Road to Sustainability

Akanksha Sharma, Global ESG Head, STL, talks about innovative solutions for long-term green development leading to inclusive communities

How can we leverage technology for a sustainable world?

ESG is now, more than ever, an unquestionable priority for all the world's largest corporations. The global pandemic has impacted everything. While we are still recovering from the crisis, there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to start over and create a world that we would be proud to call home. Green technology is on the rise alongside a surge in innovative digital transformation.

At STL, we have always put innovation, technology, and collective action at the heart of our Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) programs. Digital inclusion and tech-enablement thus form important elements of our social programs as well. Through our business, we are well poised to leverage this decade-long network creation cycle that has started, driven by 5G, FTTx, and Rural Connectivity. STL Academy has inked an MOU with NASSCOM to undertake relevant skills upgradation and mobilize 100,000 youth under the NASSCOM skill project. We have announced 5G Empower, a program that will skill one million women on 5G technology.

STL lays a lot of emphasis on women's empowerment. Would you share the best practices in this arena?

While the literacy rate in India has gone up to 75%, only 10% of girls in villages complete 10-11 years of schooling. This eventually results in a huge gender gap. To bridge this, we are running a Centre of Excellence in Velhe, Pune, catering to over 100 villages. The program centers around breaking out of a patriarchal mindset, entrepreneurship, and imparting vocational skills such as computer courses and nursing via the Maharashtra State Board of Vocational Education. There is also a backend platform where the women are mentored and hand-held through the entire course till, they reach an independent entrepreneurial stage. We have partnered with brands such as Rangsutra to engage them on a global scale. Many of these artisans are now selling their handcrafted and rural products on Amazon. Over 20,000 villagers have benefited from this program. We are now creating a handloom silk cluster in Bhandara.

What steps can corporations take to combat climate change?

Despite the Paris Climate Agreement and other efforts, GHG emissions have continued to rise at a rate of over 1% per annum, exasperating the issue of global warming. Consistent policy mediation at the country and global level is required to mitigate the effects of global warming. In addition to this, corporates can explore independent and synchronized initiatives like decreasing emissions through efficiency enhancements, climatic risk assessment and mitigation measures, innovations with lower emission profiles, and so on.

As STL drives digital networks of the future, we are accelerating our efforts towards net-zero manufacturing and sustainable network-building strategies. We have conducted Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs) for ten optic fiber cable families and are looking to cover 100% of our portfolio by 2030. For example, in our Celesta cable, the use of overall plastic content is reduced while Aerial cables (ADSS) use lesser harmful thermoplastics like Aramid yarns. We have taken giant strides towards implementing environmental impact programs through zero waste to landfill diverting over 135,000 MT of waste from landfills reducing a significant amount of methane emissions, sustainable sourcing, water positivity, and much more. We will continue to invest in becoming a carbon-neutral company through various energy efficiency initiatives and other efforts.

Please tell us about the other sustainable development programs and future plans.

Our goal is to enable 5 million lives in a holistic manner by 2030. As a global technology company, we are committed to creating green and sustainable digital networks. There is an emphasis on sustainable sourcing in a big way and the goal is to have a complete green supply chain by 2030. In partnership with the World Bank's Water Resources 2030 group, we are working to build water resilient villages and explore possibilities of leveraging wastewater treatment for afforestation.

We also run a Digital Empowerment program in Pune slums of Pune to promote digital inclusion and livelihood opportunities. A major initiative to empower rural communities is the STL T-Fiber project. This digital infrastructure will give affordable and high-speed broadband connectivity to 6 million rural citizens across 3,000 Gram Panchayats in Telangana.

Through our social impact programs, STL has transformed everyday living for over 1.43 million lives. Presently, we're working in aspirational districts like Gadchiroli and Nandurbar apart from Aurangabad and Silavssa ensuring access to quality digital education for 300,000 beneficiaries and healthcare across 200+ villages, digital inclusion, social behavior change, livelihood opportunities, water resilient villages, biodiversity restoration, and green cover enhancement.

STL
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Transforming billions of lives through **digital networks**

Net Zero emissions in manufacturing facilities by 2030

100% sustainable sourcing

Water positivity by 2030

100% zero waste to landfill by 2030