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## ESG & SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT - CHENNAI

“SDG SHOCKS IN ESG AND SUSTAINABILITY: ACCELERATING ACTION TOWARD RESILIENCE”



23 March 2026

Sigma Auditorium, Sairam Institutions, Chennai ( Tamil Nadu)



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## Introduction

The ESG & Sustainability Leadership Summit 2026 ( Edition - 3), convened by the United Nations Global Compact Network India (UN GCNI), was held on 23 March 2026 at Sairam Institutions, Chennai ( Tamil Nadu). The summit served as a premier multi-stakeholder platform, bringing together leaders from government, industry, academia, , and civil society to deliberate on the evolving landscape of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) & Sustainability and its critical role in advancing sustainable development.

Anchored in the theme “SDG Shocks in ESG and Sustainability: Accelerating Action Toward Resilience,” the summit was designed to address the growing complexities and disruptions affecting the global sustainability agenda. It provided a space for thought leadership, knowledge exchange, and dialogue on how organizations can respond to emerging risks while aligning their strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



The summit also emphasized the importance of transitioning from intent to implementation by promoting actionable insights, scalable solutions, and cross-sectoral collaboration. By convening diverse stakeholders, the event aimed to bridge the gap between policy, practice, and innovation, thereby enabling organizations to embed ESG principles more effectively into their core operations and decision-making processes. It further sought to highlight India’s growing role in driving sustainability leadership and fostering responsible business practices in alignment with global frameworks.

In addition, the summit placed strong emphasis on fostering a solutions-oriented approach by encouraging dialogue that bridges global sustainability commitments with local implementation realities. It aimed to create a forward-looking roadmap for organizations to navigate ESG complexities while remaining competitive and responsible. By integrating perspectives across sectors and geographies, the summit further reinforced the importance of collective intelligence and shared responsibility in driving meaningful and measurable sustainability outcomes.

## Rationale

The global sustainability landscape is undergoing a period of significant transformation, marked by increasing uncertainties arising from climate change, geopolitical tensions, economic disruptions, and widening social inequalities. These interconnected challenges—referred to as “SDG Shocks”—have not only slowed progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals but have also exposed systemic vulnerabilities in existing development models.

In this context, there is an urgent need for organizations to move beyond fragmented, compliance-driven approaches and adopt integrated ESG frameworks that are resilient, adaptive, and future-oriented. ESG is no longer viewed solely as a reporting or risk management tool; rather, it has emerged as a strategic imperative for driving long-term value creation, enhancing organizational resilience, and building stakeholder trust.



## Objectives

The summit was guided by the following objectives:

- To provide a structured platform for multi-stakeholder engagement on key ESG and sustainability challenges and emerging opportunities
- To identify and promote actionable strategies, innovative solutions, and best practices for accelerating progress toward the SDGs
- To strengthen leadership capacity and institutional readiness for embedding ESG principles into organizational strategies and operations
- To foster partnerships and collaborative frameworks across sectors to enable sustained and scalable impact

Overall, the summit sought to contribute to the advancement of a cohesive, resilient, and action-oriented ESG ecosystem aligned with national and global sustainable development priorities.



## Inaugural Session

### Strategic Context

The Inaugural Session established a strong strategic baseline for the Summit, setting the tone for the deliberations that followed and clearly defining the thematic contours of the evolving ESG landscape. Moving beyond a conventional ceremonial opening, the session functioned as a high-level platform for vision-setting, where distinguished leaders articulated the urgent need to reposition ESG from a compliance-driven obligation to a resilience-oriented strategic imperative.

The discussions underscored that in an increasingly volatile global context—marked by climate risks, socio-economic inequalities, and governance complexities—organizations must embed sustainability at the core of their business models rather than treating it as an adjunct function. Speakers highlighted the transition from fragmented ESG practices to integrated, systems-level approaches that align corporate performance with long-term value creation, stakeholder trust, and planetary boundaries.

The session also emphasized the importance of leadership accountability, policy coherence, and cross-sector collaboration in accelerating this shift. By framing ESG as both a risk mitigation tool and a driver of innovation and competitiveness, the Inaugural Session laid a forward-looking foundation for the Summit, encouraging participants to engage with sustainability not merely as a reporting requirement, but as a transformative pathway toward inclusive and future-ready growth.

Dr. Sai Prakash Leo Muthu, Chairman, Sairam Group of Institutions, in his Welcome Address, highlighted the critical role of educational institutions in shaping a sustainability-oriented mindset among future leaders. He emphasized that academia must act as a catalyst for innovation by integrating ESG principles into curricula, research, and institutional practices. He further noted that institutions have a responsibility to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world sustainability challenges by fostering industry-academia collaboration.



Mr. Thakur Pherwani, CSO, TVS Motor Company and Vice President (South), UN GCNI, contributed a critical perspective on scaling sustainable practices across complex and interconnected operational networks. He highlighted that achieving this requires embedding transparency, ethical engagement, and accountability not only within core operations but across the entire value chain, including suppliers, partners, and stakeholders. He further underscored the importance of strengthening governance mechanisms, adopting standardized ESG reporting practices, and leveraging data-driven insights to enhance decision-making and risk management. He noted that organizations that integrate these principles effectively are better positioned to ensure long-term sustainability, maintain stakeholder trust, and drive responsible growth.

Mr. Abhishek Ranjan, Global Leader – Sustainability & Joint Secretary, UN GCNI, in his Keynote Address, provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving ESG landscape. He emphasized that ESG is transitioning from a reporting framework to a strategic imperative that influences investment decisions, risk management, and long-term value creation. He highlighted the increasing role of green finance, responsible supply chains, and climate risk disclosures in shaping corporate strategies. He also pointed out that organizations must adopt a forward-looking approach by integrating resilience and adaptability into their ESG frameworks.







## Inaugural Session

### Strategic Context



Mr. Naresh Raj K, Chief Information Officer, in Concluding emphasized the importance of integrating digital infrastructure with sustainability goals. He discussed how organizations can leverage digital systems to track ESG performance, improve transparency, and enhance accountability. He also highlighted the need for capacity-building to ensure effective adoption of digital tools.

The inaugural session concluded with a strong emphasis on the need to transition from dialogue to decisive action in advancing ESG and sustainability agendas. The speakers collectively underscored that addressing “SDG shocks” requires integrated approaches, institutional commitment, and sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The session set a clear direction for the summit, highlighting resilience, innovation, and accountability as key pillars for future progress. It established a shared understanding among participants on the urgency of embedding ESG principles into core strategies and laid a solid foundation for the in-depth discussions and knowledge exchange that followed in the subsequent sessions.





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## **Roundtable Discussion** ***“Practical Pathways for Strengthening ESG Implementation”***



The roundtable discussion, moderated by Hafiz Khan, served as a highly interactive and solution-oriented platform that brought together senior leaders, practitioners, and institutional stakeholders to deliberate on practical approaches for strengthening ESG implementation across sectors. The session moved beyond conceptual discussions and focused on identifying actionable strategies, institutional mechanisms, and collaborative pathways required to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A key area of discussion was the strengthening of data systems and digital infrastructure for ESG monitoring. Participants underscored the importance of building robust data collection, validation, and reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. The role of digital tools and dashboards was emphasized as critical enablers for real-time tracking of ESG indicators, supporting evidence-based decision-making and improving reporting accuracy. It was also highlighted that integrating ESG metrics with business performance indicators can enhance organizational accountability and drive leadership commitment.



Capacity-building emerged as another critical theme, with participants highlighting the need to strengthen institutional and human resource capabilities for ESG implementation. This includes training programmes, leadership development initiatives, and awareness campaigns aimed at building a deeper understanding of ESG principles across organizational levels. Participants also emphasized the importance of embedding ESG into organizational culture to ensure long-term sustainability.



Importantly, the discussion focused on future-oriented initiatives and pathways to accelerate SDG achievement. Participants proposed the development of sector-specific ESG roadmaps that outline clear targets, timelines, and implementation strategies. The establishment of ESG innovation hubs and incubation platforms was suggested to promote the development of scalable and technology-driven solutions. Additionally, the integration of ESG considerations into financial systems, including green financing and impact investments, was identified as a key enabler for driving large-scale transformation.

Overall, the roundtable successfully provided a forward-looking roadmap for strengthening ESG implementation, highlighting practical strategies, collaborative approaches, and innovative solutions necessary to drive meaningful and measurable impact.



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## Session 1: "SDG Game 2030" – Experiential Game-Based Workshop



The session introduced an innovative and highly engaging, game-based learning approach to deepen participants' understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles. Facilitated by Bharti Maru, with strong co-facilitation support, the workshop placed a clear emphasis on experiential learning as a transformative pedagogical tool. This approach moved beyond traditional lecture-based methods, enabling participants to actively immerse themselves in simulated real-world scenarios, thereby enhancing both engagement and retention of complex sustainability concepts.

Participants were strategically divided into teams and assigned practical, project-based tasks that required them to collaboratively design solutions addressing pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges. These challenges were carefully aligned with the SDGs, ensuring that participants not only understood the theoretical framework but also explored its practical applications. Through this dynamic and participatory format, individuals were encouraged to employ critical thinking, foster teamwork, and apply problem-solving skills to develop solutions that were not only innovative but also holistic and sustainable in nature.



A key strength of the session lay in its use of simulation-based learning, which effectively illustrated the inherent trade-offs and interdependencies that characterize sustainable development. Participants were exposed to the complexities of balancing competing priorities—such as economic growth versus environmental protection or social equity versus resource allocation—thereby gaining a nuanced appreciation of the challenges faced in real-world implementation. This immersive experience also highlighted the importance of systems thinking, encouraging participants to view sustainability issues as interconnected rather than isolated.

Overall, the activity provided a rich, hands-on learning experience that bridged the gap between theory and practice. It enabled participants to better understand the real-world implications of SDG implementation in everyday contexts, while reinforcing the idea that sustainability challenges are deeply interconnected and require balanced, informed, and inclusive decision-making. The session ultimately served as a powerful reminder that innovative learning approaches can play a critical role in building capacity, enhancing awareness, and driving meaningful progress toward sustainable development.





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## Session 2 – Panel Discussions

### Panel 1: Green Finance, Just transition & Climate Investments



The panel discussion on “Green Finance, Just Transition & Climate Investments”, moderated by Udaya Sankar, Director, NASSCOM Academia & Corporate Connect, focused on the pivotal role of financial systems and institutional mechanisms in driving an equitable and sustainable transition toward a low-carbon economy.

Setting the context, the moderator emphasized that achieving climate goals and SDG targets requires a fundamental shift in how capital is mobilized, allocated, and monitored. He highlighted that green finance is not only a financial instrument but also a strategic enabler for long-term resilience and inclusive growth.



Mr. Kamaleashwar Venkatachalam, Managing Director – Middle East, ESG Solutions Private Limited, emphasized the growing importance of integrating ESG considerations into financial decision-making processes. He noted that organizations must move beyond traditional financial metrics and incorporate environmental and social risk assessments into investment strategies. He further highlighted that scaling green finance requires robust frameworks, standardized ESG disclosures, and stronger alignment between global sustainability goals and local implementation practices.

Mr. Arul Ponnusamy, President – TIEMA, focused on the role of industry in facilitating a just transition. He emphasized that while industries are key drivers of economic growth, they also bear responsibility for ensuring that sustainability transitions are inclusive. He highlighted the need for capacity-building within industries, particularly MSMEs, to adopt sustainable practices and access green financing opportunities. He also stressed that policy support and incentives are essential to encourage industries to invest in clean technologies and sustainable operations.



Henry Maris, Secretary and Chief Security Officer, Nazareth Group of Institutions, brought an institutional and governance perspective to the discussion. He emphasized the importance of embedding sustainability within organizational governance structures and ensuring that ESG considerations are integrated into long-term strategic planning. He noted that institutions, including educational and social organizations, play a critical role in promoting awareness and building capacities for sustainable finance and climate action.

The panel collectively emphasized that a “just transition” must be inclusive, ensuring that vulnerable communities and sectors are not disproportionately affected by sustainability transitions. It was highlighted that financial systems must be designed to support equitable access to climate investments, particularly for marginalized and underserved groups.

The discussion further underscored the importance of aligning financial flows with sustainability objectives, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and enhancing transparency in ESG reporting. Panelists emphasized that effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms are essential to ensure that investments lead to measurable environmental and social outcomes.

The session concluded with a strong consensus on the need for collaborative action between governments, financial institutions, industry, and civil society to scale green finance and accelerate climate investments. It reinforced that achieving sustainable development requires not only increased financial resources but also strategic alignment, innovation, and inclusive approaches that leave no one behind.



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## Panel 2: Leadership for a Sustainable Future The panel discussion on “Leadership for a Sustainable Future”,



The panel discussion on “Leadership for a Sustainable Future”, moderated by Anju Mary K, Independent Director, KSPL & Founder Director, Learnspartz, explored the evolving dimensions of leadership required to navigate the complexities of sustainability and drive meaningful ESG transformation across sectors.

The moderator set the context by emphasizing that leadership in the current global landscape must move beyond conventional management practices and embrace a more purpose-driven, inclusive, and adaptive approach. She highlighted that leaders today are expected not only to deliver economic value but also to create social and environmental impact, aligning organizational strategies with long-term sustainability goals.



Abida Aneez, Vice President – CSR & Sustainability, Legrand India, emphasized the importance of integrating sustainability into the core vision and culture of organizations. She highlighted that leadership must be values-driven, ensuring that ESG principles are embedded across all levels of decision-making. She further noted that effective leadership requires fostering a culture of accountability and transparency, where sustainability is not treated as a separate function but as a fundamental aspect of business operations.

Dr. I. Arul Aram, Principal – ICAT College of Design and Media, brought an academic and creative perspective to the discussion. He emphasized the role of education and creative industries in shaping future leaders who are equipped to address sustainability challenges. He highlighted that leadership development must incorporate interdisciplinary learning, innovation, and critical thinking to prepare individuals for complex, real-world problems. He also stressed the importance of nurturing ethical values and social responsibility among students and professionals.

Sunil David, Digital Technology Consultant & Former Regional Director, focused on the role of digital transformation in redefining leadership. He emphasized that technology is a key enabler for sustainability, allowing organizations to enhance efficiency, improve transparency, and scale impact. He highlighted that leaders must be digitally literate and open to innovation, leveraging emerging technologies to address sustainability challenges. He also pointed out that data-driven decision-making is becoming increasingly important in shaping effective ESG strategies.

The panel collectively emphasized that leadership for sustainability requires continuous learning, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace change. It was noted that leaders must engage actively with stakeholders, including communities, employees, and partners, to build trust and drive collaborative action.



The discussion also highlighted the importance of ethical governance and responsible decision-making in ensuring long-term sustainability. Panelists emphasized that leaders must balance economic objectives with social and environmental considerations, ensuring that growth is inclusive and sustainable.

The session concluded with a strong consensus that future-ready leadership must be visionary, collaborative, and innovation-driven. It reinforced that building sustainable organizations requires leaders who are committed to driving systemic change, fostering partnerships, and embedding ESG principles into the core of organizational strategy and culture.



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## Classroom Session Summary ESG & Sustainability Leadership Summit 2026



The Classroom Sessions of the ESG & Sustainability Leadership Summit 2026 were designed to provide focused, in-depth discussions on key aspects of ESG implementation, regulatory frameworks, and the role of education in advancing sustainability. These sessions brought together industry experts, practitioners, and academic leaders to share practical insights and actionable strategies

Both classroom sessions provided valuable insights into the practical implementation of ESG principles across corporate and academic domains. While the first session focused on governance, compliance, and corporate transformation, the second emphasized education, capacity building, and long-term systemic change. Together, these sessions reinforced the importance of integrating ESG into both organizational practices and learning ecosystems to drive sustainable and resilient development.

### Classroom Session 1: ESG and Regulatory Compliance

“Transforming Corporate Governance and Operational Systems for Sustainable Value Creation”

This session focused on the growing importance of regulatory compliance and governance in strengthening ESG performance. Moderated by Kalpathy G Lakshmi Vipin, the discussion emphasized how organizations must move beyond basic compliance to embed ESG principles into their governance structures and operational systems.

The panel highlighted that evolving regulatory frameworks, both in India and globally, are pushing companies toward greater transparency, accountability, and standardization in ESG disclosures. Speakers emphasized the need for aligning internal policies, risk management systems, and business strategies with ESG requirements to ensure long-term value creation. Key insights included the importance of ethical leadership, robust compliance mechanisms, and data-driven reporting systems. The speakers also stressed that integrating ESG into corporate governance is not only a regulatory necessity but also a strategic advantage that enhances investor confidence, stakeholder trust, and organizational resilience. Practical examples were shared on how companies are adopting ESG frameworks to improve operational efficiency and manage risks effectively.



### Classroom Session 2: Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)

“Embedding Sustainability Principles for a Resilient Academic and Business Ecosystem”

The second classroom session focused on the role of academic institutions in advancing sustainability through the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). The speakers highlighted the need to integrate sustainability into academic curricula, research, and institutional practices to prepare future leaders for ESG challenges.

The discussion emphasized that educational institutions play a critical role in shaping responsible business leaders who are equipped with sustainability-oriented thinking and decision-making skills. Speakers underlined the importance of industry-academia collaboration in designing relevant programs, promoting experiential learning, and fostering innovation in sustainability. Key takeaways included the need for embedding ESG principles across disciplines, encouraging interdisciplinary research, and building institutional frameworks that support sustainability initiatives. The session also highlighted how PRME can serve as a guiding framework for institutions to align with global sustainability goals and contribute to building a resilient and inclusive ecosystem.





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## Valedictory Session : Pathways to Future



The Valedictory Session marked the formal conclusion of the ESG & Sustainability Leadership Summit 2026, encapsulating the key discussions and reinforcing the collective commitment toward advancing ESG and sustainability.



The session brought together key dignitaries and stakeholders who reflected on the insights and outcomes of the summit. The speakers highlighted that the deliberations throughout the day emphasized the urgency of moving from intent to action in ESG implementation. They reiterated that resilience in the face of “SDG shocks” requires strong leadership, integrated strategies, and sustained collaboration across sectors.

The session underscored the importance of aligning corporate practices with global sustainability frameworks, strengthening governance mechanisms, and leveraging innovation and technology for scalable impact.

It also emphasized the critical role of partnerships between industry, academia, and policymakers in driving long-term sustainable development.

The Valedictory Session concluded with a note of appreciation to all speakers, participants, and partners for their valuable contributions, and a renewed call for collective action to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals



## Key Takeaways from the Summit

### Accelerating Action on SDGs in a Disrupted Global Context:

The notion of “SDG Shocks” emphasized the growing impact of climate change, economic volatility, and social inequalities on development progress. Participants highlighted the urgency of adopting adaptive and coordinated strategies to safeguard and accelerate SDG achievements.

### Mobilizing Green Finance and Sustainable Investments:

The discussions underscored the importance of unlocking capital flows toward sustainable infrastructure, climate action, and inclusive development. Strengthening green finance ecosystems and enabling policy support were identified as critical to driving long-term impact.

### Mainstreaming ESG into Core Business Strategy:

The notion of “SDG Shocks” emphasized the growing impact of climate change, economic volatility, and social inequalities on development progress. Participants highlighted the urgency of adopting adaptive and coordinated strategies to safeguard and accelerate SDG achievements.

### Advancing Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:

The summit reinforced that achieving systemic and scalable impact requires strong collaboration among corporates, governments, academia, and civil society. Cross-sector partnerships were identified as essential for co-creating solutions, sharing best practices, and driving collective progress toward the SDGs

### Transformational Leadership for Sustainability:

The summit highlighted the critical role of leadership in driving ESG integration. Purpose-driven, ethical, and accountable leadership was identified as a key enabler for fostering organizational culture, guiding decision-making, and ensuring sustained commitment to sustainability goals.



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## Achievements and Outcomes

### Strengthened Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals)

The summit successfully convened representatives from corporates, government institutions, academia, and civil society, resulting in enhanced collaboration and identification of joint action areas. It facilitated the development of strategic linkages, including engagement with global networks such as UN Global Compact Network India (UNGONI), thereby reinforcing pathways for collective action and knowledge exchange.

### Promotion of Academia-Industry Collaboration (SDG 4: Quality Education)

The summit strengthened collaboration between academic institutions and industry stakeholders to support research, innovation, and capacity building in ESG. This alignment is expected to facilitate the development of future-ready talent, promote interdisciplinary learning, and support the co-creation of practical sustainability solutions.

### Catalyzing Corporate ESG Commitments (SDG 8 & SDG 9)

Participating organizations demonstrated increased commitment toward integrating ESG into their strategic and operational frameworks. The summit encouraged businesses to align sustainability with value creation, risk management, and long-term competitiveness, reinforcing the role of the private sector in driving sustainable development.

### Advancement of Integrated ESG Frameworks (SDG 12 & SDG 13)

A key outcome was the strong consensus among stakeholders on adopting integrated and holistic ESG approaches. Participants emphasized embedding sustainability into core business strategies, operations, and governance systems, enabling a shift from fragmented initiatives to cohesive, system-wide implementation models.

### Enabling Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building (SDG 4 & SDG 16)

The platform enabled the dissemination of best practices, case studies, and emerging trends in ESG. It enhanced stakeholder awareness and capabilities in areas such as sustainability reporting, governance frameworks, and regulatory alignment, contributing to more transparent and accountable systems.



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### **About UN Global Compact Network India (UN GCNI)**

As a United Nations Global Compact local arm, Global Compact Network India has been acting as a country-level platform for businesses, civil society organisations, public and private sectors, and aids in aligning stakeholders' responsible practices towards the Ten Universally Accepted Principles of UNGC in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti- corruption and 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other key sister initiatives of the United Nations and its systems. UN GCNI is working hand in hand with the Government of India to balance the three dimensions of Sustainable Development, the economic, social and environmental, to take the UN Agenda of SDGs forward. At present, the Indian Network has a Pan-India membership of over 500 Leading Business and Non-Business Partners.



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