

Harsha Saxena, Founder & CEO of IICSR, Puts AI at the Centre of India's Sustainability Transition

IICSR's leadership programme united industry and academic experts to explore how AI can enhance sustainability performance and business value.

MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA, July 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- IICSR's leadership programme brought together experts from Oracle, JSW, EY, Deloitte, GovEVA, Updapt ESG Tech and academia to examine how artificial intelligence can improve sustainability performance and business value.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly moving beyond automation and productivity to become an important part of corporate sustainability strategy. Organisations are increasingly examining how AI can help reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency, strengthen ESG reporting, forecast climate risks and make supply chains more resilient.



These themes were explored during "AI and Sustainability: From Strategy to Scalable Impact," a full-day leadership programme organised by the International Institute of Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility, or IICSR. The programme brought together corporate leaders, ESG professionals, technology specialists, researchers and entrepreneurs for discussions, workshops, case studies and solution-building exercises.

The event focused on a central question facing businesses worldwide: Can artificial intelligence deliver measurable environmental and commercial value without creating new governance, ethical and energy-related risks?

From ESG reporting to ESG intelligence

The programme highlighted the need for organisations to progress from retrospective ESG reporting towards real-time ESG intelligence.

Traditional sustainability reports often describe performance after the reporting period has ended. AI-enabled systems can help organisations analyse data continuously, identify inefficiencies, forecast emerging risks and support faster operational decisions.

Harsha Saxena, Founder & CEO of [IICSR Group](#), said businesses must move beyond treating sustainability as a periodic disclosure requirement.

“Sustainability can no longer remain limited to annual disclosures, isolated pilot projects or distant Net Zero commitments. AI allows organisations to analyse thousands of data points, identify climate and operational risks earlier, optimise resources in real time and connect sustainability performance directly with financial decision-making. The next competitive advantage will belong to companies that deploy AI responsibly, measure its impact and act on the intelligence it generates,” Saxena said.

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AI's intelligence carries a climate cost. Its true value will depend not only on what it can achieve, but on how responsibly we manage its energy, water and carbon footprint.”

*Harsha Saxena, Founder and
CEO IICSR Group*

Applications discussed during the programme included carbon accounting, Scope 3 emissions tracking, climate-risk modelling, energy optimisation, supply-chain monitoring, circular-economy planning and automated ESG reporting.

AI could unlock significant business value

A major theme of the programme was the financial case for AI-enabled sustainability.

The IICSR framework estimated that enterprise-level AI and

sustainability initiatives could potentially unlock between \$2 million and \$10 million in annual value, depending on the organisation's size, operations, data quality and implementation maturity.

Potential benefits included:

Energy optimization of 10% to 25%, with estimated annual savings of \$500,000 to \$1.25 million.



Operational-efficiency improvements of 15% to 30%, potentially generating savings of \$1 million to \$3 million annually.

ESG-reporting cost reductions of 30% to 50%, equivalent to approximately \$100,000 to \$500,000 annually.

Revenue growth of 5% to 10%, potentially producing \$2.5 million to \$5 million in additional revenue.

Risk-avoidance value ranging from \$700,000 to \$6 million annually through predictive monitoring and improved climate-risk intelligence.

The figures reinforced the idea that sustainability should not be viewed only as a compliance expense. When connected with energy management, operational efficiency, revenue generation and risk avoidance, it can become a measurable source of enterprise value.

Twelve leaders across technology and sustainability

The programme featured 12 speakers and facilitators representing sustainability, technology, ESG platforms, consulting, academia and entrepreneurship.

The speakers included Harsha Saxena, Founder & CEO of IICSR Group; Prabha Kishore, CEO of IICSR Foundation; Ajay Dubey, CEO of Intellerac Communications; Satish Ramchandani, Co-Founder of Updapt ESG Tech; Raghav Sarda, Director at EY Consulting; and Amit Aylani, Researcher at VIT Mumbai.

The programme also featured Setu Shah, Senior Director at Oracle; Nikhil Kulkarni, Sustainability and Energy Centre of Excellence Lead at JSW; Surabhi Kejriwal, Firm Director at Deloitte; Deepshikha Dalchand, Head of ESG at GovEVA; Rashmi Birla, Founder & CEO of Enggauge Solutions; and Jangoo Dalal, Co-Founder & CEO of GovEVA.

The multidisciplinary speaker group enabled participants to examine AI and sustainability from several perspectives, including enterprise strategy, technology adoption, energy management, ESG reporting, governance, organisational transformation, communications and research.

A 90-day implementation roadmap

Rather than limiting the programme to theoretical discussions, IICSR encouraged participants to develop a 90-day AI and sustainability roadmap.

The framework was designed for Chief Sustainability Officers, ESG leaders, Chief Technology Officers, Chief Data Officers, AI professionals, strategy heads and climate-tech founders.

It included six key components:

- AI integration into enterprise sustainability strategy.
- ROI measurement and value tracking.
- Emissions-reduction monitoring and reporting.
- Cross-functional team building.
- Development of a 90-day implementation plan.
- Ongoing implementation and governance support.

Participants were advised to begin with a clearly defined sustainability or business problem

rather than selecting an AI tool first. The programme emphasised that technology must be connected to measurable targets, reliable data and clear organisational ownership.

Practical AI applications

During the first workshop, participants examined how AI could transform four major sustainability areas: carbon accounting, climate-risk analytics, ESG reporting and circular-economy optimisation.

Each participant was encouraged to identify at least three AI use cases that could be tested within their organisation.

Potential applications included predicting facility-level energy demand, automating Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 data collection, detecting emissions anomalies, identifying high-emission suppliers, forecasting climate-related supply-chain disruptions, optimising logistics routes and improving water and resource efficiency.

Participants also explored how AI could automate ESG data validation and detect inconsistencies that might lead to misleading environmental claims or greenwashing.

A case study on predictive emissions tracking demonstrated how AI could enable real-time carbon monitoring across a global supply chain, improve Scope 3 emissions management and strengthen ESG-reporting accuracy.

A six-step framework for sustainable AI

The second workshop introduced a six-step methodology for designing AI-enabled sustainability solutions:

- Problem identification.
- AI model selection.
- Tool selection.
- Data mapping.
- Impact measurement.
- Responsible AI and governance.

The framework highlighted that successful AI implementation depends on more than model performance. Organisations also require credible data, clearly assigned responsibilities, measurable outcomes and governance mechanisms.

Prabha Kishore, CEO of IICSR Foundation, emphasised the importance of connecting technology with communities and implementation realities.

“AI must not become another layer of complexity imposed on sustainability programmes. It should help organisations understand communities more accurately, allocate resources efficiently and measure whether interventions are creating lasting change. A system may process millions of data points, but its success must ultimately be judged by whether it improves outcomes for people and the planet,” Kishore said.

She added that AI could strengthen social and environmental programmes through beneficiary mapping, impact monitoring, resource allocation and early identification of implementation risks.

The environmental cost of AI

- While the programme examined the benefits of AI, it also addressed the environmental and governance risks associated with rapid adoption.
- AI systems depend on data centres, electricity, computing infrastructure and water-intensive cooling systems. As organisations adopt increasingly complex models, the carbon, energy and water footprint of digital infrastructure could itself become a sustainability concern.
- The responsible-AI sessions focused on sustainable digital infrastructure, model bias, regulatory alignment, accountability, data quality and the risk of AI-assisted greenwashing.
- Speakers warned that an AI-generated sustainability report is not automatically an accurate report. Poor-quality data, opaque methodologies and unverified assumptions can enable technology to produce misleading claims at greater speed and scale.

Governance as protection against greenwashing

- The programme emphasised that responsible AI governance must be established before deployment.
- As companies use AI to prepare sustainability reports, supplier assessments, climate disclosures and stakeholder communications, accountability cannot be transferred to an algorithm.
- Organisations must establish controls around data sources, model selection, auditability, human verification, disclosure approval and regulatory compliance.
- Without these safeguards, AI could amplify incomplete information or transform uncertain assumptions into polished but misleading sustainability claims.

Four messages for corporate leaders

The programme concluded with four strategic messages for boards and senior management teams.

First, AI can become a core Net Zero enabler by supporting emissions forecasting, energy optimisation, carbon accounting and climate-risk management.

Second, organisations must progress from ESG reporting to ESG intelligence. Annual reports explain past performance, while predictive systems can help leaders determine what actions should be taken next.

Third, governance is essential to prevent greenwashing. AI-generated sustainability claims must remain evidence-based, auditable and subject to human accountability.

Fourth, responsible early adoption can create competitive advantage. Companies that establish strong data systems, governance processes and skilled teams may achieve faster cost savings, improved risk visibility and greater stakeholder confidence.

The next boardroom question:

For corporate leaders, the discussion is no longer simply whether AI should be adopted.

The more urgent questions are where AI can deliver the greatest environmental and financial return, how quickly companies can move from pilot projects to enterprise-wide implementation, whether the underlying data can be trusted and who remains accountable when algorithms influence sustainability decisions.

The IICSR programme reflected a wider transformation in global business. Artificial intelligence and sustainability are no longer developing as separate strategic agendas. They are increasingly becoming part of the same investment decisions, risk assessments and boardroom conversations.

The organisations leading the next phase of sustainable business may not necessarily be those using the most AI. They are more likely to be those applying it with the clearest purpose, strongest governance and most measurable impact.

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