# Transitions Research

## Section I: Director's Message

Dear Readers,

I am thrilled to introduce the first newsletter of 2024. This edition highlights our latest blogs that showcase ongoing projects, plans for Urban October, upcoming Talking About Transitions dialogues and new team members. We invite you to delve into this content and join us on our journey to discover sustainable transition pathways for India's future.

Warm Regards,
Vikrom Mathur

—- Notes for Director's Message: Digital Society—-

2023 has been in many ways the year of AI. Due to the launch of several generative AI applications, this has been the year where AI has burst into the public consciousness and entered a new phase of commercialisation and mainstreaming. As the role of AI in addressing several pressing challenges of our times, including combating climate change is becoming increasingly prominent, we have witnessed rising investments and interests from governments, multinational corporations and global forums alike in channelling AI for social benefit. However, regional differences in tech capacity, cultural contexts as well institutional settings will continue to shape the differential impact of AI. We argue for an people centric, culturally rooted and empathetic approach towards understanding the intersection of AI and society.

Activities done under digital society between July to December 2023:
- Publication of a short blog piece on "AI, Climate Adaptation, and Epistemic Injustice– the piece argues that acknowledging the cultural and contextual dimensions of climate change is crucial in the realms of science, policy, and practice. While AI has the potential to aid decision-making processes, it must be approached with caution to prevent exacerbating underlying injustices. Human experiences should not be overlooked in favour of algorithmic solutions.
- Online Participation in the KTH Conference on Digitalisation and AI in Agriculture, held at Stockholm – where we presented two papers.

- Publication of a three part blog-series 'When Algorithms Till the Land: Speculative Fiction Futures, where we explored speculative fiction as a method to bring narratives of AI's impact to life.
- Ongoing activity: We conducted a small scale pilot project on user-centres understandings of Generative AI and Future of Work, by speaking to 22 individuals across diverse professional backgrounds, using and working with genAI. Report is upcoming.

Forward Focus: We believe that technology alone will not enable just and equitable solutions. Technological trajectories need to be socially-shaped, particularly, in the context of emerging and digital technologies, whose trajectories are not predictable and social dimensions uncertain.

A key area of focus for us this year is the digital anthropocene. Digital and emerging technologies like AI increasingly mediate our relationship to 'nature'. AI and digital technologies will continue to shape how we take climate action. There is a critical need to ensure that technological innovations/ solutions for climate action are responsibly developed, people centric and culturally inclusive.

# Section II : Research Updates

- People's Urban Living Lab (PULL):
  In 2023, we relaunched our Urban Living Lab with a project called PULL: Net Zero. PULL works to co-create, test, and implement equitable climate solutions to transform Indian cities into inclusive, exceptional places to live and thrive. Our new project is supporting four, rapidly growing, mid-sized Indian cities to develop and implement net-zero strategies, with a focus on the social dimensions of these transitions. Learn more: *website, video, blog links*
- Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA):
  In 2023, Transitions Research became the lead of the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA)'s Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) and Strategic Tracking, Learning, and Sharing (TLS). The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is a global coalition responding to the urgent challenges vulnerable communities face from climate change. Its membership comprises researchers, funders, policymakers, development bodies, and community-based organisations committed to action-oriented research for adaptation that supports climate-resilient futures. Transitions Research is a member of the ARA and is leading a strategic learning initiative for the Alliance.
  Our work focus is twofold: a) supporting the Secretariat with monitoring processes and tools for adaptive programme management and sensemaking and b) fostering peer-to-peer learning and reflection amongst the ARA members.

We will be leading engagements with relevant stakeholders in designing, planning and delivering research outputs, conducting on-ground monitoring and evaluation processes, peer-to-peer learning and other knowledge exchange collaborations, and developing actionable recommendations for a step-change on adaptation, collaborating with governments, businesses, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to prepare for climate risks, mobilise further action, and increase adaptation financing.

## Section III: Latest Blogs

- [Blog Series] When algorithms till the land: Speculative futures of AI in Indian agriculture

  It's the year 2040 and an AI revolution is underway in India. How does it impact the scores of small and marginal farmers, farmhands and landless labourers in India? Uma, who works as a farmhand in her husband's field in Andhra Pradesh and Pravesh, a small farmer in Karnatka, both bear witness to the tranformation. We use speculative fiction case studies to delve deeper into the potential implications of AI in Indian agriculture. Read on to learn more about Uma and Pravesh's AI journeys.

- [BLOG] The Road to Net Zero in India: Are Government Policies Promoting True Mobility Decarbonisation?

  For more effective low carbon mobility transitions, there is a need to consider the interlinkages between EV policies and urban mobility plans, policies governing energy transitions and carbon emitting sectors, consumer uptake, and lifecycle carbon emissions for EVs. Learn more in Karthikeyan Kuppu's blog: *link*

- [BLOG]: Urban Heat: The Tradeoffs Between Air Conditioning and Mitigating Climate Change

  As India grapples with extreme urban heat, the demand for and usage of air conditioners is skyrocketing. This growth in energy consumption for cooling is harming India's ambitious net zero targets. How can we combat urban heat while meeting our growing cooling needs more sustainably? Read more in Shantha Venugopal's blog: *link*

# Section IV: Events

- [Event] 4S: Unpacking the climate emergency and crisis discourse
- [Event] Building a Net Zero Society
- PULL Launch:

  We launched PULL: Net Zero on World Cities Day (October 31st) last year with a Talking About Transitions Dialogue called Building a Net Zero Society (*link event page with vide*o). The dialogue explored the social transformations that must accompany low carbon transitions to ensure an equitable net zero, urban future. The Transitions Research team was in conversation with Dr. Shiraz Wajih, the President of Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group and Kristina Londakova, Principal Advisor and Sub-Saharan Africa Lead at The Behavioural Insights Team. *Learn more: links to the blog summary and the event video*

# Section V: Upcoming at Transitions

- AI+ Blog series

  Despite its ubiquity, AI continues to be an enigma to many – it escapes conceptual capture and sense-making. This is, in part, due to the 'black-boxed' nature of AI, as well as, the various scales at which AI operates – be it the algorithm itself, the data that fuels it or the wide network of human labour that ultimately runs it. Several aspects of its social, ecological and human linkages often remain hidden away from view, and as users of technology, we are confronted with only seamless objects and interfaces for interaction – a button to click on or speakerphone to talk to, as our gateway to 'AI'. However, if we open up the hood, and peer under it, we find that AI is much more than its algorithmic core.
  In our upcoming AI+ blog series, we aim to peel back the hidden dimensions of AI, while situating it within different worlds and practices. we invite// we feature guest authors {{ from academia, policy and tech world}} thinking and writing about AI, to dissect the complex socio-technological assemblage of AI, and understand how AI interacts with diverse local contexts, systems and situated practices.

- Gen-AI, Future of Work and Other Things People Told Us

  *Rough text*: Upcoming report on generative AI, anf the future of work – provides a window into the world of generative AI and it's implications on the future of work, as well a focus on how users make sense of AI. In the evolving landscape of AI, the year 2023 has been significant in catapulting generative AI into the public consciousness. We spoke to a group of 22 individuals, examining their user

journeys of integrating generative AI applications into their workflows. How does working with AI impact how they work, think and create? What concerns and anxieties do users have when it comes to genAI and the future of work? What does a people's ethics of genAI look like? Read our exciting upcoming report to know more.

- Talking About Transitions: Upcoming Dialogues

  Our upcoming dialogue on January 29th is called Power and Politics: Imaginaries of Resilience. We will be in conversation with *names- hopefully confirmed-* to discuss the predominant narratives and visions that shape resilience planning in Indian cities. We will focus on discussing and addressing real trade-offs, where resilience infrastructure has led to displacement and further marginalisation of vulnerable communities, to discover pathways for more inclusive and equitable planning for climate risks. Join us on Monday, 29/01/24 at 5pm IST by registering: *link*

- Blog Series and Publications

# Section VI: New Members:

- Prerna

- Godwin: Over the years, energy transition has been a widely discussed topic, while the discussion on a "*just transition*" is still a question. A recent podcast I listened to proves to be an example of how  talked about how a AEP's Pirkey plant - a lignite fired power plant near Hallsville, Texas treated social aspect as vital as the technical or economic part of the decommissioning process. The livelihoods of people directly and indirectly associated with the supply chain of the functioning of the power plant in the town were taken into consideration by the authorities. Very minute details on the town's interest, their opinion, future plans of the families after decommissioning were extensively analysed and people from all walks of life, the local authorities, local small and large businesses, school children, and home makers were surveyed and called for a "campaign" to ensure their livelihoods are not affected in any way and they are not displaced to another town. Also, technical training programs for the employees in the plant on cleam energy technologies, support for resume building, financial incentives for families over a certain period during their unemployment phase were provided by AEP and other stakeholders.

- Rushalee

## Section VII: What Have We Been Reading/Listening To:

- <u>Ashali</u>: I'm kicking off the new year by revisiting one of my favourite books, Form and Flow: The Spatial Politics of Urban Resilience and Climate Justice by Kian Goh. The book deconstructs dominant approaches to urban resilience, highlighting the need for inclusive, socially just and ecologically responsive urbanism. Goh's key question "*In the face of climate change and uneven social and spatial urban development, how are contesting visions of urban futures produced and how do they attain power?*", although rooted in cases in New York, Jakarta and Rotterdam, is essential for reimagining Future Cities in India today.
- Prerna: I am catching up on the weekly podcasts by New Scientist Weekly from the holiday month. The podcast series discusses the biggest weekly breakthroughs in the world of science and their impact on all of us, with some of my favorite podcasts talking about the okra uprising in the oceans, soap bubble lasers, and the complex serious social issues of domestic violence caused by the pandemic. COP 28 dominated the December podcasts, with the journalists noting the subtleties of political and economic tension with scientific facts about climate change. Still catching up with the January weeks I missed! If anyone is interested and is a science nerd, I also recommend their Dead Planet Society podcast series, which discusses outlandish what-if scenarios of the universe from the lens of science.
- Amita: I've been watching Katie Patrick's series of short videos on influencing individuals to take action for climate change. She applies gamification and other principles from behavioural economics to suggest fun, simple, actionable ways to increase community engagement and instil a sense of hope. I've also been revisiting the anthology of winning stories from ASU's annual Everything Change Climate Change speculative fiction contest, which they ran from 2016-2019. These powerful, beautiful stories are a model for the kind of story I've been trying to write myself, to create emotion for what we're losing but then also generate hope and a sense of community.

## Section VIII:Call to Action:

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