

# STL commits to net-zero emissions by 2030, strengthens sustainability focus

Industry-leading integrator of digital networks STL today announced its commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030. As STL drives digital networks of the future, it is accelerating its efforts towards net-zero manufacturing and sustainable network build strategies.

Recently, at the COP26 Summit, nations discussed the importance of urgent climate action. They have committed to reducing emissions and limiting the average annual temperature rise to 1.5°. According to estimates, the Internet and supporting network components account for 3.7% of global greenhouse emissions.

As a global technology company, creating digital networks that are green and sustainable is very much at the forefront of its ambitions. To that end STL has outlined a 10-year roadmap to deliver on its commitment towards its sustainability and social aims and contribute to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

- Net-zero emissions in manufacturing facilities by 2030 - STL has been mitigating carbon emissions from its manufacturing plants and has set a goal for net-zero emissions by 2030
- 100% plants Zero Waste to Landfill certified by 2030 - STL is the first in the industry to get 'Zero Waste to Landfill' (ZWL) certification for its Indian manufacturing facilities. Recently, STL has achieved a landfill diversion rate of 99.97% for its Rakholi plant
- 100% sustainable sourcing - Over the last few years, STL has been sourcing sustainable raw materials for packaging, transitioning to a green supply chain
- Water positivity by 2030 - STL recycled over 1,41,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water at its manufacturing facilities and harvested another 4,000+ m<sup>3</sup> through rainwater harvesting structures. By 2030, it aims to become 100% water positive across all its manufacturing locations

Akanksha Sharma, Global Head ESG at STL took time out to tell Broadband Journal about their recent announcement which forms only a part of their overall corporate responsibility and sustainability plans. Was this announcement a stand-alone response to COP26 or does this form part of a more long-term initiative?

"STL has always been committed towards ESG and is creating greener networks without any external triggers," she told Broadband. "Our priority impact areas have always been environment conservation, healthcare, education and empowerment of women. Our ambitions are very clearly charted out and closely linked to the United Nations' sustainable development goals."

This is certainly impressive, but there are announcements like this frequently in the press. A lot of good publicity is generated at the time of course, but Broadband was curious. How is all this measured? Will STL be making their progress public? Akanksha nodded. "Yes, we are signatories to the UN Global Compact, where we publish our annual disclosures. This is also aligned to Global Reporting Initiative, the universally-accepted standard on sustainability and ESG."

Clearly passionate about sustainability and STL's varied achievements, she told Broadband, "We are the world's first integrated optical-fibre and cable manufacturer which is zero waste-to-landfill certified. And I say this - it gives me immense pleasure - because we collaborate with other industries, and we came up with the whole idea of circularity and put it into practice, where we are co-processing the waste generated from manufacturing by conversion to energy."

These days it is a foolish company that doesn't broadcast its corporate responsibility statement early on; millennial customers, having grown up with a strong social conscience, will vote with their feet and go elsewhere before you can say zero carbon emissions. The world has changed a lot; as recently as 15 years ago companies were still being labelled new-age cranks for announcing well-meaning initiatives about the environment. Such positive change is welcome but from a PR perspective it is not easy to stand out from your competitors when all of you are doing the same - albeit laudable - thing.



Sharma explained that their competitors are matching some of these efforts, but according to estimates, the Internet and supporting network components account for nearly 3.7% of global greenhouse emissions. Clearly there is a huge collective responsibility to tackle this issue. She agreed.

“In addition to all of this we are actively working on the social impact and community efforts,” she said. “So we have transformed everyday living for about 1.4 million people. This includes work on digital inclusion, and a whole range of solutions that are around EdTech initiatives that aim to provide better education solutions to marginalised children. Our education and healthcare system got badly disrupted because of COVID, not just in India, but everywhere, and in rural pockets of India, children are just not getting any support.

Sharma added, “STL are running a community educator program with American India Foundation, providing rural possibilities of enabling education at the last mile, which is what we stand for.”

This is certainly beyond the realms of responsibility for many corporations, but Sharma hadn’t finished. “We also have programs on healthcare, again, leveraging technology and for women, we offer skilling, market readiness and placements to women. Lastly, on the environment, we are not just working within our business influence, but also a lot of work is being done on conservation with the World Bank’s WRG2030 team on building water resilience in the communities.

Essentially, STL’s various initiatives are put together not because of external triggers, but as a proactive call in response to unprecedented world events. Regarding sustainability

announcements, STL’s particular approach concerns working closely with others in their supply chain to maximise results in addition to their own internal efforts. “I think that is a big commitment by any business; I actually get very closely involved while working with some of our suppliers. And a lot of them are small scale and medium scale suppliers, and it’s really hard looking at the challenges in the ecosystem to keep them motivated about carbon, water, resourcing and so on.”

The message from STL is about collaboration; the company’s mission to achieve net zero emissions, 100% sustainable resourcing and water positivity are only achievable, they say, through working across the value chain. “What really differentiates us is that we also work very closely with our business partners up and down the stream,” Sharma explained. “It’s evident now that institutions and organisations cannot just walk the walk individually, we need to bring our business partners with us. This is what I believe in, and this is what our organisation does.”

It would be interesting to see how their partners’ efforts are measured, and by what metric, and how public their results are made. This remains vague. In conclusion, how do those initiatives actually translate on the ground? “I’ll just share one instance, when a lot of people last year during the pandemic in India were losing their jobs, we were talking to some of our social program beneficiaries to find out how they were getting on. There was a woman in a very remote location of Maharashtra and she told us ‘I’m still able to earn seven to 8,000 Rupees a month, and feed my kids, because of your skilling, I’m making and placing my products on Amazon.’ That is real empowerment, that amidst all of this, people are able to take care of their families. That is very reassuring.”

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