

From an Hour to a Decade: Sustaining Environmental Action for a Greener Future

In a world grappling with escalating environmental crises, symbolic gestures like Earth Hour and commemorative days such as World Environment Day serve as powerful reminders of our collective responsibility toward the planet. Yet, while these moments ignite awareness, lasting environmental transformation demands long-term commitment, systemic change, and continuous engagement. This article explores how environmental observances, ranging from hours to entire decades, contribute to global sustainability by mobilizing action at multiple levels. It also analyzes the strategic value of time-bound campaigns, from single-day events to year-long themes and decade-long United Nations (UN) led initiatives, in fostering behavioral change, influencing policy, and uniting stakeholders. It also highlights the proactive steps being taken by Indian Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) and the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE), an apex body of Indian PSEs, in aligning their operations with climate goals and sustainability principles. Ultimately, it makes a compelling case for integrating awareness with action, transforming fleeting inspiration into enduring environmental stewardship.

Why the Environment Matters: Nature's Life-Support System

The environment is the Earth's ultimate life support system. It is made up of both living

(biotic) elements like animals & plants, and non-living (abiotic) elements like air, water, and sunlight, all of which influence human life. It provides the essentials we rely on: clean air, fertile soil, fresh water, and raw materials for food, industry, and shelter. Through natural cycles like carbon, nitrogen, and water, it regulates climate, maintains environmental balance, and breaks down waste. More than just a resource provider, nature also nurtures mental well-being, cultural identity, and economic activity through its beauty and biodiversity. Acting as a carbon sink, and habitat hub for all life-forms, the environment is vital to climate stability and human survival. It also holds cultural and spiritual significance in many societies. Therefore, protecting and preserving environment is not optional but essential for long-term sustainability and human well-being.

A Calendar of Commitment: Purpose Behind Numerous Environmental Days

There are numerous 'green dates' on the calendar and 'environmental observances' across various time scales: hours, days, weeks, months, years, and even decades. Each time-scale zooms in on a specific issue, for example, World Environment Day for overall environmental protection, Earth Day for climate action, and World Water Day for water conservation. These dedicated events serve a vital

purpose as they raise awareness, drive policy, encourage sustainable habits, and spark youth involvement. They also foster cross-border cooperation, because nature knows no borders. The reason we commemorate so many environmental days is rooted in the reality that the planet's challenges are not isolated incidents but they are persistent, deeply interconnected, and global in nature. Starting from human-induced air pollution fueling climate change to a multitude of other environmental crises demand constant attention at every level. By spreading out focus across the year and across causes, environmental observances keep the momentum going and ensuring that awareness leads to action, and action leads to lasting impact.

From an Hour to a Decade of Collective Environmental Action

From switching off lights for an hour to decade-long United Nations (UN) missions, environmental observances come in all time-scales, each playing significant role. Following sections summarises these observances celebrated at different time-scales.

Environment Hours: Power in a Single Hour

We don't often hear about "World Environment Hours," but the concept is already alive in global movements like **Earth Hour**. Launched in 2007 in Sydney,

Australia, this “lights-off” initiative takes place annually on the last Saturday of March from 8:30 to 9:30 PM local time. For just one hour, millions around the world turn off their lights, not just to save energy, but to send a symbolic act of unity for climate action. This simple gesture creates a striking visual of global solidarity. It reminds us that even the smallest actions, when done together, can spark awareness and drive meaningful change.

150 countries in a shared call for change.



Environment Days: One Day at a Time

Single-day environmental observances may seem brief, but their impact can be powerful and far-reaching. These days serve as concentrated moments to educate the public, inspire action, influence policy, and shine a global spotlight on urgent environmental issues. At the heart of these efforts is World Environment Day (WED), led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and celebrated every year on June 5. Since its inception in 1973, it has grown into the world's largest platform for environmental awareness, uniting more than

Each year, the WED revolves around a central theme, tackling pressing concerns like ecosystem restoration, air quality, or plastic pollution. A designated host country leads the global narrative while also showcasing local solutions.

The 2025 edition is being observed under the banner “#BeatPlasticPollution”, with events taking place from 4th to 13th June in Jeju and Seoul, South Korea, under the theme “Shared Challenge, Collective Action.” The week is packed with dynamic activities: beach clean-ups, reforestation drives, school art competitions, policy dialogues, and mass awareness

campaigns. Importantly, WED isn't an isolated event as it serves as a global platform for raising awareness and inspiring action for environmental protection. Celebrated worldwide, it unites governments, businesses, communities, and individuals to reflect on environmental challenges and commit to sustainable solutions for a better future. Since environmental challenges are numerous, a single day of reminder is not enough and therefore, we have many days dedicated to a specific cause. Some of the significant days are as following –



Earth Day: Celebrated every April 22 since its 1970 grassroots origins in the United States, Earth Day has become a worldwide movement uniting over a billion people in 190+ countries. It spotlights urgent environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and mobilizes global climate actions. The 2025 theme, “**Our Power, Our Planet,**” emphasizes our shared responsibility to drive the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. It urges individuals, organizations, and governments to act boldly through policies, innovation, and everyday choices, so that so we can triple clean electricity by 2030 and secure a greener, more resilient future. From local clean-ups to global pledges, Earth Day is where awareness meets action.



World Water Day (WWD):

Observed annually on March 22, WWD highlights the vital importance of freshwater and sustainable water management. Established by the UN in 1993, it raises awareness about global water challenges, including scarcity, pollution, and unequal access. With over two billion people lacking safe water and sanitation, WWD underscores the urgency of achieving SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. Each year's theme focuses on a key water issue; in 2025, "**Glacier Preservation**" draws attention to glaciers as critical freshwater reserves endangered by climate change. **The 2025 UN World Water Development Report, titled Mountains and Glaciers: Water Towers**, was released on March 21 to mark both World Day for Glaciers and WWD. Published annually by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on behalf of UN-Water, the report stresses the link between water security, peace, and prosperity, offering recommendations for improved access. Through global campaigns, activities, and policy dialogue, WWD inspires collective action because water is not just a resource, it is the essence of life and dignity.

International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB): Observed annually on May 22, this UN-

designated day underscores the critical role of biodiversity in sustaining planetary and human health. Established in 1993, it raises awareness of the alarming loss of species, ecosystems, and genetic diversity driven by deforestation, habitat destruction, overexploitation, pollution, and climate change.



The 2025 theme, "**Harmony with Nature and Sustainable Development**," links the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). The day also promotes global agreements like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), urging nations to integrate biodiversity into national policies and development plans to ensure a thriving, resilient planet for future generations.



World Oceans Day (WOD): Celebrated every year on June 8, WOD is an UN-designated event recognizing the oceans' vital role in sustaining life on

Earth. Covering over 70% of the planet, oceans regulate climate, produce oxygen, support marine biodiversity, and sustain billions of livelihoods. Although celebrated since 1992 by conservation groups, **it was officially recognized by the UN in 2008.**



The 2025 theme, "**Sustainable Fishing Means More**," highlights the importance of responsible fishing in preserving marine life for future generations. The official event, hosted by DOALOS in partnership with Oceanic Global, will take place in Nice, France, ahead of the UN Ocean Conference 2025. The day also reinforces commitments to **SDG 14: Life Below Water**, emphasizing that ocean health is central to climate stability, food security, and global sustainability.

These commemorative days are just a few among many

internationally recognized observances dedicated to spotlighting critical environmental issues. By turning awareness into accountability,

and conversations into collective action, these global observances act as powerful catalysts reminding us that while meaningful change can begin on a single day, sustaining that change demands ongoing commitment throughout the year. A selection of some other key environmental days observed globally is presented in the table below.

Beyond a Day: Powering Through Environmental Weeks

Rather than limiting efforts to one symbolic day, dedicated

and governments to act more sustainably. **Equally critical is World Water Week**, organized annually by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), bringing together global changemakers every August or September in Stockholm and online. The 2025 theme, “**Water for Climate Action**”, focuses on water’s role in tackling climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. It highlights innovative, cross-sector solutions and emphasizes equity and inclusiveness. The

environmentalist **Rachelle Strauss**, it champions a waste-free world and now unites over 100 countries in practical action.

The 2025 theme, “**Towards Zero Waste in Fashion and Textiles**,” aims to tackle the fast fashion crisis. The week encourages reducing single-use plastics, composting, repurposing, and adopting a circular economy mindset, reminding us that “**there’s no such thing as away**” when it comes to waste. Environmental weeks are not just calendar events but they are also catalysts for transformation, reinforcing that environmental stewardship requires consistent, collective commitment. They spark conversations, inspire innovation, and most importantly, empower us to take climate-conscious steps.

Sustaining Momentum for a Month

Unlike single-day or week-long events, month-long campaigns offer an extended window for awareness, education, and action on critical environmental issues.

These extended observances provide the time and space needed to shift mindsets, build

environmental weeks serve as powerful platforms to deepen environmental engagement and amplify action beyond the bounds of a single day. By stretching observances over several days, these weeks allows for broader outreach, inclusion of diverse voices, and the nurturing of long-term habits essential for a healthier planet. One of the most prominent is **World Environment Week**, celebrated globally around June 5, building on the spirit of World Environment Day. Countries across the world mark this period with week-long activities ranging from climate talks to eco-fairs for motivating communities to embrace greener lifestyles and urging industries

event also honors breakthroughs in water conservation through the prestigious Stockholm Water Prize, often dubbed the “Nobel Prize of Water.” **Another powerful movement is Zero Waste Week**, held globally in the first week of September. Launched in 2008 by UK-based



capacity, influence policies, and inspire systemic change. They remind us that environmental responsibility is not just a momentary act, but a sustained journey that grows stronger with every passing day of meaningful participation. For example, **Earth Month (April) centered around Earth Day** on April 22 has become a global movement encouraging individuals, organizations, and governments to participate in tree plantations, clean-up drives, sustainability workshops, and policy dialogues throughout the month. Similarly, **Plastic Free July**, a global campaign launched in Australia, empowers millions worldwide to reduce single-use plastics, offering resources and challenges to help people transition to a zero-waste lifestyle. Several other month-long environmental observances exist, though they are typically country-specific. This is largely because ecological priorities, cultural contexts, and policy frameworks vary from one country to another, making global coordination of such extended campaigns more complex. For instance, the USA observes **National Garden Month** in April, **Water Quality Month** in August, and **Fire Prevention Month** in October. **Arbor Month** is marked in South Africa (September), parts of the USA (April), and **India (aligned with Van Mahotsav in July)**, focusing on tree planting, forest conservation, and urban greening through school programs, tree adoption drives, and reforestation efforts. While these observances are localized, they significantly contribute to broader global sustainability goals by encouraging context-



specific, community-driven action.

Year-Long Focus on Driving Global Environmental Action

Designating a full year to an environmental cause offers a powerful opportunity for deep, strategic engagement. These year-long observances, often led by the United Nations, encourage governments, industries, and communities to adopt long-term policies, foster innovation, and undertake large-scale environmental initiatives.

of 92 International Years. While only one environmental theme i.e., the International Year of the Ocean (1998) was observed before 2000, **28 of the 62 international environmental years declared since 2000 have focused on environment and sustainable development.**

This remarkable rise reflects the increasing global urgency around climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable resource use. These observances have spurred impactful global dialogues and

Year	International year of -	Year	International year of -
1998	The Ocean	2014	Small Island Developing States
2002	Ecotourism	2015	Soils
2002	Mountains	2016	Pulses
2003	Freshwater	2017	Sustainable Tourism for Development
2004	Rice	2020	Plant Health
2006	Deserts and Desertification	2021	Fruits and Vegetables
2007	Poles (WMO)	2021	Creative Economy for Sustainable Development
2008	The Potato	2022	Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture
2008	Planet Earth	2022	Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development
2009	The Gorilla [UNEP and UNESCO]	2022	Sustainable Mountain Development
2009	Natural Fibres	2023	Millet
2010	Biodiversity	2024	Camelids
2011	Forests	2025	Glaciers' Preservation
2012	Sustainable Energy for All	2026	Rangelands and Pastoralists
2013	Quinoa	2026	Volunteers for Sustainable Development
2013	Water Cooperation	2027	Sustainable and Resilient Tourism

Unlike short-term campaigns, Environment Years provide the time needed to embed sustainability into systems, shift public mindsets, and promote lasting change. **From 1959 to 2025, the UN has declared a total**

actions from sustainable tourism and plant health to glacier preservation and rangeland protection. The theme of the current Environment Year i.e., **"International Year of Glaciers' Preservation,"** and theme of 2026

– “Rangelands and Pastoralists” and “Volunteers for Sustainable Development”, and 2027 – “Sustainable and Resilient Tourism” continue this momentum, aligning global attention with the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Besides international environmental years, India has also demonstrated strong commitment to environmental stewardship by dedicating specific years to key ecological causes. For example, **2018 was declared as the “Year of Millets”** which later inspired a global declaration in 2023. Similarly, 2020 was observed as the “**Year of Awareness on Science for Sustainable Living**”. These national observances reflect India’s proactive role in aligning local priorities with global sustainability goals.



Environmental Decades: The Power of Long-Term Global Commitment

While single-day or month-long observances are effective in sparking awareness and public engagement, solving the world’s complex environmental challenges requires enduring commitment and transformative action. This is where **Environmental Decades** come into play – decade-long global initiatives declared by the United Nations to foster sustained momentum, coordinated investment, and cross-sectoral collaboration. They serve as comprehensive strategic frameworks aimed at driving systemic change, guiding long-term policy reform, and fostering innovation across science, industry, civil

Environment Decades: Driving Transformative Change



society, and governments. Their extended timeframe allows for deep-rooted progress toward a more resilient and sustainable planet.

Since 1960, the UN has announced 56 international decades. Strikingly, only 2 of the 24 decades declared before 2000 addressed environmental themes – the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981–1990) and the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990–1999). However, the tide turned in the 21st century. **Out of 32 decades announced since 2000, a significant 13 focus on environment and sustainable development**, reflecting a global awakening to climate and ecological challenges.

Today, six environmental decades, each with its unique agenda, are actively underway. One of these is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), a rallying cry to revive at least one billion hectares of degraded ecosystems worldwide. Co-led by UNEP and FAO, this initiative targets forests, wetlands, grasslands, farmland, rivers, and marine areas. It is a direct response to alarming data: nearly 40% of the planet's land is already degraded. The decade aims to restore nature's ability to support clean water, food security, biodiversity, and climate resilience, supporting multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 6 (Clean Water), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Environmental decades provide a rare, focused opportunity for



humanity to reset its relationship with nature, not through fleeting campaigns but through coordinated, decade-long blueprints for a greener, safer, and more sustainable future.

PSEs in India: Leading from Front in National Sustainability Journey

Indian PSEs have long played a pivotal role in the nation's economic and social development.



Currently, PSEs contribute around 12% to the national GDP and employ around 1.5 million people in different sectors. In recent years, they have emerged as frontrunners in advancing India's sustainability agenda, aligning with national commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and the objectives of net-zero emissions.

PSEs play a pivotal role in translating symbolic environmental observances into meaningful, sustained action across various timescales. From participating in global initiatives like Earth Hour to aligning with year-long national campaigns and decade-long international frameworks, PSEs have emerged as institutional anchors of environmental responsibility in India.

At the micro level, they actively observe events such as Earth Hour, World Environment Day, and the International Day for Biological Diversity by organizing activities like switching off non-essential lighting, conducting awareness drives, plantation campaigns, and community clean-up efforts. These momentary actions serve as important tools for fostering environmental consciousness among employees and the wider public. Moving beyond single-day observances, PSEs also engage in annual thematic campaigns that integrate sustainability into workplace

culture and operations. **Initiatives such as Swachhata Pakhwada, plantation drives, “Say No to Single Use Plastic” campaigns, and Water Neutrality Missions have become regular features in many PSEs, encouraging behavioural change and reinforcing sustainable habits. These efforts are often aligned**

Transportation) scheme, PSEs have established plants for the production of Compressed Bio Gas (CBG), contributing to cleaner fuel alternatives and energy diversification.

Significantly, over 20 PSEs have now committed to achieving Net Zero targets by 2047, marking a

to transform fleeting inspiration into enduring environmental action.

In essence, **Indian PSEs are not only complying with environmental norms but are leading transformative action through innovation, stewardship, and strategic foresight playing an indispensable role in India's national sustainability journey.**

SCOPE's Comprehensive Climate Action Efforts

The Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) has established itself as a national facilitator for climate action among Indian PSEs, playing a crucial role in aligning them with India's sustainability and decarbonisation goals. Since 2019, SCOPE has partnered with GIZ under the Indo-German Cooperation framework to build institutional capacity, develop tools, and promote sectoral innovation for climate resilience and low-carbon development. SCOPE's initiatives include conducting **pan-India workshops, seminars, and**



with national policies and are implemented with measurable outcomes, contributing to broader environmental goals. Crucially, several PSEs have taken decisive steps to institutionalize sustainability through systemic reforms and long-term commitments. Many have adopted practices such as energy and water audits, integration of renewable energy into operations, implementation of green procurement protocols, and adherence to **ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles and Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) frameworks. These measures reflect a strategic shift from awareness to accountability. Additionally, under the SATAT (Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable**

bold and strategic alignment with India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the national goal of attaining Net Zero emissions by 2070. In doing so, PSEs are not only supporting national climate ambitions but also setting a precedent for large-scale organizations worldwide



regional consultations that have trained hundreds of PSE executives on climate change, carbon pricing, climate finance, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has launched sector-specific training manuals and certification programmes, including an **“Advanced Online Course¹ on Climate Change and Climate Action for PSEs”** in November 2024 that has already seen participation from over 850 PSE executives. SCOPE also launched a dedicated **Online Knowledge Platform (OKP)² on Climate Action** and regularly publishes climate-focused content in its monthly magazine Kaleidoscope. **Videos showcasing the climate efforts of PSEs and a compendium of innovations in PSEs** further enhance outreach and peer learning.

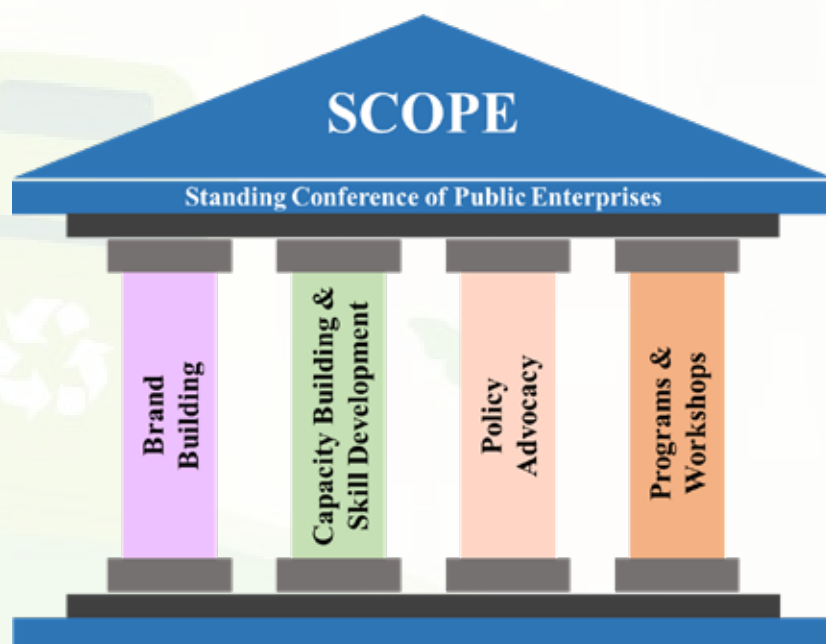
A key innovation has been

the introduction of Internal Carbon Pricing (ICP) tools, with **handholding support provided to selected PSEs to determine and integrate ICP** into their operations. SCOPE is also envisioning to develop a framework to objectively track and benchmark climate performance across PSEs. To **promote climate co-benefit assessment methodologies**, SCOPE has conducted regional workshops and is currently leading roundtable discussions to test and pilot these methodologies in selected PSEs. Areas of focus of climate co-benefit assessment methodology include urban forestry, circular economy, and sustainable resource management. Recently, **SCOPE has organised the “Indo-German Exchange Visit on Low-Carbon Technologies for Industries”**. Additionally, SCOPE is undertaking a **techno-**

commercial feasibility study for selected PSEs, assisting them in integrating circular economy and green hydrogen in steel production, aiming to decarbonize hard-to-abate sectors. **Through its multi-pronged approach i.e., brand building, capacity building & skill development, policy advocacy, and programs & workshops, SCOPE is transforming PSEs into sustainability leaders** and accelerating India’s national climate commitments.

Conclusion and Future Perspectives

The spectrum of environmental observances from symbolic hours to strategic decades demonstrates the multifaceted approaches needed to foster a sustainable planet. **While events like Earth Hour and World Environment Day galvanize public attention and spark immediate action, it is the sustained and layered campaigns – weeks, months, years, and decades that embed environmental consciousness into societal norms, policies, and industrial practices.** These time-bound observances not only amplify awareness but also drive systemic change by engaging a diverse range of actors including governments, businesses, academia, and civil society. India's PSEs, under the stewardship of bodies like SCOPE, are emerging as pivotal players in this journey. Their proactive adoption of sustainable practices, net-zero commitments, and employee-driven green campaigns reflects



¹ Advanced Online Course on Climate Change and Climate Action for PSEs: <https://online.atingi.org/enrol/index.php?id=4780>

² SCOPE Online Knowledge Platform (OKP) on Climate Action: <https://scopeclimatechange.scopeonline.in/>

a transformative shift from compliance to climate leadership. This holistic engagement underscores a key insight: environmental sustainability is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing commitment that evolves through continuous action, innovation, and accountability.

As the global community approaches the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative that future environmental action focuses on several key priorities. First, there is a pressing **need to institutionalize sustainability by embedding environmental objectives** into core policies, business strategies, and governance frameworks. This will help ensure long-term resilience and accountability

across sectors. Equally important is the **scaling up of science-based targets**, particularly by encouraging PSEs and other organizations to adopt verified emission reduction commitments and embrace transparent climate disclosures. **Fostering citizen and youth participation** must also take center stage, with a focus on enhancing grassroots engagement through education, digital platforms, and localized campaigns that empower individuals to act as daily stewards of the environment. Additionally, **strengthening the link between global frameworks and local actions** is essential. Initiatives such as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration must be effectively localized through region-specific efforts that resonate with communities on the ground. **Accelerating green**

innovation and job creation will further align environmental priorities with economic development, especially through investments in renewable energy, circular economy models, and green skills training. Finally, it is crucial to **move beyond symbolic gestures by developing robust metrics that measure the real impact of environmental initiatives**, ensuring that awareness is consistently translated into tangible ecological benefits. Ultimately, the success of environmental observances lies not in their visibility but in their ability to inspire lasting change. As the urgency of the climate crisis intensifies, the path forward must be one of integrated, inclusive, and sustained action where every hour counts, every day matters, and every decade delivers.