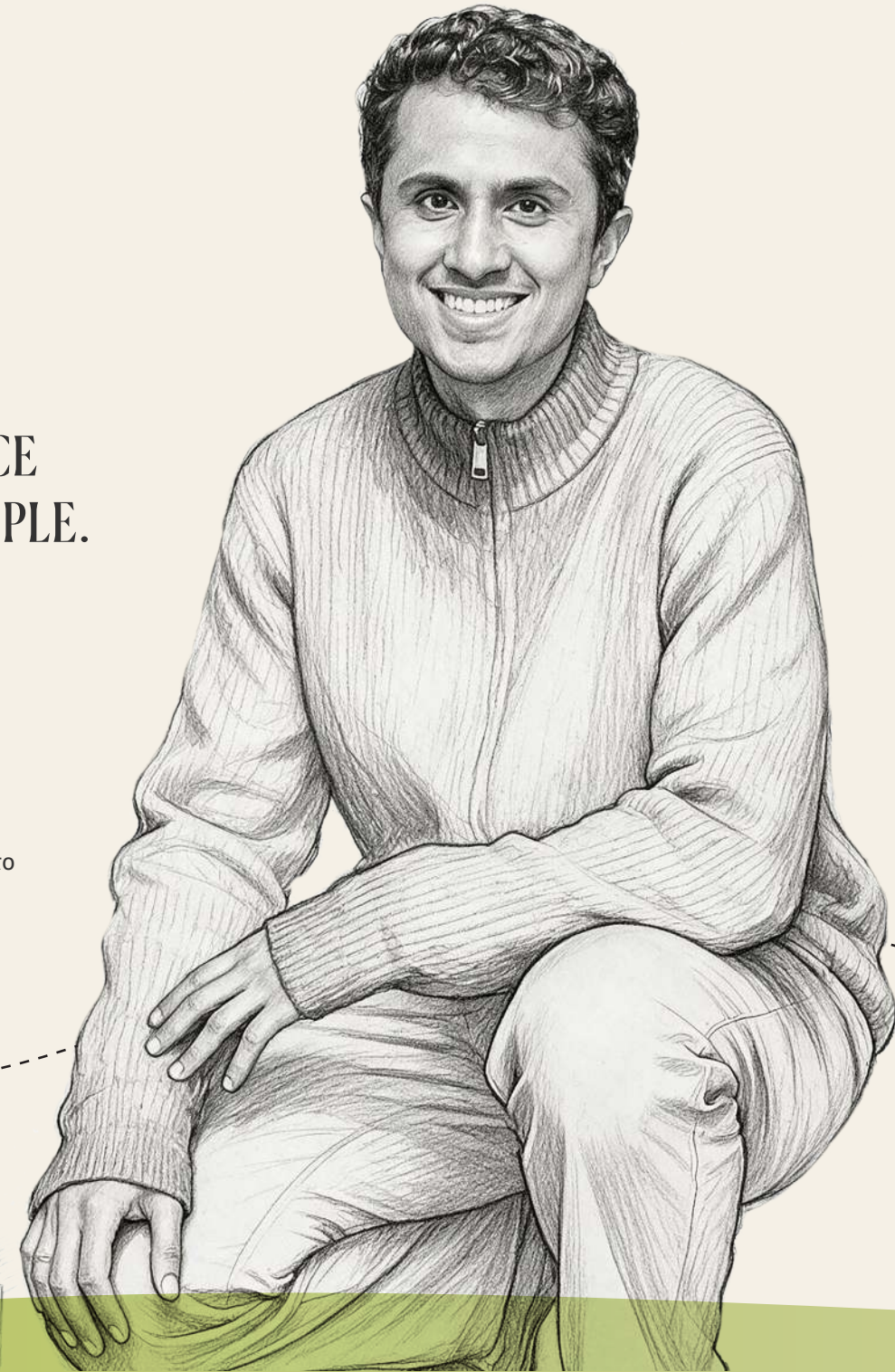
No one has seen him age

MIHIR SHAH

“MORE CLIMATE EVIDENCE
ALONE WON’T MOVE PEOPLE.
LIFE MIGHT.”

Mihir Shah found something rare when he joined The Council over a decade ago: a think tank with excellent research and strong storytellers already in the room. But he also sensed scope. Not just to communicate more, but to do so differently.

Creating comms appreciation and appetite



His grounding in mass media, an MBA in brand strategy at MICA, and formative years working with the Government of Gujarat gave him a sense of the machinery of public policy. He designed several public awareness campaigns, drafted talking points, trained several government officials, and watched words move markets and moods.

This insight kickstarted his innings at CEEW: data convinces policy, but narratives move people.

Communications was a team of one in an organisation of 15 when Mihir joined in 2014. He formatted studies, pitched articles to journalists, organised events, and absorbed technical language on the fly. “Weeks went by in a daze,” he says. Researchers seemed intimidatingly sharp. He read more, asked more, rewrote more. “I realised quickly that I had to earn my place.”

That effort compounded into outreach becoming essential to institutional thinking at CEEW. Communications is embedded in research workflows, scaled through systems, and strengthened by building researchers’ capacity to communicate without losing nuance.

By 2020, his growing team cleared space for deeper questions: how could sustainability travel in an age of information overload and shrinking attention spans? Could it be entertaining, consumable, and still precise?

“Climate science alone cannot mobilise most people,” he found himself thinking. “Solar must be about savings and modernity. Waste segregation must be about pride. Solutions must meet people where they are.” That shaped both core and cutting-edge outreach: daily storytelling and media, alongside newer forms such as cartoons, documentaries, spoken-word poetry, art exhibitions, and campaigns. Each reaching newer audiences beyond policy rooms.



The communications stack he and his team built now spans editors, writers, filmmakers, designers, data journalists, digital specialists, and strategists, with almost 30 members actively shaping CEEW’s voice across formats and growing with the institution. Mihir may have led remotely, but he was never MIA. Calm in the storm, always precise under pressure. “We are as good as the standards we keep,” he says. Creative risk is welcome, but never at the cost of research rigour.

In the off hours, he loves taking long walks in the park with his son Kabir and watching him find his way in the world. He talks about how he would like to read more, watch more world cinema, and return to photography. He believes that it is arrogant to think narratives can be controlled. But Mihir and his team help shape form. Over time, that form has become recognisable: **a think tank from the Global South speaking with confidence, precision, and an abundance of imagination.**

“CLIMATE SCIENCE ALONE CANNOT
MOBILISE MOST PEOPLE. SOLAR MUST BE
ABOUT SAVINGS AND MODERNITY. WASTE
SEGREGATION MUST BE ABOUT PRIDE.
SOLUTIONS MUST MEET PEOPLE WHERE
THEY ARE.”

Inspiring public opinion



Has tried all the vegan dark chocolate bars out there

RUCHIRA GOYAL

“IF IT’S NOT SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AND JUST, IT’S NOT SUSTAINABLE.”

Ruchira’s journey into food systems begins with climate justice. An elective on sustainable engineering at IIT Bombay exposed her to a stark truth: those most affected by climate change are often those who contributed least to it.

Seeker of climate justice



That intuition sharpened in Stockholm, where, during a master’s in sustainability, she began to see both the possibilities and limits of individual efforts while studying cotton supply chains. “Sustainability cannot be scaled in isolation,” she says. Public policy, she realised, was where rules, not just intentions, could shift outcomes.

When she joined the Council as an intern in 2021, the Sustainable Food Systems team was barely a year old—“almost like a startup within CEEW,” she recalls. The questions were big and layered: dairy, land use, diets, livelihoods. But even then, the ambition went across boundaries: production and consumption, incentives and institutions, private sector and policy, all seen together.

Her work on crop diversification showed that sustainable alternatives to rice-wheat-sugarcane systems exist and deliver income benefits. “But the incentive structures are misaligned.” She carried this lesson into the dairy sector. The team’s national study—spanning 15 states—challenges the idea that cattle systems can be understood solely through milk. Nearly 38 per cent of rearers do not sell milk. Cattle serve as assets, insurance, a source of nutrition, and draught power. “Looking beyond milk changes everything,” Ruchira admits.

In Madhya Pradesh, through system dynamics modelling and field engagement, she and the team have worked to reflect this diversity of access and systems between landless and landed rearers, tribal belts and peri-urban clusters. “Quantitative modelling sounds technical,” she says, “but much of it is understanding people.”

One-size-fits-all interventions, she learned, risk unintended harm. But at the end of the day, “Food, feed, land, diets—it’s one system. We’re trying to bring bottom-up and top-down approaches together and we are testing if AI tools can support diversification and decentralisation rather than entrench existing practices and inequities.”

Through the Next Generation India Fellowship with the UN Foundation and CEEW, Ruchira also carried these layered realities into consultations in Kochi and Varanasi and onwards to multilateral spaces in New York and Spain, asking young people what India should look like in 2047. “National choices and global conversations”, she realised, “are part of the same web, viewed from different heights.”

Back in Delhi, she finds steadiness in running, cooking, and navigating green spaces. An introvert by her own admission, she has steadily learned to find her voice, both on and off the field.

CEEW, she says, gave her something rare: the path to turn frustration into action and complexity into possibility, with **livelihoods at the centre.**

“FOOD, FEED, LAND, DIETS: IT’S ONE SYSTEM. WE’RE TRYING TO BRING BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN APPROACHES TOGETHER.”

Committed to be the change she wants to see



Valuing individuals and institutions



HEMANT MALLYA

“IF YOU WANT THE GOLIATHS OF INDUSTRY TO MOVE, SPEAK IN LEVERS THEY RECOGNISE.”

At a moment when the world's attention is noisy and fractured, when energy security, trade shocks, and geopolitics can push climate way down the agenda, Hemant Mallya is not interested in softening the truth.

From shop floor to systems



At CEEW, he leads work on industrial sustainability at the toughest edge of the energy transition. The sectors that build economies—steel, cement, refining, chemicals—are also the hardest to decarbonise. Change here cannot be wished into existence. It has to be engineered.

Hemant began as a production engineer on shop floors and supply chains before pursuing industrial engineering and operations research at Penn State. Years of consulting across North America, working on energy markets and emissions modelling, sharpened a systems instinct that still guides him. When he returned to India and joined CEEW in 2020, he found a different arena, one where progress depends on turning climate ambition into choices that governments, companies, and investors can actually act on.

“Unless you understand industrial processes,” he says, “you can’t address carbon emissions.” That complexity is also why industrial emissions rarely register in everyday life the way air pollution does. “You have to provide clarity on credible pathways,” he says, “and on the risks of maintaining the status quo.”

Sustainability and goodwill alone are often not enough to shift the logic of balance sheets. What matters is making the opportunity visible in terms industry already understands—profits, competitiveness, and long-term security. For steelmakers, this may mean export exposure if carbon border measures tighten worldwide. For oil refiners, it is the churn ahead as EVs begin to shift oil and gas demand. For legacy fuel players, it could be reinvention: turning drilling expertise into an advantage for carbon storage or new resources like natural hydrogen.

Engineering change and changing ‘industrialese’



In 2024, this willingness to find frontiers culminated in CEEW’s nexus study mapping India’s renewable and green hydrogen potential, showing where scale is plausible, where land conflict and population density tighten the runway, and why water availability will matter for producing green hydrogen at competitive costs. “Involving industry and other stakeholders early and addressing climate risks,” Hemant said then, “is what keeps projects viable in the long run.”

Off the clock, he keeps his world deliberately quiet. Colleagues describe him as measured and steady, preferring careful thinking to quick declarations. He is “terrible at social media,” by choice, listens to a wide variety of podcasts and jogs, when he can, in Pune’s increasingly dustier air.

His is the discipline of long bets: staying with industry long enough for the world to change around it, and ensuring India is ready when it does. Without breaking trust, without selling illusions, and while building a team that can **keep the long horizon in view**.

“INVOLVING INDUSTRY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS EARLY AND ADDRESSING CLIMATE RISKS IS WHAT KEEPS PROJECTS VIABLE IN THE LONG RUN.”

Committing to big bets!

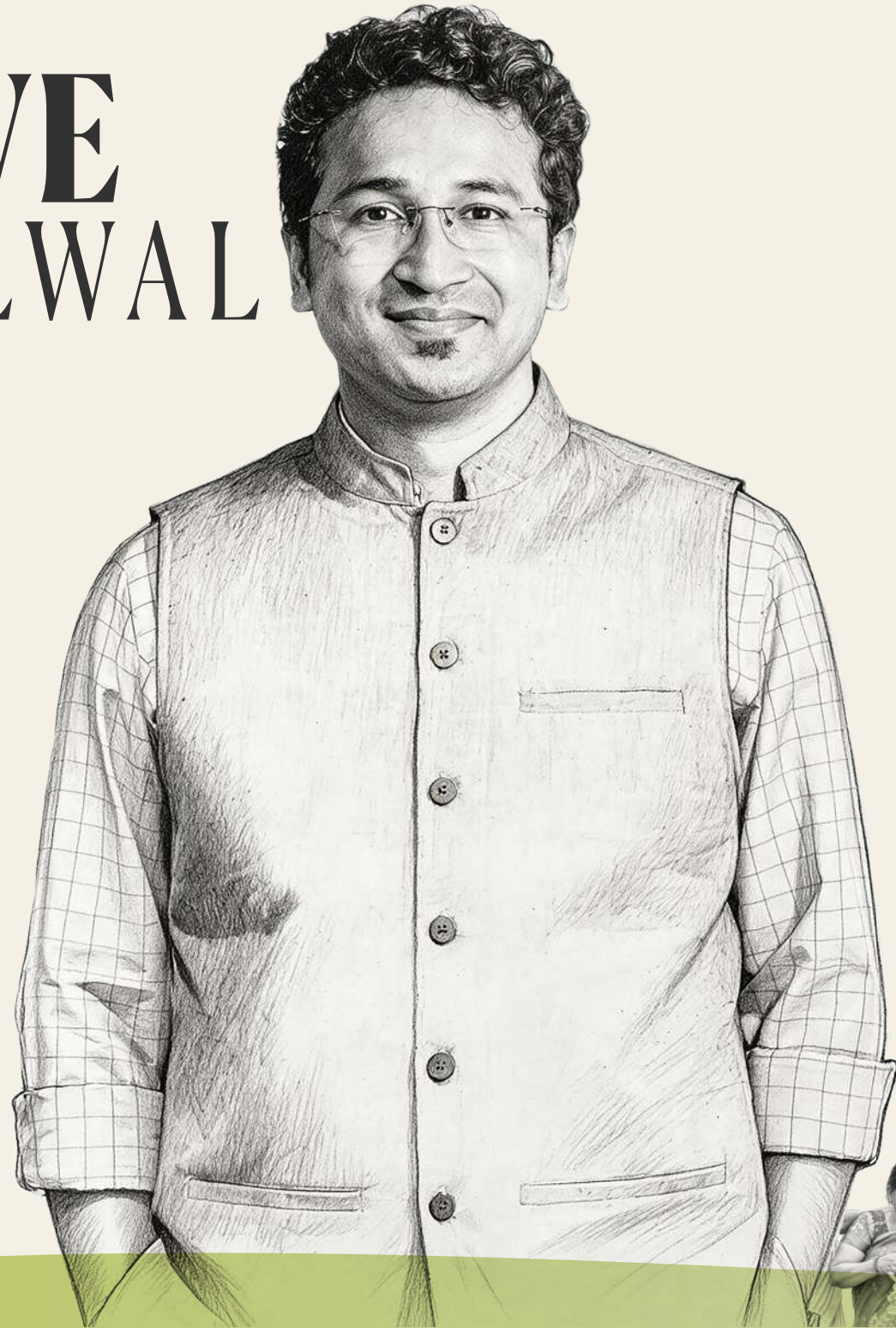


Foodie heading food systems team

APOORVE KHANDELWAL

“TECHNOLOGY IS SERVANT
TO COMMERCE, COMMERCE
TO POLICY, AND POLICY TO
WHAT PEOPLE ARE READY
TO SUPPORT.”

Engineer unlimited



Apoorve Khandelwal once believed science could explain everything. He is now the rare engineer who does not think technology alone can solve complex systems.

Studying biotechnology at IIT Delhi first taught him that the living world is too interconnected for sweeping fixes. “The world is held in a very fine balance,” he says. “We must intervene cautiously.” His early career deepened that instinct. Work on advanced biofuels and biomaterials at Bharat Petroleum showed him that good science rarely travels far on its own and is bound by commercial viability. Later, in sustainability consulting, he saw another constraint: private-sector actors could only move as far as policy environments allowed. Commerce, too, had a master.

By the time he arrived at The Council in late 2020, Apoorve was no longer asking which tech may change the world. He was asking how whole systems could.

Food was where those lessons finally converged.

Few sectors are as large, politically sensitive, or intimate to daily life as agriculture. It feeds India, sustains livelihoods at enormous scale, and binds together soil, livestock, markets, nutrition, climate, and culture.

One of his earliest major pieces asked a deceptively simple question: why do good agricultural initiatives struggle to scale? That became a framework on the “DNA of scalability” in agriculture—what makes one intervention adaptable, fundable, politically viable, and institutionally durable, while others remain stuck as well-meaning experiments. It set the tone for their research: systems thinking, strategic discipline, and impatience with superficial impact.

Asking every scalability question



Their work since has carried that same signature. A roadmap for Rajasthan helped the state think strategically about natural farming. Work with NITI Aayog opened the door to the Government of India’s first agricultural emissions forecasts and scenarios under net zero. The team’s agenda has expanded across sustainable agricultural and dairy systems, bioeconomy pathways, AI, and climate modelling—always treating food not as disconnected problems, but as a web of relationships. “Policy is servant to politics,” Apoorve says, “and politics serves what people are ready to support.” In food systems, where reforms can affect millions of farmers and consumers, the real frontier is political economy.

The team has grown with similar intentionality. Monday huddles have their own rounds for mutual appreciation, requests for help, and shared learning. His off-hours carry this same rhythm of relentless optimisation: playing the drums, singing, and reading Indian philosophy. He and his team are always first among volunteers for celebratory gatherings!

For Apoorve, the frontier lies where it always has: “Understanding how complex systems move—and **designing solutions that respect the realities they must serve.**”

“POLICY IS SERVANT TO POLITICS, AND
POLITICS SERVES WHAT PEOPLE ARE READY
TO SUPPORT.”

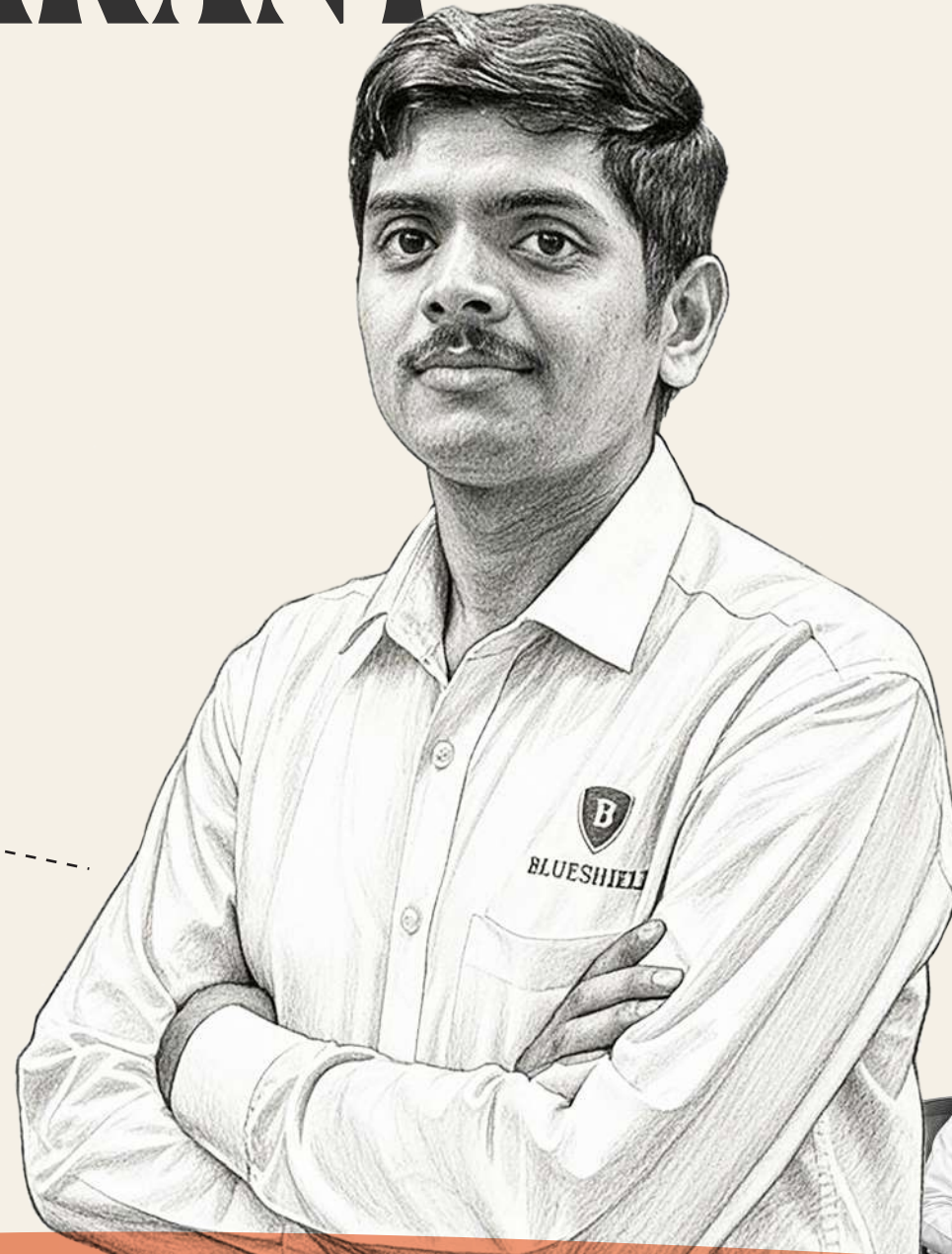
Food is thought!



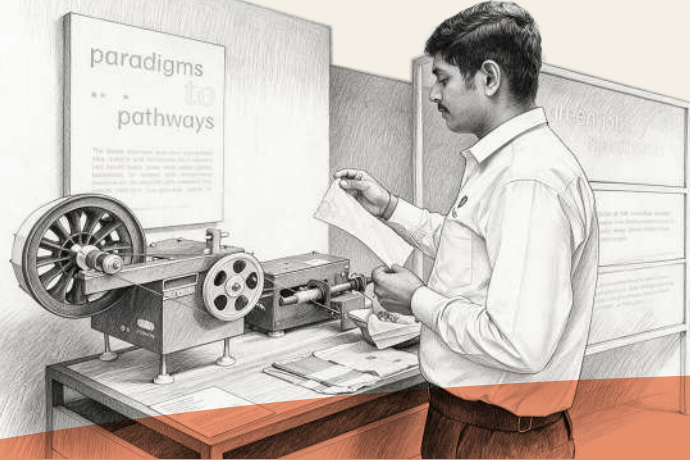
A STEADY SENTINEL

CHANDRAKANT PRASAD

“SCIENTISTS AND AMBASSADORS WALK THROUGH THESE DOORS. I LEARN BY WATCHING HOW THEY SPEAK AND WORK.”



Constant learner



From the reception, Chandrakant Prasad has a view of CEEW that few others do. Everyone passes by at some point: researchers rushing to meetings, officials arriving for consultations, embassy representatives, stakeholders, delivery workers, and new interns on their first day.

It is from this desk that he has learned how many different kinds of people it takes to run an institution.

Chandrakant came to Delhi from Chhapra, Bihar, in early 2022 after his father passed away. As the eldest of three brothers and a sister, he came looking for work that would allow him to support his family. Today, he and his colleague Piyush Pandey take turns between day and night shifts to manage the entrance desk of CEEW's Delhi office—handling visitors, couriers, calls, and records. “Everything and everyone is entered in the register, that is the responsibility of the first face someone sees in CEEW,” he says.

The desk has also become a place of learning. “Scientists, foreign delegates, and government officers walk through these doors,” he says. “There is much to be learned just by watching how they speak and work.”

He studies after work, preparing for his BA in Arts through distance learning from Mangalayatan University in Aligarh. Before coming to Delhi, Chandrakant had already tried building something of his own: a cyber café with 10 to 12 computers procured through a Mudra loan, which his brother now runs. Now his wife runs a small banking service point in their village while studying for her B.Ed., and he hopes his younger brothers will study further and find good jobs. Everything he does is for them and his seven-month-old son, Riyansh.

The Bachelor of Arts and enterprise



He looks at the work The Council does from the research reports. The Vidyut Sakhi programme in Uttar Pradesh particularly excites him, where women from self-help groups in UP collect electricity bills in their villages, earning an income while improving electricity services. “I felt good reading that,” he says. “In villages, opportunities like that matter.” He hopes such a programme reaches Bihar soon.

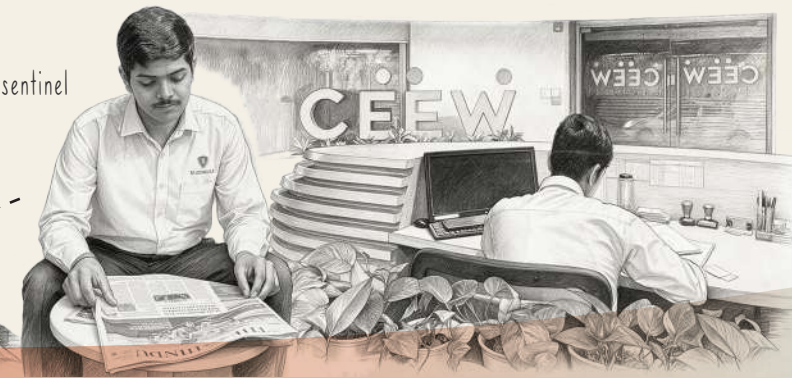
Beyond the register, it's also the way people look out for one another that keeps him going. Whether it is Samal being there like a rock—guiding him through the maze of official work at the oddest of hours—or team members always remembering to stop by between trips to ask if he is doing well.

At the end of the day, after the last visitor has left and the building grows quiet—save for the familiar, mechanical hum of the AC ducts—Chandrakant closes the register and does a check.

From his desk, he has watched the institution grow in the last three years. And as many people pass through the doors each day, he stays **a steady sentinel of CEEW — learning, working, and planning what comes next.**

“I FOCUS ON DOING MY DUTY. I MAY NOT UNDERSTAND ALL THE RESEARCH, BUT I KNOW OUR WORK HELPS VILLAGES AND COMMON PEOPLE. THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE.”

The steadfast sentinel



No dropped catches

VIKAS PANDEY

“WHEN EVERYTHING IS
WORKING WELL, PEOPLE
SHOULDN'T NOTICE
FINANCE OR OPERATIONS AT
ALL. THAT IS THE POINT.”

Fixing what ain't
broke yet

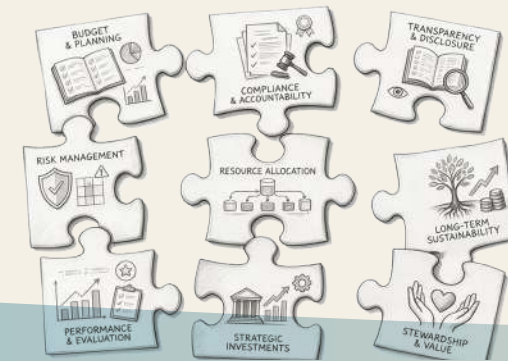


Vikas Pandey sees the end of every financial year as a series of moving parts that must keep aligning: projects closing, books reconciling, contracts checked, compliance filed, salaries released on time. What is not immediately visible is the network of processes that makes this possible.

When he joined CEEW's finance team more than a decade ago, the organisation fit on a single floor. Much of the work moved on paper and manual repetition. He could already see that scale would make such systems fragile and susceptible to individual follow-ups. As the institution grew, so did the complexity: more projects, more people, more partners, more reporting, more compliance. “Growth is good,” he says, “but systems have to grow with it.”

Over time, he and his team shifted workflows online, introduced automated approvals, built shared systems for expenses, payroll, and project tracking, and created checks that prevent small errors from snowballing into large mistakes. “Accuracy is very important,” he says. “But automation removes routine work so people can focus on challenges they actually enjoy engaging with.”

This is particularly relevant at The Council, where researchers may be out on field sites, meeting government officials, or travelling for conferences and negotiations. In such a place, the certainty of processes becomes its own kind of enabling support. A reimbursement cleared on time, a contract processed quickly, a travel request approved without delay, these small efficiencies make larger work possible.



Vikas still describes his work simply: “Every day there is a new puzzle,” he says. “You try to solve it so that the system becomes a little better than yesterday.” The goal is not just control, but ease. “You cannot just follow rules,” he explains. “You have to make processes that people can actually use.” This means that he puts in as much time making sure his colleagues learn better financial practices as he encourages his own team to learn new tools, question old processes, and keep improving systems.

Outside work, he has recently begun carving out his weekends more intentionally: time for cricket, for badminton, and being more present for his children.

“In finance, a lot of the work is similar every year,” he says. “**But every year, the systems should become a little easier for everyone.**”

“EVERY DAY THERE IS A NEW PUZZLE.
YOU TRY TO SOLVE IT SO THAT THE
SYSTEM BECOMES A LITTLE BETTER THAN
YESTERDAY.”

Compliance, compliance, compliance

Marrying efficiency with EQ



Still waiting for someone to get a clean sweep on his quiz

KARTHIK GANESAN

“EVERY INSTITUTION STARTS OUT WITH CURIOSITY. PEOPLE AND A SHARED PURPOSE NOURISH IT.”

Curiosity over comfort



When Karthik Ganesan joined The Council in 2012, he had the credentials to choose safer paths. A civil engineer from IIT Madras, trained in public policy, he had already worked in analytics and consulting abroad.

What drew him in instead was the opportunity to chase a harder question: what would it take to build institutions that could think about energy, growth, and quality of life—together, and at scale?

In the early years, the work came with the opportunity, and the obligation, to engage with everything at the intersection of energy and environment: “You could be the same face representing the organisation in every sector,” he recalls. Industrial carbon footprint one day, power and energy access another, while also juggling questions of air pollution and clean mobility. It meant working on emerging questions early. He and a colleague found themselves presenting on critical minerals to the National Security Advisor in 2013, long before it became a strategic priority.

That necessity, sustained over time, became a method. Learn enough to ask better questions. Push assumptions harder. Make sure the evidence holds: “Measure first. Argue later.”

Over time, that breadth has become one of the institution’s strengths. Karthik has a knack for spotting talent early for research teams, mentoring them long before their work coheres into formal verticals. Everyone knows when Karthik raises a hand after a PPT that a thorough question is coming.

Today, as Director of Strategic Partnerships, he still works from the same logic: approaching partners as actors with constraints, incentives, and blind spots to be understood, without diluting what the institution stands for.

What gets measured, gets done

That rigour also shows up in how ‘KG’ has helped shape softer institutional habits: an active cab sharing group, fruits in office on Tuesdays (everyone was eating too many sweets!), and a long-running battle to do away with paper towels and reduce waste. Culture goes both ways: sustainable habits prove that an institution means what it studies.

Colleagues know him as exacting, deeply anchored in facts, often dryly funny, always up for a quiz, and unwilling to let weak assumptions pass. The point is to keep the work from becoming convenient. “It’s both a boon and a bane,” he laughs. “There is no true boundary between institution-building and living by the systems you claim to care about.”

If CEEW’s first innings was about proving an institution could be built, the next will be about whether it can keep renewing itself. Karthik sits precisely between memory and architecture, between standards and reinvention, between what has endured and what still has to be built.

At fifteen years, as this year of tales comes to a close, this is a reminder that **institutions are always larger than the stories they can tell at any one time.**

“THERE IS NO TRUE BOUNDARY BETWEEN INSTITUTION-BUILDING AND LIVING BY THE SYSTEMS YOU CLAIM TO CARE ABOUT.”

Practising everything preached



The Council is built on

purpose,

driven by

processes,

and sustained by its

people.



Celebrating #CEEW15

ABOUT CEEW

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)—a homegrown institution with headquarters in New Delhi—is among the world’s leading climate think tanks. The Council uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to support public policy, transform markets, shape technology, and nudge behaviour. It addresses pressing regional and global challenges through an integrated and internationally focused approach. The Council prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research and strives to impact sustainable development at scale.

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