

# IMPACT

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APRIL 17, 2022

# Invest in Planet Earth

## WEEKEND REFLECTIONS



By Pramod de Silva

**CLIMATE CHANGE HAS BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE. MAN'S ACTIONS HAVE RESULTED IN PHENOMENA SUCH AS GLOBAL WARMING, WHICH COULD MEAN A DRASTIC TEMPERATURE AND SEA LEVEL RISE THAT COULD THREATEN ESPECIALLY THE COASTAL AND ISLAND COMMUNITIES**

**W**e have only one home - Planet Earth. We are not advanced enough (yet) to venture to worlds beyond, which might offer us another livable habitat. Thus, we have to live here for thousands of years to come. However, that will only be possible if we protect Mother Earth.

Yet, we hear so many stories about Man's destructive attitudes towards the Earth. We cut down its forests; drive its flora and fauna to extinction; pollute its seas and rivers; emit noxious gases to its atmosphere. If these activities go on, the Earth might not survive.

Therefore, there is a dire need to listen to the Earth's stories and come forward to protect it. This is the aim of the International Mother Earth Day, which has been celebrated every year on April 22 since 1970. More than one billion people around the globe will participate in Earth Day on April 22 under the theme Invest in Planet Earth.

Looking back, Earth Day marks the anniversary of what many consider the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970. The idea came to Earth Day founder Gaylord

Nelson, then a US Senator from Wisconsin, after witnessing the ravages of the 1969 massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California.

### National political agenda

Inspired by the student anti-war movement, he realised that if he could infuse that energy with an emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution, it would force environmental protection onto the national political agenda.

His efforts culminated in a show of environmental solidarity by 20 million Americans who took to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment in massive coast-to-coast rallies.

Today, the Earth Day encompasses every nation on Earth, big and small, rich and poor.

We usually think that only Governments have to be responsible for looking after the environment and hence the earth. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This is the idea behind the Billion Acts of Green campaign and the invest in Planet Earth campaign. Even a small act - from planting a tree to recycling a plastic container - by a per-

son helps.

Even replacing an incandescent bulb with an LED or fluorescent bulb can make a big difference in the end. US scientists have estimated that if every 60-watt incandescent bulb in the US was replaced with a 10-watt LED/fluorescent bulb, the country would save about 35 terawatt-hours of electricity, the equivalent electricity of 17.5 electric power stations, or US\$ 4 billion in one year.

### Carbon emissions

Moreover, the change will also avoid 20 million metric tons of carbon emissions, or the equivalent to removing nearly four million cars from the roads.

That is the power of one small measure, magnified by the population of a given country. Just imagine the scale of the positive impact on the environment if everyone around the world replaced their incandescent bulbs.

There will be a huge emphasis on renewable energy this year, because these technologies are now going mainstream. With renewable energies such as wind and solar coming to

the fore, talking about 'sustainability' is no longer an option. All need to take individual and collective responsibility towards 'living sustainably'. And that means living without damaging the fragile environment.

Another factor is the need to protect the planet's rich flora and fauna. It is true that new species are being discovered every day, but the rate at which species are going extinct is rather alarming. Some species are down to only a handful of individuals in the wild.

We must act before they too become as dead as the dodo. Do we really want to see a world without elephants, tigers, polar bears or pandas?

Climate change has become a major issue. Man's actions have resulted in phenomena such as global warming, which could mean a drastic temperature and sea level rise that could threaten especially the coastal and island communities.

We have altered the cycles and patterns of nature by cutting down forests and polluting rivers. Agriculture too is facing a crisis because the amount of arable land is becoming limited.

We might be able to overcome this challenge, but only if we strike a balance between consumption and conservation.

### Nurturing the Earth

Living sustainably while protecting and nurturing the Earth is the only possible - and viable - answer. Earth Day is a golden opportunity to ponder on these issues and to be committed to save our endangered planet.

And while there is still time to solve the climate crisis, time to choose both a prosperous and sustainable fu-

ture, and time to restore nature and build a healthy planet for our children and their children, is short.

Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action. Nature is suffering. Oceans are filled with plastic and turning more acidic. Extreme heat, wildfires and floods, as well as a record-breaking hurricane season, have affected millions of people. We are still facing Covid-19, a worldwide pandemic linked to the health of our ecosystem.

Climate change, man-made changes to nature as well as crimes that disrupt biodiversity, such as deforestation, land-use change, intensified agriculture and livestock production or the growing illegal wildlife trade, can accelerate the speed of destruction of the planet.

This is the first Mother Earth Day celebrated within the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Ecosystems support all life on Earth. The healthier our ecosystems are, the healthier the planet - and its people. Restoring our damaged ecosystems will help to end poverty, combat climate change and prevent mass extinction. But we will only succeed if everyone plays a part. For this International Mother Earth Day, let's remind ourselves that we need a shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet.

As persons, we have the simple yet effective power to make our voices heard through our choices, our actions, and our personal interactions. At a rally, a cleanup, with your vote, or your wallet, be heard however you are able. For all of us - today and for our future - let's invest in our planet.

