



From the Sundarban to the City: A Green Call to Action

Introduction:

Progyan Foundation for Research and Innovation (PFRI) marked *World Environment Day (5 June 2025)* and the subsequent *Sustainable Environment Week (9–13 June 2025)* with a comprehensive campaign under the global theme “*Putting an End to Plastic Pollution*”. The campaign’s purpose was to raise awareness, educate various communities, and spur action on environmental issues, especially plastic waste. By aligning its regional outreach with *United Nations Environment Programme* (UNEP) priorities, PFRI aimed to translate global goals into community impact. The Foundation’s program was designed to engage both Eco-sensitive communities and corporate professionals through storytelling, hands-on activities, and interactive exhibits, demonstrating how small changes in daily life can support SDG, UNDP and UNEP’s broader objectives.

Background:

Plastic pollution is a pressing global issue, with over 400 million tons produced annually, much of it polluting oceans, rivers, and land. Most people are unaware of how everyday choices like using single-use plastics contribute to this crisis. Raising awareness and educating communities, especially youth, empowers them to adopt sustainable habits, reduce plastic waste, and support long-term environmental health. Local actions such as clean-up drives and responsible consumption align directly with global frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15) and the UNEP-led campaign to end plastic pollution. Informed citizens are key to advancing both grassroots change and global environmental commitments.



From Mangroves to Mindsets, Empowering Children in the Sundarban:

PFRI organized a special program in the Sundarban region for local schoolchildren, featuring interactive storytelling sessions that highlighted the importance of clean rivers, forests, and wildlife, and explained how plastic pollution harms these environments. Young participants were encouraged to think of themselves as ‘guardians of the Sundarban,’ and learned through narrative how everyday habits like reducing single-use plastic can protect wildlife such as tigers. The children then joined volunteers in a riverside clean-up drive, collecting discarded plastic bottles and bags from the mangrove fringes. This hands-on activity connected theory to practice, showing how community action can improve local ecology. By focusing on youth education and participation, PFRI’s Sundarban event echoed UNEP’s emphasis that young people are essential agents of change in the environmental movement. The day’s mixture of storytelling, clean-up efforts, and discussion empowered children with knowledge and responsibility, laying a foundation for sustainable habits early in life.



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Acting Local, Thinking Global:

PFRI continued its environmental outreach throughout Environment Week (9 June 2025 – 13 June 2025) by partnering with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) across five Kolkata corporate campuses. Each weekday, PFRI volunteer teams set up awareness stalls in the canteens of TCS offices (Delta Park, Eco Space, Candor IT Park, Gitanjali Park.), engaging employees with information on environmental issues. The stalls displayed posters explaining the dangers of plastic pollution and showcased practical alternatives, such as reusable containers and cloth bags. One interactive feature was a 'plastic footprint' survey: visitors recorded their own daily use of plastic items and extrapolated the results to annual figures. This personalized exercise, guided by PFRI staff, brought to life how individual choices accumulate into significant waste over time. By quantifying personal plastic use, participants saw the direct link between daily habits and global pollution trends. These activities reflected UNEP's call for sustainable lifestyles, since understanding and reducing one's environmental footprint is central to living 'better and lighter'.



In parallel with plastic-awareness activities, PFRI integrated climate-resilient agriculture and biodiversity education into the TCS events. PFRI curated a display of ten indigenous, salt-tolerant rice varieties from the Sundarban region. Informational signs and discussions explained that these traditional paddy strains have been cultivated by local farmers for generations because of their ability to withstand saline soils and flooding. PFRI staff emphasized that preserving such crop diversity is a key adaptation strategy as the climate warms and sea levels rise. This exhibit demonstrated in practical terms how sustainable agriculture can meet current food needs without degrading the environment, exactly the kind of farming UNEP advocates as part of its vision for sustainable development. Visitors learned that supporting indigenous rice and natural farming methods helps maintain soil health and biodiversity, thus linking agricultural practices with ecosystem stewardship.





The program also included cultural and educational media to deepen ecological awareness. At each campus, PFRI screened short documentary films on local environmental topics – for example, one film highlighted traditional paddy farming in the Sundarban and another followed the story of the endangered Hoolock gibbons in Arunachal Pradesh. These screenings drew employees into the real-world implications of conservation. The visual narratives reinforced how seemingly distant issues (tropical agriculture or primate conservation) connect to global biodiversity goals. By featuring these stories, PFRI underscored that biodiversity conservation protecting diverse species and habitats – is integral to the overall environmental mission. This approach resonated with UNDP and UNEP’s broader agenda, which stresses that healthy ecosystems and biodiversity awareness are crucial components of environmental sustainability.

Key Outcomes and Impacts:

Throughout the week, quiz contests and incentive programs kept participants engaged. Short environmental quizzes tested attendees’ knowledge, and employees answering correctly received badges and live saplings as rewards. This ‘knowledge-for-action’ exchange bridged learning with a tangible commitment- planting a tree. It exemplified UNEP’s philosophy that education should lead to practical, sustainable outcomes (for example, the United Nations recently highlighted sustainable lifestyle choices as a policy priority). By motivating staff to take saplings home, PFRI helped ensure that the lessons of Environment Week would grow roots in the city’s neighborhoods as well.

Taken together, PFRI’s activities during Environment Week mapped directly onto several UNEP priorities. The campaign’s focus on plastic through cleanup drives, informative stalls, and personal footprint surveys mirrored the World Environment Day theme and UNEP’s push for a global treaty to end plastic pollution. Engaging children and corporate employees alike affirmed UNEP’s view that citizens of all ages must contribute to sustainability. Encouraging lower-plastic lifestyles and giving people tools to change their habits reflected UNEP’s sustainable living objectives. Highlighting indigenous agriculture and distributing trees addressed both climate resilience and biodiversity: these efforts underscored how supporting diverse, locally adapted crops and expanding green cover contribute to global goals on climate-smart farming and ecosystem protection. In each case, PFRI’s local programs served as practical expressions of the United Nations’ environmental agenda, linking grassroots action with international strategies.

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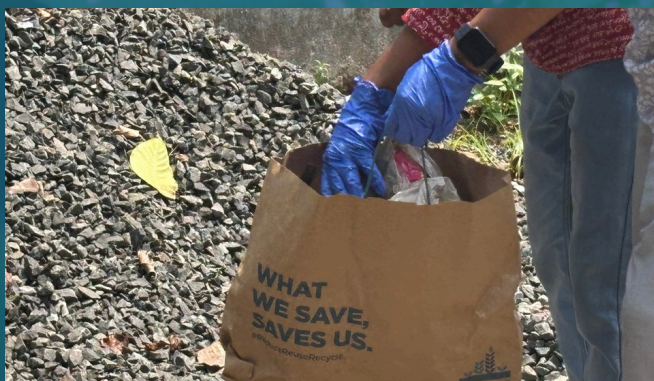
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In Conclusion, the Progyan Foundation's newsletter reports that the World Environment Day and Environment Week campaign was a success in community engagement and education. The Foundation reaffirms its ongoing commitment to the themes of ending plastic pollution, fostering sustainable lifestyles, and protecting biodiversity. By drawing together storytelling, educational activities, clean-up efforts, and interactive exhibits, PFRI demonstrated how grassroots initiatives can help meet UNEP's global targets. The newsletter closes with a formal reminder that PFRI welcomes continued participation from schools, businesses, volunteers and policymakers in its future initiatives. The Foundation emphasizes that environmental progress depends on broad collaboration: by working together, stakeholders can realize the shared goal of a cleaner, greener future that aligns with both local needs and the United Nations' sustainable development vision.



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