

BUILDING RESILIENT ECONOMIES FOR THE FUTURE

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ABOUT VOICES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Voices of Sustainability is a thought leadership platform launched by the Zayed Sustainability Prize to explore the challenges and opportunities of the global transition to an inclusive and prosperous future. Each month, the series

brings together leading global voices to discuss emerging trends shaping sustainability, resilience and equitable development across sectors and regions.



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INTRODUCTION

On 27 November 2025, the Zayed Sustainability Prize aired its 54th episode of the Voices of Sustainability series, entitled Building Resilient Economies for the Future. Featuring Dr Arunabha Ghosh, Founder and CEO of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), the episode, explores how fast-growing economies

can pursue development while building the resilience needed to withstand escalating climate shocks. Blending policy insights with field-level realities, he discusses how innovation, investment and community leadership can work together to redesign food-energy-water systems for long-term security.



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SUMMARY

At a time when nations are racing to build prosperity, resilience emerges as the quiet measure of those who will be able to hold onto it. In the 54th episode of Voices of Sustainability, Dr Arunabha Ghosh explores how designing resilience into economic planning from the outset can transform vulnerability into lasting opportunity.

During the discussion, the founder and CEO of India's CEEW challenges the conventional belief that economies must grow first and adapt later. "What was extreme yesterday has already become normal today - the past is no longer a predictor of the future," he notes, urging a move away from relying on historical patterns to guide decision-making. Instead, resilience must sit at the heart of development models, creating systems that are confident, forward-looking, and equipped to absorb disruption.

For that to happen, societies must be willing to learn, iterate and even embrace failure not as a setback, but as a critical stage in discovering the right mix of technology, policy, finance, and behaviour that enables sustainable ideas to scale.

A recurring focus of the discussion is the food–energy–water nexus, which Dr Ghosh describes as the backbone of everyday stability. Food security, he argues, is not about volume alone, but about producing the right kind of food. One that is aligned with water availability, soil health, and nutritional needs. When agriculture, energy access, and water systems are managed as a single ecosystem rather than isolated sectors, they unlock new forms of resilience and economic value.



We have to weave in resilience into the growth story, rather than first grow and then think about climate action. We've got to do it simultaneously; this is the formula.

Dr Arunabha Ghosh

Founder and CEO
Council on Energy,
Environment and Water (CEEW)



Nature-based approaches also feature prominently in his vision. Rather than defaulting to cement-heavy grey infrastructure, he points to mangrove restoration and sponge city design, where blue–green landscapes absorb shocks and regenerate ecosystems — shifting infrastructure from static barriers to active allies in resilience.

A key message is the value of combining modern innovation with traditional and local knowledge. This fusion, he suggests, is not a compromise but a strategy for building development pathways that are both adaptive and grounded. Communities long accustomed to navigating scarcity have generated

SUMMARY

forms of wisdom that, when amplified through policy and technology, can spark breakthroughs with global relevance.

Drawing on India's trajectory, Dr Ghosh emphasises that these lessons apply far beyond any one region. Emerging economies are not only responding to global disruptions — they are quietly shaping new development models that blend technology with cultural memory, ambition with adaptability. Across villages, research hubs,

and local enterprises, innovation is already taking root. The task now is to recognise and connect these efforts early, even when they start as small experiments that do not succeed immediately.

Despite the scale of the challenge, his outlook remains optimistic. Early-stage initiatives are already showing promise across communities and innovation networks and when platforms help bring these efforts into view, they can turn isolated ingenuity into shared opportunity and, in time, into systemic change.



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BIOGRAPHY

Dr Arunabha Ghosh

Founder and CEO
CEEW

Dr Arunabha Ghosh is the Founder and CEO of the CEEW, one of Asia's leading policy research institutions. A globally recognised public policy expert and institution builder, he brings extensive experience advising governments, industry, civil society and multilateral organisations on sustainable development and energy transitions.

A Selection Committee Member of the Zayed Sustainability Prize, he was appointed by the Government of Brazil as a Special Envoy for the COP30 climate negotiations, following his role on India's Commission for Air Quality Management. He co-chairs the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on the Energy Nexus and has served on India's G20 Finance Track Advisory Group, as well as advising the Sherpa Track during India's G20 Presidency.

Internationally, he has been appointed by the UN Secretary-General to the High-Level Expert Group on Net-Zero Commitments and serves on the UN Committee for Development Policy as its current Vice-Chair.



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OUTCOMES



Resilience must be reframed as a core strategy in economic planning, embedded from the outset rather than treated as a reactive adaptation measure following growth.



Innovation should be scaled through iteration and learning from failure, with policymakers, funders, and platforms fostering flexible pathways for sustainable solutions to grow.



Food, energy and water systems must be managed as interconnected ecosystems to unlock efficiencies, strengthen community resilience, and enhance integrated security.



Policies and investments must bridge traditional knowledge with modern technology, validating indigenous practices alongside scientific tools to create solutions that are both culturally grounded and future-ready.



Nature-based infrastructure should be prioritised in development planning, with blue-green landscapes recognised as strategic assets that absorb risks, regenerate ecosystems, and deliver durable economic value.

Watch the full episode on the Zayed Sustainability Prize's YouTube channel

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