



LIFE LESSONS: RETHINKING POLICIES FOR LIFESTYLES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

January 2024
Background Paper No. 19

BY ANIT MUKHERJEE

1. INTRODUCTION

Combating climate change is the defining challenge of our times. The Conference of Parties (COP21) meeting in Paris in 2015 urged countries to set national targets and outline actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a time bound manner to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Nearly a decade later, the world is no closer to achieving the goal - and may have even regressed - underlining the need to take urgent action on a global scale. Achieving the Paris targets will require significant transformation in consumption behavior beyond just the transition to clean energy that has been the focus of global efforts to mitigate climate change until now. There is a need to move toward lifestyles that are sustainable, preserve resources, reduce waste, and promote health and nutrition through demand-side interventions.¹ In this context, India's Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE) initiative provides an integrated framework to attain sustainable lifestyles while preserving and protecting the right to development and well-being of people, especially in the Global South.

When introducing the concept at the Glasgow meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP26) in 2021, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi declared that, "there is a need for all of us to come together and take Lifestyle for the Environment as a campaign," stating further that, "what is needed today is mindful and deliberate utilization, instead of mindless and destructive consumption. This can become a mass movement for Environment Conscious Lifestyle."²

Taking inspiration from the Mission LiFE principles, the G20 adopted the High-Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development (G20-HLP) during India's presidency. It highlighted the role of "thoughtful and purposeful consumption through behavior change combined with regulatory and legislative actions for climate-friendly consumer choices and sustainable production patterns."³ The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration further committed the G20 to take "robust collective actions that will enable the world to embrace sustainable production and consumption patterns and mainstream Lifestyles for Sustainable Development....(and) support the creation of an enabling policy environment to promote sustainable lifestyles for climate action."⁴ In conjunction with the commitment to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the G20-HLP and Mission LiFE can serve as a springboard to make sustainable lifestyles as an integral part of global movement for effective climate action in the years ahead.

The key contribution of Mission LiFE to global discourse on reducing climate impact is to shift the locus of action from the supply to the demand side of climate mitigation.

¹ Felix Creutzig, et al, "Towards demand-side solutions for mitigating climate change," *Nature Climate Change*, April 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0121-1>.

² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "National Statement by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at COP26 Summit in Glasgow," November 2, 2021, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34466/National+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+Shri+Narendra+Modi+at+COP26+Summit+in+Glasgow>.

³ See G20 High Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development, 2023. Adopted at the Varanasi Development Ministerial Meeting, June 12, 2023, <https://dwgg20.org/summits/2023/>.

⁴ See G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, 2023, New Delhi, September 9-10, https://www.g20.org/content/dam/gtwenty/gtwenty_new/document/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf.

While other world leaders, notably President Jose Mujica of Uruguay, have also called for sustainable lifestyles to tackle the climate crisis, the emphasis has been for countries to transition away from fossil fuels to clean and renewable sources of energy such as solar power and electric vehicles to reduce carbon emissions.⁵

Making a case to change lifestyles is politically more difficult. For example, in the food production sector, empirical evidence shows that shifting to plant-based diets in the developed world reduces greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 percent along with higher health co-benefits.⁶ This would, however, require not only massive changes in individual behavior and societal norms but also leaders to take on politically powerful lobby groups that promote meat processing industry in many countries. Despite the difficulties, lifestyle changes have been successfully implemented in several Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Denmark. In Sweden, this was achieved through citizen engagement coupled with policy changes.⁷ In the developing world, Costa Rica has emerged as a pioneer in sustainability, exemplified by its eco-friendly transportation systems, a robust “pay-as-you-throw” recycling program, and its extensive utilization of clean energy sources.⁸

Given this background, Mission LiFE’s provides a set of broad themes and illustrative actions to change behaviors, norms, and policies on the demand side. It is based on seven key domains of action – saving energy, saving water, avoiding single-use plastics, reducing waste and e-waste, adopting sustainable food systems, and a healthy lifestyle. These are indicative rather than prescriptive, leaving space for individual and collective action that are context specific. As such, the Mission LiFE principles and actions can be adopted at different levels (individual, societal, national, and global) where the end goal is to shift to sustainable lifestyles to mitigate the impact of, and adapt to, climate change.

Mission LiFE, therefore, provides a global framework for countries to design and implement policy interventions to nudge individuals and communities toward sustainable lifestyles, moving beyond siloed initiatives (such as clean energy) to a more holistic approach to reduce climate impact, achieve the SDGs, and honor their commitment to the Paris climate agreement. The next section takes stock of the global targets and achievements and assesses how countries can adopt the Mission LiFE framework to design policies and programs to mitigate climate change.

⁵ “Human happiness and the environment: Address by Uruguayan president Jose Mujica at Rio +20 Summit,” June 12, 2020, <https://thewanderlife.com/human-happiness-and-the-environment-address-by-uruguayan-president-jose-mujica-at-rio-20-summit/>.

⁶ Felix Creutzig, et al, “Demand, services and social aspects of mitigation,” In IPCC: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press, 2022, doi: 10.1017/9781009157926.007.

⁷ Katherine Delfay, “A greener shade of blue and yellow: Sweden’s path to environmental leadership,” Fordham University, 2023, https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1151&context=environ_2015.

⁸ Mollie Chapman, et al, “A payment by any other name: Is Costa Rica’s PES a payment for services or a support for stewards?” *World Development*, May 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.104900>. Ministerial Meeting, June 12, 2023, <https://dwgg20.org/summits/2023/>.

2. OPERATIONALIZING MISSION LIFE FOR GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION

Over the past decade, world leaders have pledged to achieve sustainable development leaving no one behind and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit the impact of a changing climate. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit countries to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact (Goal 13) and to ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns (Goal 12). These include targets to achieve sustainable management and use of natural resources and to reduce substantially waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse, moving toward sustainable lifestyles over time.⁹

The 2015 Paris Agreement at COP21 resolved to implement the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by, “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change,” and, “aim to reach peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible.”¹⁰

Recent assessments, however, indicate that the world is falling behind in achieving both the SDGs and the COP21 targets. The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GDSR) states that, at the halfway mark, the world is offtrack in reaching several of the goals. Additionally, the lingering effect of the global pandemic continuing to have a disruptive impact on the Global South in particular. The report points to a deterioration in progress toward achieving the targets for food security, sustainable economic growth, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions between 2020-2023.¹¹

In a similar vein, the recently released Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that, “global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals.”¹² The report notes that climate change has reduced food and water security, hindering efforts to achieve the SDGs, thereby providing strong evidence for the need for urgent global action.

Both the GDSR and IPCC reports indicate that there is a rapidly narrowing window of opportunity to enable climate-resilient development. This will require coordi-

⁹ The United Nations, “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development,” A/RES/70/1, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>.

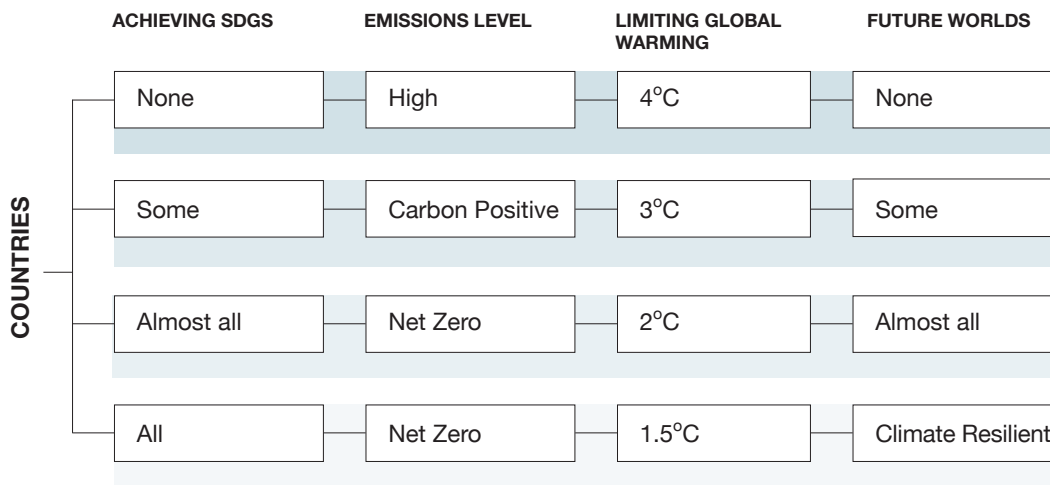
¹⁰ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, “The Paris Agreement,” 2016, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/parisagreement_publication.pdf.

¹¹ The United Nations Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, “Global Sustainable Development Report 2023,” New York, 2023, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FINAL%20GDSR%202023-Digital%20-110923_1.pdf.

¹² IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf. Ministerial Meeting, June 12, 2023, <https://dwgg20.org/summits/2023/>.

nated actions at sub-national, national, and international levels, with individuals and communities playing a crucial role in enabling and accelerating shifts in development pathways toward sustainable and climate resilient development. These climate resilient development pathways (CRDPs) require societal and systemic transformation since business-as-usual would not suffice to achieve the climate and development goals.¹³

Figure 1: Climate-resilient Sustainable Development Pathways



Source: Author’s representation, based on data and analysis from IPCC, 2018: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Effecting such transformation requires actions to avoid, shift, and improve demand for products, activities, and services - known as the ASI framework - that would have the greatest impact for both climate mitigation and sustainable development.¹⁴ In addition, it is important to identify the key stakeholders who can drive this transformation. These include not only individuals, societies, and governments but also global institutions such as the United Nations (UN), UNFCCC, and the G20 that set targets and enforce accountability.

The transportation sector is an illustrative case. According to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, it is responsible for approximately 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, making it a key area for climate mitigation efforts.¹⁵ A review of the literature indicates that the avoid category includes actions to disincentivize the demand for mobility services through compact urban planning which obviates the need for personal vehicle ownership.¹⁶ The shift category actions substitute demand for mobility services with a low (or zero) emission ones with behavior change playing an important role in the transition.

¹³ IPCC, “Global Warming of 1.5°C,” IPCC Special Report, 2018, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

¹⁴ Felix Creutzig, et al, “Demand-side solutions to climate change mitigation consistent with high levels of well-being,” *Nature Climate Change*, November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01219-y>.

¹⁵ IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers.”

¹⁶ Joyashree Roy, et al, “Demand side climate change mitigation actions and SDGs: literature review with systematic evidence search,” *Environmental Research Letters*, 2021, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abd81a/pdf>.

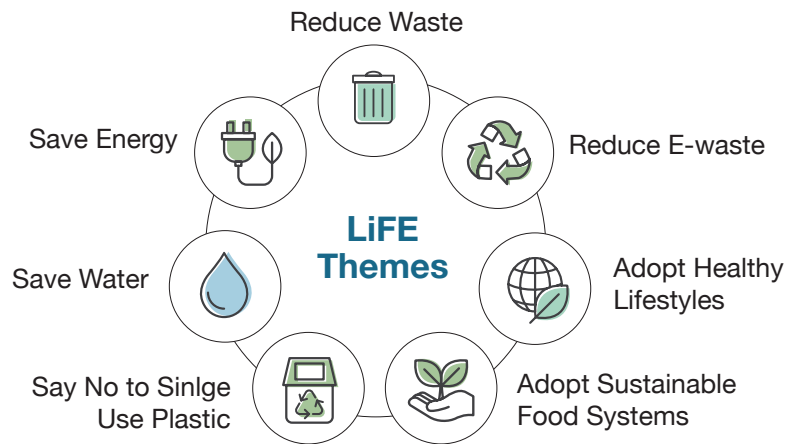
These include the use of active travel options, such as walking and biking, and greater use of public transport. Actions in the improve category encourage energy efficiency such as the use of electric vehicles (EVs) and non-polluting modes of public transport such as hydrogen-fueled buses. These can be achieved through a combination of incentives and regulation, such as the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States.¹⁷

The ASI framework requires three sets of policies to facilitate the transition to sustainable lifestyles. These include regulations (for example, building codes that encourage pedestrian friendly cities), incentives (for example, tax rebates for electric car purchase), and mass campaigns to promote pro-climate behaviors and lifestyles at the individual level. Moving toward sustainable lifestyles is therefore a combination of:

- (i) a bottom-up approach through programs and actions that directly empower individuals, households, and communities in their daily lives, enabling them to understand, create/co-create, and/or choose the more sustainable lifestyle options; and
- (ii) a top-down approach to support government policy, business models, institutional arrangements, and actions that set the conditions necessary for sustainable lifestyles to thrive.

The ASI framework can be applied to Mission LiFE to understand the link between the seven themes depicted in Figure 2. However, Mission LiFE is premised on the interlinkages between the three ASI categories, thereby going beyond the siloed approach to design and implement programs that impact multiple themes. These can then be linked to the SDG goals, and their impact can be measured against national and global targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprints.

Figure 2: Mission LiFE Themes



Source: Niti Aayog and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), Government of India, <https://missionlife-moefcc.nic.in/>.

¹⁷ Melissa Barbanell, "A Brief Summary of the Climate and Energy Provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022," World Resources Institute, 2022, <https://www.wri.org/update/brief-summary-climate-and-energy-provisions-inflation-reduction-act-2022>. Ministerial Meeting, June 12, 2023, <https://dwgg20.org/summits/2023/>.

Under the ASI framework, only one of the seven themes falls under the avoid category: the elimination of single-use plastics. Others can be classified either as a shift in behavior (waste management, health and nutrition) or in use of resources such as water and energy through behavior change interventions. As depicted in Figure 3, these shifts are intended to be carried out in phases (demand, supply, and policy) with the objective of enabling individual, societal, and systemic transformations as per the CRDPs.

Figure 3: Phase-wise Mission LiFE shifts



Source: Niti Aayog and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), Government of India, <https://missionlife-moefcc.nic.in/>.





In terms of concrete measures, Mission LiFE lists seventy-five actions under the seven themes that individuals can take in their daily lives to put sustainable lifestyle into practice. While not all the actions are possible for every individual, they are intended to be nudges or reminders that change individual behavior as shown in Phase I of Figure 3. If adopted at population scale, these changes can induce shifts in production (Phase II, Figure 3) and lead to policy action at a global scale (Phase III, Figure 3).

Taking illustrative examples from each of the themes, Table 1 maps the Mission LiFE actions to specific SDG goals and suggests policies that can support the shift. The overarching objective of Mission LiFE and proposed actions relate directly to combating climate change and its impact (SDG 12). However, the analysis shows that the seven selected actions correspond to several SDGs, ranging from ending hunger (SDG 2), management of water resources (SDG 6), sustainable urbanization (SDG 11), protection of biodiversity (SDG 15), and sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12). This indicates that supporting climate action (SDG 13) through sustainable lifestyles requires a broad-based and multisectoral approach that forms the organizing principle of Mission LiFE.











Preliminary studies point to a significant impact of Mission LiFE actions to save energy vis-à-vis global efforts to reduce global warming. In terms of emissions, simulations indicate that the adoption of the kinds of actions and measures targeted by LiFE – including behavioral changes and sustainable consumer choices to save energy – would reduce annual global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by more than 2 billion tons (Gt) in 2030. This is about one-fifth of the emissions reductions needed by 2030 to put the world on a pathway to net zero emissions, a key aspiration of SDG 13. LiFE measures would also save consumers globally around \$440 billion in 2030, equivalent to around 5 percent of all spending on fuels across the global economy that year, thereby providing a direct incentive to transition to sustainable lifestyles.¹⁸

In terms of policies, analysis shows that some of the Mission LiFE objectives and actions can be incorporated into existing government programs, for example, encouraging the consumption of millets by including it in the public distribution system for foodgrains. Others might require formulating new policies, such as the creation of biodiversity zones within cities that may fall under the ambit of state and local governments. Situating Mission LiFE themes in terms of the ASI framework can drive policy coherence both across ministries and departments, as well as between federal and state levels. Some policies, such as the ban on single-use plastics for example, will require legal sanctions on the production side as well as coordination between central and state governments to enforce the provisions at the local level. Similarly, better waste management might be achieved through education and behavior change communication where either the central, state, or local government can take the lead, coordinating the actions of different ministries, departments, and agencies as in the case of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission – SBM).

Table 1: Mission LiFE and SDGs

MISSION LIFE THEME	SUGGESTED ACTION	SDG GOAL	SDG TARGET	POLICY OPTION
<p>Adopt Sustainable Food Systems</p> 	Include millets in diets.	 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>	2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices.	Include millets in public procurement and distribution.
<p>Adopt Healthy Lifestyles</p> 	Start biodiversity conservation at community level.	 <p>15 LIFE ON LAND</p>	15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.	Create and protect biodiversity zones especially in urban areas.

¹⁸ International Energy Agency, “LiFE lessons from India: The benefits of advancing the Lifestyles for Environment (LiFE) initiative through the G20,” February 2023, <https://www.iea.org/reports/life-lessons-from-india>.

<p>Say No to Single Use Plastic</p> 	<p>Use cloth bags for shopping instead of plastic bags.</p>		<p>6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, Eliminating dumping, and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials.</p>	<p>Enforce ban on single-use plastic bags.</p>
<p>Save Energy</p> 	<p>Use public transport wherever possible.</p>		<p>11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport.</p>	<p>Investment in non-polluting public transport.</p>
<p>Save Water</p> 	<p>Use efficient water-saving technologies.</p>		<p>6.4 By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors.</p>	<p>Provide incentives to adopt water saving technologies and conservation practices.</p>
<p>Reduce Waste</p> 	<p>Practice segregation of dry and wet waste at home.</p>		<p>12.5 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse.</p>	<p>Support community-based awareness campaigns to for better waste management.</p>
<p>Reduce E-waste</p> 	<p>Repair and use Electronic devices over discarding devices.</p>		<p>12.5 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse.</p>	<p>Provide incentives for recycling e-waste, such as discounts or vouchers for correct disposal.</p>

Source: Author’s representation based on the Sustainable Development Goals available at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Operationalizing Mission LiFE will accelerate progress toward multiple SDGs and help put the G20-HLP principles into practice. It will also help countries identify a set of policies to support the transition to sustainable lifestyles adapting to their own priorities and needs.

Mission LiFE, designed as a global program from the outset, can provide a practical framework for coordinated action to mitigate climate change at the global level. This is particularly relevant for G20 which is responsible for nearly 80 percent of all territorial

greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁹ As the world's most populous country, India has taken the initiative to propose Mission LiFE as a set of guiding principles and concrete actions to mitigate climate change. However, these principles and actions have global resonance.

Brazil, the current G20 president, is trying to reverse the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, caused in large part due to the production of meat and soybeans. An effort to reduce exports and shift consumption in favor of plant-based diets could support the government's stated objective of zero deforestation.²⁰ South Africa, the president-designate of G20 following Brazil, is in the throes of an energy and water crisis that has disrupted daily life in the country. As the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the African continent, there is an urgent need to shift from coal to renewables, as well as rationalize the consumption of energy.²¹ Adopting Mission LiFE actions to save energy and water, for example, installing solar panels on rooftops and rainwater harvesting, can not only help mitigate the crisis in the short run but also enable the country to take a leadership role in the continent as a whole.

With India, Brazil, and South Africa as the troika in 2024, there is a historic opportunity to make sustainable lifestyles a priority for the G20 in the coming year and beyond. Mission LiFE can play an important role in catalyzing a global movement to make that happen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge Kadisha Mitchell for her valuable research assistance, and thank Kaushik Ranjan Bandopadhyay and Satyam Vyas for their review, comments, and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. The paper is part of ORF America's G20 initiative supported by the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF). This background paper reflects the personal research, analysis, and views of the author, and does not represent the position of either of these institutions, their affiliates, or partners.

Cover image designed by Freepik.

¹⁹ Ceecee Holtz, "Are G20 countries doing their fair share of global climate mitigation?" Oxfam Discussion Paper, September 2023, <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621540/dp-are-g20-countries-doing-their-fair-share-of-global-climate-mitigation-070923-en.pdf;jsessionid=EC91EECCC39B7E0DB3727D027BA8DCFB?sequence=7>.

²⁰ Tiago Reis, Erasmus zu Ermgassen, and Osvaldo Pereira, "Trase: Brazilian Beef Exports and Deforestation," Stockholm Environment Institute, November 21, 2023, <https://www.sei.org/features/trase-brazil-beef-exports-deforestation/>.

²¹ Mariel Ferragamo, "Will South Africa's Power Crisis Sink Its Green Ambitions?" Council on Foreign Relations, July 20, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/will-south-africas-power-crisis-sink-its-green-ambitions>.

ABOUT ORF AMERICA

The Observer Research Foundation America (ORF America) is an independent, non-partisan, and nonprofit organization in Washington DC dedicated to addressing policy challenges facing the United States, India, and their partners in a rapidly changing world.

ORF America produces research, curates diverse and inclusive platforms, and develops networks for cooperation between the developed and developing worlds based on common values and shared interests. Its areas of focus are international affairs, technology, climate and energy, and economics. Established in 2020, ORF America is an overseas affiliate of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), India's premier non-government think tank.

Observer Research Foundation America
1100 17th St. NW, Suite 501, Washington DC 20036

www.orfamerica.org

