

Climate11: Sports & Sustainability Summit

September 6, 2024

Leh, Ladakh



Overview

The Climate11 summit marked a pivotal moment in the global discourse on climate change, particularly concerning the Himalayan region. As the first climate conference of its kind, Climate11 successfully united senior stakeholders to engage in critical discussions about the multifaceted impacts of climate change, including the increasing frequency of extreme weather events and their repercussions across various sectors. The event emphasized the urgent need for a shared understanding of these challenges, especially for vulnerable communities, including athletes who faced the adverse effects of climate change on their sports and livelihoods.

In this context, Climate Trends joined as a knowledge partner, providing essential insights and information that shaped the sessions, along with a workshop focusing on crafting climate stories. This initiative enriched the dialogue by integrating scientific explanations



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from doctors and climate scientists with real-life stories from athletes. This comprehensive approach aimed to highlight how climate change not only affects athletes but also how sports can play a role in changing this conversation. The summit recognized that rising global temperatures, extreme weather patterns, and deteriorating air quality were not just environmental issues but significant threats to global sports and community well-being.

Alarming, 20% of Olympic nations are at high risk of disappearing due to climate impacts, and by 2050, half of the cities that have hosted the Winter Olympics may be unable to do so. Regions like Ladakh, known for their unique geographic and climatic conditions, are particularly vulnerable.

Global warming is melting glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Range, including Ladakh, leading to a severe water crisis that threatens food security and livelihoods. Once-abundant glacial streams are now ice-free and often dry. Rising temperatures, driven by carbon emissions, have caused rapid ice melting and evaporation. Locals are now relying on limited groundwater, as tourism further strains water resources.

The growing number of extreme weather events also makes it difficult for Ladakh to host sporting events and threatens the health and performance of local athletes. Sports serve as a powerful unifier across India's vast diversity, bringing people together, and fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

Athletes and sportspeople, revered as role models, have the unique ability to catalyze collective action. As India aspires to host the 2036 Olympics, it's crucial to address these challenges.

The Climate 11 Summit brought together experts, athletes, and stakeholders to explore the impacts of climate change on sports and discuss sustainable solutions. Sports, a powerful unifier in India, can play a key role in promoting sustainability and resilience. While also highlighting the importance of building an overarching narrative to enhance resilience and adaptation measures.

Over 17 experts from across organisations and government participated in the conference. Opening remarks were made by **Shri Jigmet Takpa (IFS)**, Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UT Ladakh. The keynote address was delivered by **Shri Tashi Gyalson**, Chief Executive Councilor, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council.

Highlights from the special guests

Shri Jigmet Takpa highlighted the urgent need to transform Ladakh by implementing sustainable practices across all sectors. He stressed on the importance for Ladakh to transition into a carbon-neutral model and the union territory could only achieve its net-zero goal by leveraging its renewable energy potential. He addressed sectors responsible for emission sources like transport, agriculture, residential and commercial sectors, and urban management & defence.

Shri Tashi Gyalson spoke about the importance of the event to promote environmental awareness and sustainability for addressing the urgent issue of climate change. He stressed the significance of sending a global message on climate impact for a better future.

Health of Athletes: Felt Experience of Climate Change

Pragnya Mohan, India's top triathlete, highlighted the severe challenges athletes face due to extreme heat exacerbated by climate change. She noted that training in India's tropical climate often requires early morning sessions to avoid the sweltering temperatures, which can reach up to 50 degrees Celsius. Mohan emphasized that severe dehydration can lead to serious health risks, including cramps and impaired decision-making, impacting overall performance. The oppressive heat has made it increasingly difficult for athletes to compete effectively, as demonstrated by the struggles of participants at recent events.

Skalzang Rigzen, an esteemed mountaineer, shared his firsthand experiences of climate change while climbing at high altitudes. He reported encountering unprecedented temperatures and increased hazards due to glacier melt, which he described as alarming for both climbers and local ecosystems. This underscores the unique challenges faced by Ladakh due to its geography and reliance on natural resources.

Takeaways from the Climate11 Summit on Sports and Climate Change

Planning and Implementation

There was consensus that climate change impacts are loud and clear in the Himalayan region of Ladakh. Participants collectively agreed to the fact that climate adaptation planning was an effective tool to begin with as extreme weather events are here to stay. Simultaneously, implementation was equally critical to be able to successfully put plans into effect. It was said that unless there is a network among all the stakeholders such as actors, institutions, and ideas (technologies), we will not be able to tackle the problems posed by climate

change. This framework is an absolute necessity to execute the plans and further aid the climate action plan.

Adaptation and Mitigation

Anjal Prakash, Research Director, Bharti School of Public Policy, Indian School of Business, Hyderabad & IPCC Author stressed that all extreme weather events now have a climate connection, particularly affecting vulnerable regions like the Himalayas. Participants urged stakeholders to integrate climate change into planning strategies and enhance community-driven approaches. It was emphasised that adaptation and mitigation efforts must be prioritised, suggesting that spending on climate-resilient infrastructure should increase significantly to address these challenges effectively.

Health Impacts

Dr. Karan Madan, Head of Department at AIIMS Delhi, echoed these concerns by discussing health risks for athletes due to extreme weather conditions. He emphasised that rising temperatures could lead to heat strokes and respiratory issues, particularly affecting children exposed to polluted environments. Dr. Madan called for better awareness regarding hydration and protective strategies for athletes competing in increasingly harsh conditions.

Power of Sports: Teach and train

Athletes have a unique platform to encourage change, using their visibility to educate about sustainable practices within the sports industry. As the global sports community contributes over 2% to greenhouse gas emissions, there is a need for leagues and organisations to commit to significant reductions. Initiatives like the UN Sports for Climate Framework aim to guide these efforts, encouraging athletes to engage in collective efforts. David Goldblatt, a senior researcher with Football for Future, discussed how sports can serve as both a victim of climate change and a contributor to global emissions. He noted that while the sports industry adds to global emissions, it also possesses a unique ability to educate about climate efforts. Goldblatt highlighted the opportunities for sports organisations to reduce their carbon emissions and promote sustainability initiatives. Athletes can inspire fans and communities to prioritise climate efforts, ultimately transforming the discussion around environmental responsibility in sports.

Think globally and act locally

Piara Powar, Executive Director of the FARE Network, underscores the vital role of community engagement in using sports to combat climate change. He points to Ladakh's



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potential to lead global climate action in the sports industry, showing how local efforts can establish new standards for sustainability. Powar advocates for educational programs to inform athletes and communities about climate impacts.

Barney Weston, Co-founder of Football for Future, notes that 70% of football's carbon footprint is from fan and player travel. He argues that achieving truly environmentally sustainable mega-events like the Olympics or World Cup is currently impossible due to the significant gaps in sustainability practices across travel, equipment, and stadiums. Nonetheless, Weston believes athletes have the power to raise awareness, urging them to ask tough questions and maintain pressure on organizers to make events more sustainable. He stresses that addressing climate change must become a daily conversation.

Powar further highlights the social justice aspect, noting that while people in the Global North, particularly in Europe, are beginning to feel climate change's effects, they don't connect it as closely to their everyday lives as those in more vulnerable regions like India and Ladakh. He emphasizes that, unlike in the Global North, climate action in these areas is not just an option but a necessity for survival. He also calls out the hypocrisy of nations like the U.S. and Italy, which complained about the lack of air conditioning during the Olympics, despite it being a supposedly sustainable event.

Lastly, Powar suggests Ladakh could become a leader in sustainable sports, setting an example for the world by showing how communities most affected by climate change are tackling it head-on.

Collaborative Frameworks for Action

The conference concluded with a strong call for collaboration among various stakeholders—governments, sports organisations, communities, and athletes—to implement sustainable practices in sports effectively. The need for collective action was emphasised as essential to address the pressing challenges posed by climate change in Ladakh and beyond.



The Leh Climate Action Plan



In Leh, climate change poses significant challenges to local livelihoods, particularly those reliant on glacial water for agriculture and daily living. The region has experienced alarming trends such as decreased snowfall and erratic rainfall patterns, leading to water scarcity that threatens both irrigation and drinking supplies. Experts have noted that while increased precipitation might seem beneficial for an arid region, it often manifests as extreme weather events that cause more harm than good. Consequently, there is a critical need for comprehensive climate action plans that address these vulnerabilities through sustainable water management practices and community engagement.

The Leh Climate Action Plan aims to tackle these issues by developing actionable strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing resilience against climate impacts. This initiative involves stakeholder consultations to assess vulnerabilities and identify effective policies. With a focus on renewable energy solutions like solar power and water conservation measures, Leh is positioning itself as a leader in India's transition towards a carbon-neutral future. The local government recognizes that effective implementation of these plans requires collaboration across various sectors to ensure long-term sustainability.

Crafting Climate Stories Workshop

After three insightful panel discussions on climate impacts, changing weather patterns, and the effects of climate on athletes, we concluded the day with a Climate Storytelling Workshop. This was a two-hour interactive session, attended by 18-20 participants, including filmmakers, architects, athletes, mountaineers, and young students. The workshop aimed to deepen participants' understanding of climate issues and help them identify and then effectively communicate their lived experiences. Activities were strategically designed to encourage critical thinking/ analysis of how climate change is present in their own lives, building a stronger connection to the global climate narrative while reflecting on local impacts.



The workshop focused on both knowledge-building and content creation. Participants shared their insights into how climate change affects health and local livelihoods, drawing connections between their personal experiences and broader environmental changes that Ladakh faces. In a hands-on exercise, participants mapped out these intersections in their own lives, and together we also envisioned climate-resilient environments where people can live, work, and play.



Storytelling techniques were also a major component of the session. Social media celebrities and digital educators shared tips on how they use their platforms and storytelling skills to craft engaging narratives that resonate with audiences on topics of environment and climate. The workshop guided participants on leveraging digital tools and platforms to amplify local climate stories, with the goal of inspiring them to become active communicators of climate impacts in their communities.

In attendance

Shri Tashi Gyalson, Chief Executive Councilor, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council

Shri Jigmet Takpa (IFS), Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UT Ladakh

Sonam Lotus, Director, Meteorological Department, Jammu & Kashmir

Anjal Prakash, Research Director, Bharti School of Public Policy, Indian School of Business, Hyderabad & IPCC Author

David Goldblatt, Sr Journalist, Football for Future (Virtual)

Dr Karan Madan, Head of Department, Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi

Pragnya Mohan, Indian Triathlete & 2015 Eklavya Awardee

Sports sec Ladakh

Mukul Choudhari, CEO, Jamshedpur Football Club & Chief of Sports Excellence Centres, Tata Steel

Piara Powar, Executive Director, FARE Network; Trustee, Chelsea Foundation

Shri Moses Kunzang, Director (Coop/Youth Services & Sports), UT Ladakh

Barney Weston, Co-founder, Football for Future

Rigzin Spalbar, Former Chairman/Chief Executive Councillor LAHDC Leh

Aba Norphel, Ice Man of Ladakh

P Stobdan, Former Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan and Defence Expert

Ashish Verma, GCOM

Upendra Tripathi, Former Secretary, MNRE and Former DG, International Solar Alliance