

To these corporates, *Sustainability is more* than a catchword

writes Swetha Kannan

A few years ago, 'going green' was the catchphrase in the corporate world and sometimes it meant literally that – bringing in some 'green' cover. Apart from gestures that involved planting saplings on World Environment Day or Earth Day, not many companies went beyond that. But the story is slowly changing, with several corporate firms waking up to the broader and more comprehensive philosophy of 'sustainability' and understanding the need to

incorporate it as an integral part of their corporate agenda and operations. Corporates are increasingly realizing that sustainability is a conscious and essential choice that needs to be made – sooner, not later. While there is still a long way to go before sustainability becomes an inseparable part of the corporate ethos, many companies are clearly stating their goals and vision with respect to their environmental responsibility and chalking up



More aware and articulate

"As a growing corporate, Nagarro recognizes the fact that social and environmental responsibility are integral components of a business. We are continually working towards creating a progressive and outstretched impact. And we will remain committed to raising the bar," says Neeraj Chhibba, VP, Nagarro, a technology services and consulting company. Nagarro recently tied up with Lithium Technologies, an electric vehicle cab services company, to roll out a fleet of electric cars for employee commute in Gurgaon and Jaipur. This is in line with the company's overall commitment towards green mobility and sustainable office spaces, which includes providing cycle stations and organising cyclothons, cycle

tours, and car-free challenges to motivate employees. "Sustainability is no more a luxurious or aspirational concept. It is now affordable and attainable, and the resources needed for it are available. We corporates have realized that it is high time we acted on it. It is necessary that we are aware of environmental damages and the corrective measures that need to be taken," says Sridhar Puppala, Chief Engineer, Novotel Hyderabad Airport, part of the Accor group of hotels. Novotel Hyderabad Airport's sustainability initiatives include an ETP unit for treating laundry water, LED lighting in all public areas and possible back areas, and use of recyclable containers for packaged food. Says Veronique Augier Nel, Director of Communications & CSR – Asia Pacific, AccorHotels,

"We believe the time to act is now. There is no more time to waste. Hence, we will put all our efforts to build greener hotels, establish more responsible procurement systems, and educate our stakeholders along the way." Accor has launched the Planet 21 – Acting Here programme with various practices around sustainability. Measures include solar panels for water heating, sewage treatment plant, bio diesel for hot water boilers, and testing bottling plants at some of its properties. Accor is also focused on building green and sustainable properties. For instance, its property ibis Kolkata Rajarhat has been constructed using eco-friendly building materials such as high-performance, energy-efficient glazing, water-saving fixtures, and greener landscaping.



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Sustainable operations

With environmental consciousness on the rise among consumers and clients, companies are taking a good look at their operations – from start to finish – and coming up with articulate targets and plans so that they are seen as corporates with a conscience. Towards this, many companies are focused on inculcating sustainable practices across the gamut of their operations.

For instance, Wipro Ltd, a global information technology, consulting and business process services company, is committed to science-based targets to reduce emissions across the value chain. Its goal is to halve absolute emissions of its operational footprint and reduce indirect emissions (business travel,

employee commute, and upstream energy emissions) by 30% by 2030 – from a 2017 baseline. The company has invested on tertiary treatment methods such as ultra-filtration and RO projects for STP treated water. The treated water with a quality and TDS (total dissolved solids) of less than 1000 – equivalent to freshwater – is used in cooling towers and flushing. The company is also transitioning its global fleet to electric vehicles. Wipro has mapped the results of its efforts. Today, recycled water accounts for 42% of Wipro's total water consumption, while renewable energy comprises 40% of the company's total office space energy consumption. With respect to its carbon footprint, Wipro has managed to reduce emissions from business travel footprint by a compounded rate of 6% over the last five years. Online retailer Amazon India is



working hard on a long-term multi-pronged approach towards plastic-free packaging in its supply chain. It is leveraging technology to build solutions that optimize the use of packaging material, reduce waste and create eco-friendly packaging.

In September 2019, the company announced its commitment to eliminate single-use plastic from its packaging by June 2020. As part of this effort, Amazon has initiated a series of steps at its fulfilment centres – including paper cushions in the place of air pillows and bubble wraps and recyclable corrugate boxes with 100% recycled content. The plastic currently used in packaging mailers and bubble bags is made

of 20% recycled content.

In June 2019, Amazon launched the Packaging-Free Shipments (PFS) programme, wherein orders are shipped in their original packaging without secondary or additional packaging. This currently works in 20 cities and is also applicable to orders where the customer is located in the same region as the origin fulfilment centre. Amazon says 20% of its fulfilment centres ship products with no/reduced packaging as part of the PFS program.

Akhil Saxena, Vice President, Customer Fulfilment, APAC & Emerging Markets, Amazon, gives a number perspective to

Amazon's efforts thus far, "With existing efforts, less than 7% of packaging at our fulfilment centres uses single-use plastic. As of July 2019, we doubled the number of instances where products were shipped with only the manufacturer's packaging. In 2018, we doubled the instances of a customer receiving a box with multiple products in it. And 60% of Amazon Pantry orders are now delivered in totes."

Smart business choice

Apart from benefitting the environment, many corporates are also realizing that sustainable practices actually make a lot of business sense, leading to significant cost savings. In 2016, Wipro embraced the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool standard from Green Electronic Council in 2016 for its IT hardware procurement, translating to savings of 2.7 million units of electricity annually. Wipro believes its engagement with social and ecological issues must be a long-term commitment, as this is the only way for real

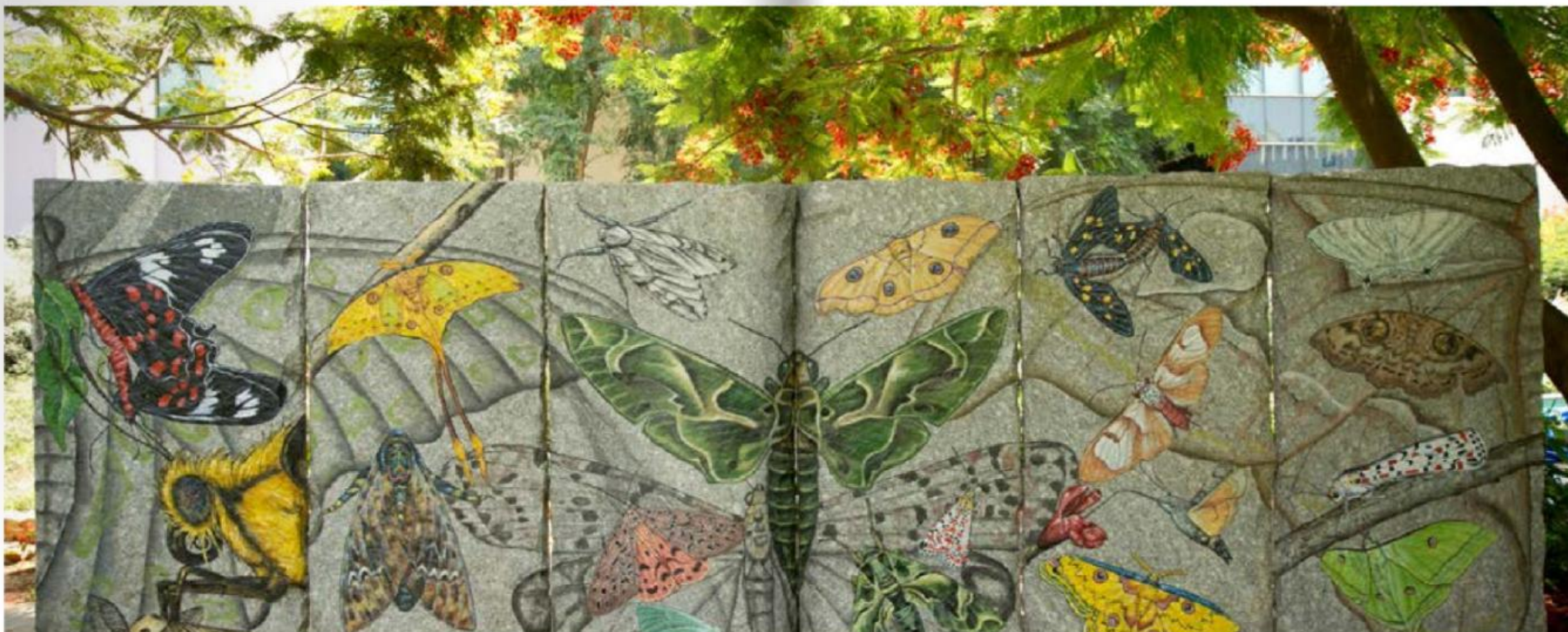
change to happen on the ground. "Such an approach serves both enlightened business interest and social good," says P. S. Narayan, Vice President and Head – Sustainability, Wipro Ltd. At the garment hub of Tirupur in Tamil Nadu, sustainability is now a way of life with investments in recycling waste water, wind and solar energy, and zero liquid discharge systems.

Recently, Tirupur-based Royal Classic Mill recycles about 40 lakh litres of effluent water every day, which is reused in processing. The treatment involves two stages – colour removal and reverse osmosis where 65% pure water is obtained. The remaining hard water with salt content is used for dyeing. "This makes it a truly a zero-liquid discharge process," says T. R. Sivaram, Managing Director of Classic Polo, an apparel brand from the company. The company's entire power requirement is catered by wind mills. Many of the company's products has 30% of recycled polyester, made from PET bottles. Apart from the sustainability aspect, "this portion of polyester gives long life to our garments," explains Sivaram.

Recently, Tirupur-based N C Johnson and Sons supplied around 25,000 units of active wear made from recycled polyester to be worn by the ball girls and boys and other staff at the Australian Open tennis tournament.

Coimbatore-based denim manufacturer KG Denim believes every day is Earth Day. It takes pride in its manufacturing practices – 100% utilization of raw materials (cotton and yarn), use of renewable energy





(solar, wind, biomass), water conservation, reusing spinning packing materials, and zero liquid discharge. The company has launched natural plant-based, machine-dyed indigo denim products under the brand name 'Nature's Blue'. Nature's Blue products are manufactured using green alkali, replacing caustic substances, and 100% green and biodegradable reducing agent.

Creating green belts

Corporates have also stepped up efforts to create green spaces

across their campus.

Wipro has invested in biodiversity projects – a butterfly park, a wetland zone and a thematic garden – in Bengaluru and Pune – to create an ecologically thriving ecosystem on campus.

Novotel Hyderabad Airport maintains a herb garden at its premises in Hyderabad across about one acre of land. The garden grows vegetables such as zucchini, broccoli and cherry tomatoes. The organic garden is watered with recycled water. "This gives guests fresh produce and

a real farm-to-fork experience," says Sridhar.

Handling waste

Several organisations have pledged to make their campuses plastic-free in a bid to reduce wastage. Nagarro uses glass bottles that are refillable and reusable, ceramic mugs in place of plastic/paper cups, and reusable utensils in the cafeteria. Waste segregation at the source and responsible disposal of waste is also something many companies, such as Wipro and

Nagarro, are doing successfully. In fact, Wipro segregates and monitors waste processing across 13 broad categories and nearly 40 sub categories.

Support of the community

The sustainability story is incomplete without the support of partners, for this is something that cannot be achieved alone. "Partnership is a key aspect of our sustainability program. We will continue to work closely with our suppliers, partners and customers on this front," says Narayan, who heads sustainability at Wipro,

which works with renewable energy suppliers, energy efficient hardware manufacturers and service providers to reduce overall greenhouse gas footprint. Amazon too has identified collection agencies to help in the collection of plastic waste generated from across the network. It also hopes to educate sellers who fulfil customer orders directly.

Looking ahead

A lot has been achieved over the last few years, but this is by no means adequate. As businesses evolve, newer models of operations

too will emerge, and sustainability goals and efforts will take on a whole new paradigm and meaning. What will not change is the fact that sustainability is a lifelong commitment that requires sustained efforts, the willingness to learn, unlearn and relearn, and the ability to put long-term interests ahead of short-term gains.

The Covid-19 crisis may have impacted the operations of several corporates, but the sustainability efforts and goals still remain integral to the plans of these companies.