

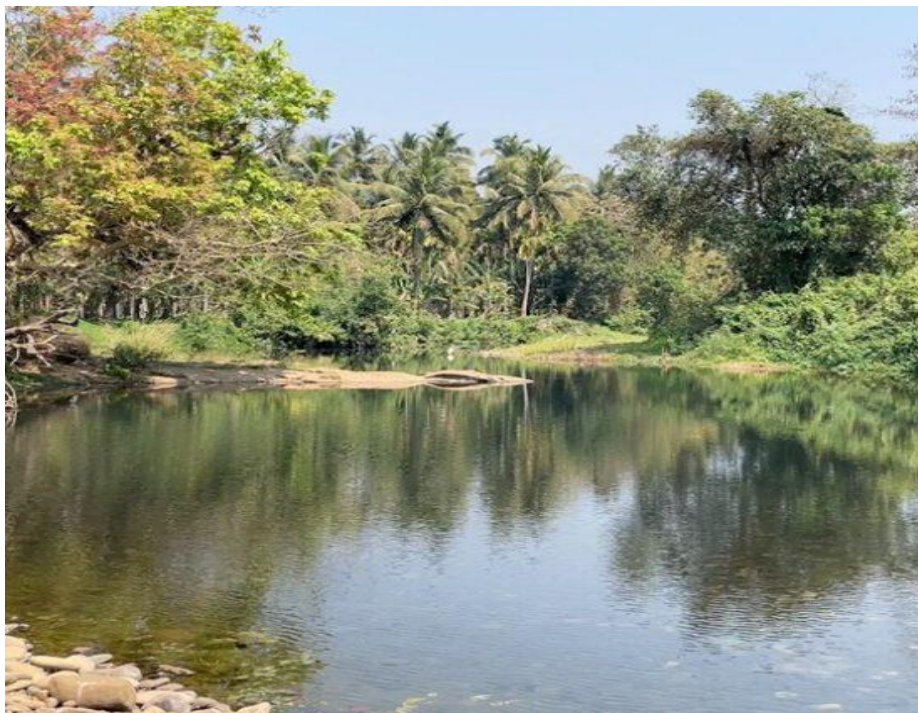


## **ACT FOR GOA - PRESS RELEASE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY**

It's World Environment Day 2024, the 52nd of its kind. And this year's theme, is land restoration, desertification and drought resilience. This may make us feel privileged, thinking it is not relevant to us in Goa as the monsoon is about to let loose and the land looks green and fertile. But it's more pertinent to our lives than we think.

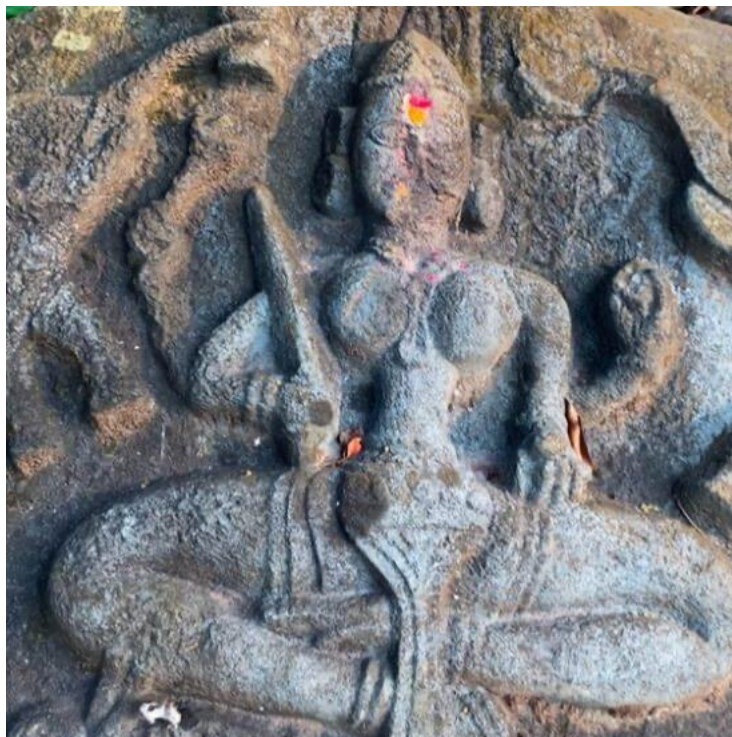
This thin sliver of land, the Konkan coast between the western ghats and the Indian Ocean, of which Goa is a central part is, on the one hand, a place of abundance and, on the other, a place of fragility. We know well the forested ghats, the plateaus with scrub and trees, the hillsides with a mix of fruit trees and native trees, the wetlands with hatcheries of fish and shellfish, and the coast with its coconut plantations, rice paddy and dunes.

The forests attract the rainfall ensuring it falls here rather than awaiting cooler air on the ghats. The plateaus catch the rain. The trees allow the water to percolate into our soils, their leaves enrich our soils. The paddy fields hold water reducing flood risk and again recharging our groundwater. The dunes reduce the impact of coastal waves and form a buffer between the sea and the inland sweetwater table. A degree of run-off supports the spawning grounds. It is a naturally robust system for circulating water and sustaining liveable temperatures and supporting our livelihoods! Whether native to Goa or a new arrival most people value this environment - its why "new Goans" find Goa so "charming".



But our development choices are causing groundwater levels to both drop and become polluted, plateaus seen as “empty space” are being covered over with villas, hillsides have lost huge amounts of their tree cover from roads, commercial premises and homes. Also, canals and nullahs have been concretised to speed up the flow of water ensuring no absorption along the way. Rivers like the historic Sal run at a trickle. Polluted water runs onto beaches spawning mosquitoes as there are fewer ponds to hold it back and our coastline is becoming more vulnerable to erosion as dunes are lost and sand mined for construction. In short, we have disrupted the traditionally robust water and land management system handed down to us by our ancestors, sanctified by the divine, and somehow we have created water scarcity in this land of water.

It is well-understood that land and waters need to be treated with sensitivity and care – understood and treated as sacred. The legends of their creation and worship are numerous showing how precious this land was seen to be. Local deities like Sateri, the devi of the jungle, now often worshipped as Shantidurga, and also Tarini-dewi the boat goddess show the respect of the ancients for this land of forests and rivers. This reflects broader aspects of cultural and religious understanding which see trees as sacred and with rights and feelings.



Bhoomi Aai or Mother Earth (or Prithvi Mata in Hindi), we say. She gives us what we need to be nourished and sustained over generations. So today let's look at World Environment Day as the day of our Earth Mother.

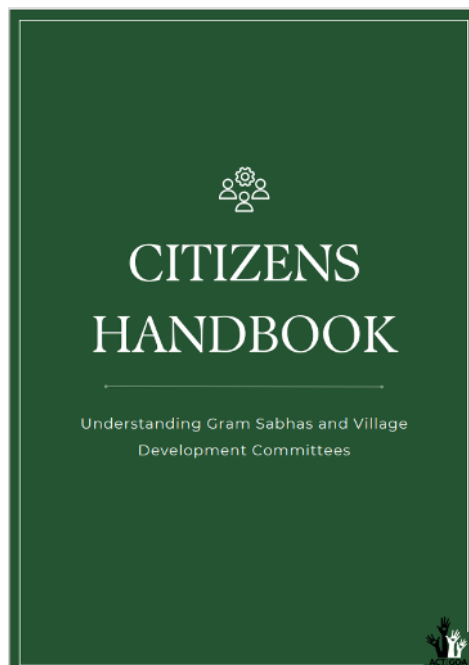
Taking on board Environment Day themes of drought and resilience, the question is, as a state blessed with abundant water, do we want to end up like Bangalore and Delhi -

highly urbanised, wealthy even, but short of water, the basic necessity of life? And what sort of legacy would we like to leave to our children and grandchildren?

The answer for most of us is that we want a sustainable form of development that does not harm our natural assets and survives the test of time. But what can we do about it? Here are 3 calls to action we are making to people (see the full 5 for the year at the end).

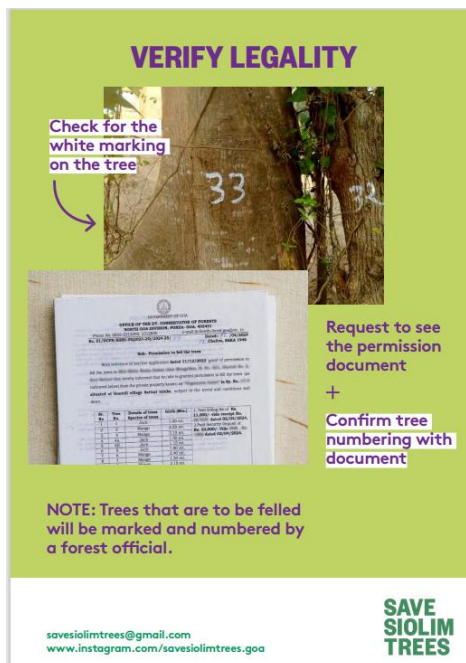
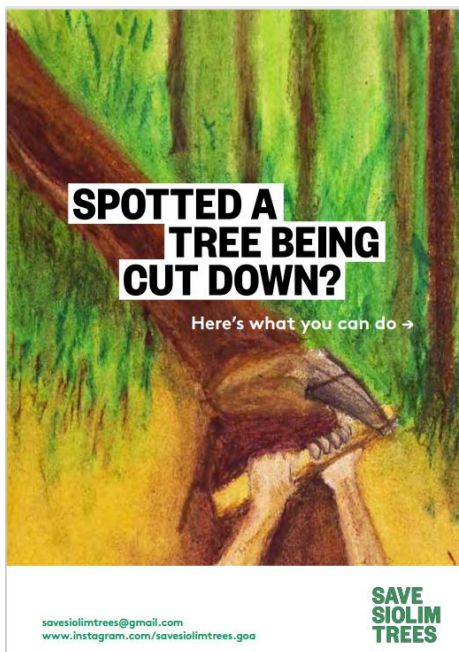
**Take responsibility through local governance structures:** it's easy for each of us to say that it's for the government to take action – but in a democracy, governments are expected to and tend to respond to popular views. If people seem mainly interested in wider roads and big bridges, concreting over surfaces, cheap power and water, this is what we get. The longer term interests of mother earth – our future and that of our children - may get sacrificed for our short term gains.

So the first step is to make our views known through local panchayats and our MLAs. Panchayats have biodiversity committees and water & sanitation committees. It's their local plans that help determine the level of funding and type of investment for a village. Any resident of voting age can participate in a village development committee. So, get involved! Find a short guide to panchayat committees at <https://actforgoa.org/resource/> Data provided by residents of Assagao.

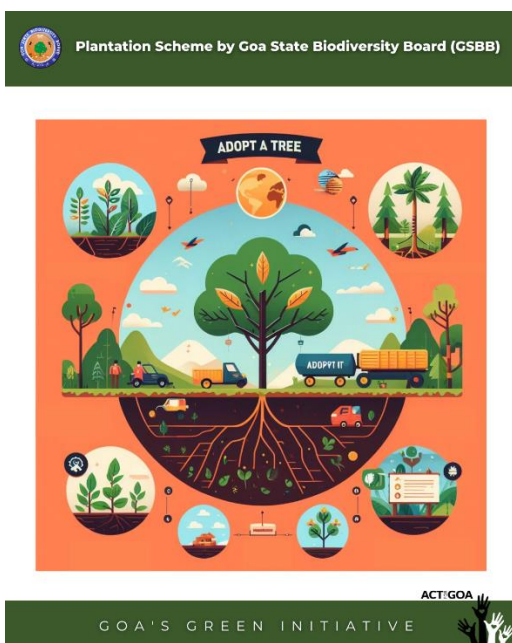


**Protect trees:** take steps to protect trees and plant new trees. Protecting trees comes before planting because old trees are huge ecosystems providing services to people and animals and storing carbon. New trees take a long time to give and store as much. It's important to ensure that any tree felling is legal, that it has a forest department permission which has properly taken into account relevant circumstances. Residents of Siolim and Goa Green Brigade have recently shown how being vigilant and asking questions about tree cutting can expose illegal activities by individuals who want to make money at the expense of the wider community. Find the fantastic guide

produced by the Save Siolim Trees group on their Instagram or online at <https://actforgoa.org/resource/>



In terms of planting new trees, you can do so on your own land or on communidade land and for example, roadsides working with the authorities. Roadside tree planting can offer shade and reduce temperatures making exercise or commuting more pleasant. Indeed, in Goa we should be asking as temperatures rise - it is wise to cut shady trees in favour of advertising and streetlamps? and who benefits from these changes? You can also contribute through the Biodiversity Board's tree planting scheme which involves supporting farmers to plant and maintain fruit trees. Find detailed information on the GSBB website at <https://gsbb.goa.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Notification-of-plantation-Scheme.pdf> or at <https://actforgoa.org/resource/>



NURSERY STOCK FOR THE MONTH OF

SER.NO.	LOCAL NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	TOTAL
01	Bael	Aegle	
02	Jack Fruit	Moraceae	
03	Sissam	Artocarpus integrifolia	
04	Jambal	Dalbergia Latifolia	
05	Pimpal	Pogonia Jambolena	
06	Shivon	Ficus Religiosa	
07	Oval	Cimelia Arborea	
08	Mango	Mimosaops Elengi	
09	Peru	Mangifera Indica	
10	Raktchandan	Falcataria Guavae	
11	Rito	Pterocarpus Santalinus	
12	Ashok	Sapindus Laurifolius	
13	Chinch	Saraca Asoca	
14	Ghoting	Tamarindus Indica	
15	Sitafal	Terminalia Bellirica	
16	Shankar	Alchornea Squamosa	
17	Ganjan (Lemon Grass)	Casualpinia Pabberima	
18	Awla	Cymbopogon Citratus	
19	Bhirand	Emblica Officinalis	
20	Noni	Garcinia Indica	
	Dalimb	Morinda Citrifolia	
	Dhoop	Punica Granatum	
	Bayo	Vateria Indica	
	Bombax	Cassia Fistulica	
	Kalyati	Sparganium Indica	
	Awla	Asaricta Indica	
	Awla	Bombax Ceiba	
	Awla	Artocarpus Lacucha	
	Awla	Tectona Grandis	
	Awla	Bambusa Nana	
	Awla	Eucalyptus Ficus	
	Awla	Begonia Indica	
	Awla	Religiosa Ficus	
	Awla	Clusia Rosea	

**Conserve and increase our local Water Supply:** we can do a lot to save water - washing cars and even clothes less frequently, cutting down showering time, turning the tap off when brushing teeth or washing dishes, covering pools and ensuring waste water from ROI water filters is used for non-drinking purposes like watering plants, washing floors or flushing the toilet.

Then we can ensure that if we live in a housing society, only STP water, not drinking quality water, is used for watering gardens. Another important strategy is to harvest water wherever we can - especially during monsoon. This can be done by storing water in ponds, fields and bandarás, making surfaces permeable rather than concreting them over, and slowing the flow of water down our hillsides. This is not about major construction works but about basic traditional measures we can take in our villages, housing complexes and our homes. Many traditional water bodies also exist so preserving and rehabilitating what we already have is also wise.



If we take the simple steps above to care for water, land and air, we will be cutting the risks of drought, desertification and severe degradation, as well as increasing climate resilience

In summary, the sacred Earth, Prithvi Mata, cares for us and provides abundance. If we show our reverence and respect, then she can help ensure that abundance continues for generations to come. If we don't, we are putting ourselves and our children and grandchildren at risk.

## NOTES:

Act for Goa has developed a wider set of action for the year **5 Calls to Action** for the Year explained below. These are in development and we welcome your views.

1. **Participate:** take part in local governance systems. Panchayats and the village development committees give people the power to make development plans and obtain government funding accordingly
2. **Protect and Plant Trees:** be vigilant about tree-cutting, know the law, and work with others to plant some new ones for multiple benefits.
3. **Practice good water management:** conserve, augment supplies, and ensure water is not polluted
4. **Pollution-free air:** don't burn plastics, and don't burn organic matter such as leaves which should be allowed to degrade to restore our soils, or can be used for biogas. Also ensure your car, if you have one, is low emission (a simple rule of thumb is that small cars are better (as well as easier to park and more suited to Goa's roads!));
5. **Protect the homes of plants & wildlife:** everytime land is cleared or water bodies tampered with, wildlife from leopards and wild boar to bees and butterflies lose their homes. Respecting animals means ensuring we don't take away their homes. Be vigilant to ensure that development is as sensitive as possible to their safety.

In the above article we focus on the 3 actions that relate to this year's Environment Day theme. But all 5 of the above are important. They only partially cover climate change mitigation - coming soon, clear steps on how to contribute to climate action!  
For further information please contact [actforgoat@gmail.com](mailto:actforgoat@gmail.com)

