Addressing
Flying-as-Default
Setting in India's IT
Companies to reduce
their
Climate Pollution

fair travel

BACKGROUND

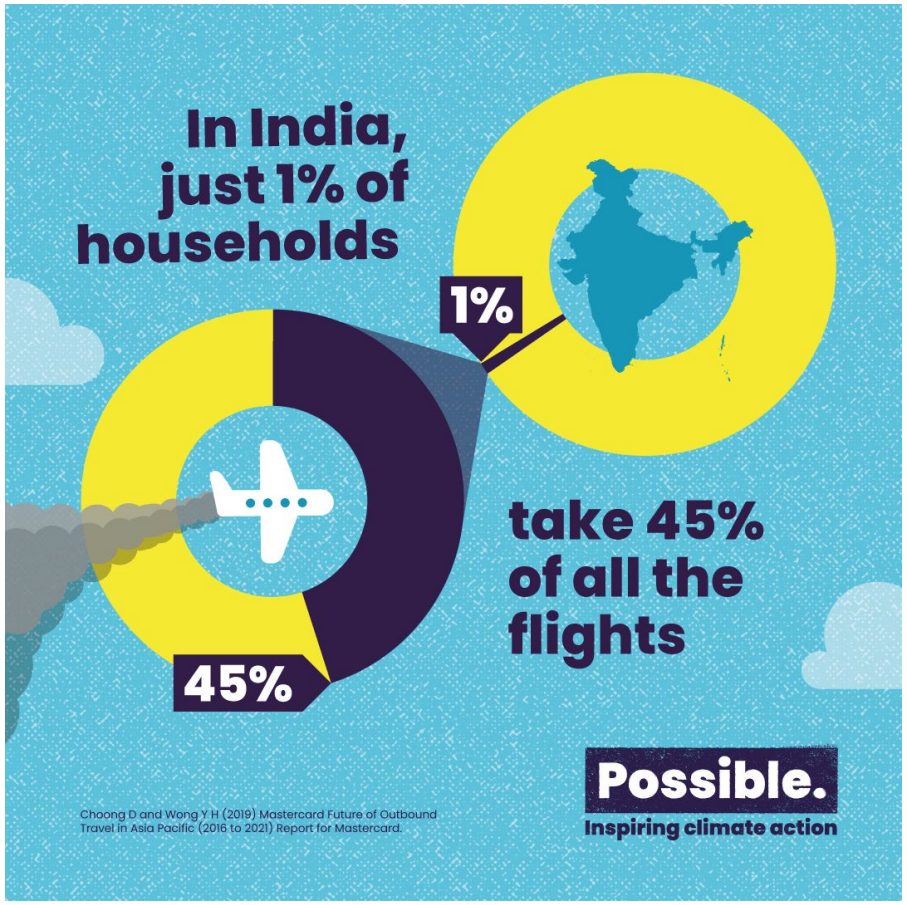
Aviation + Indian IT Companies = Climate Pollution

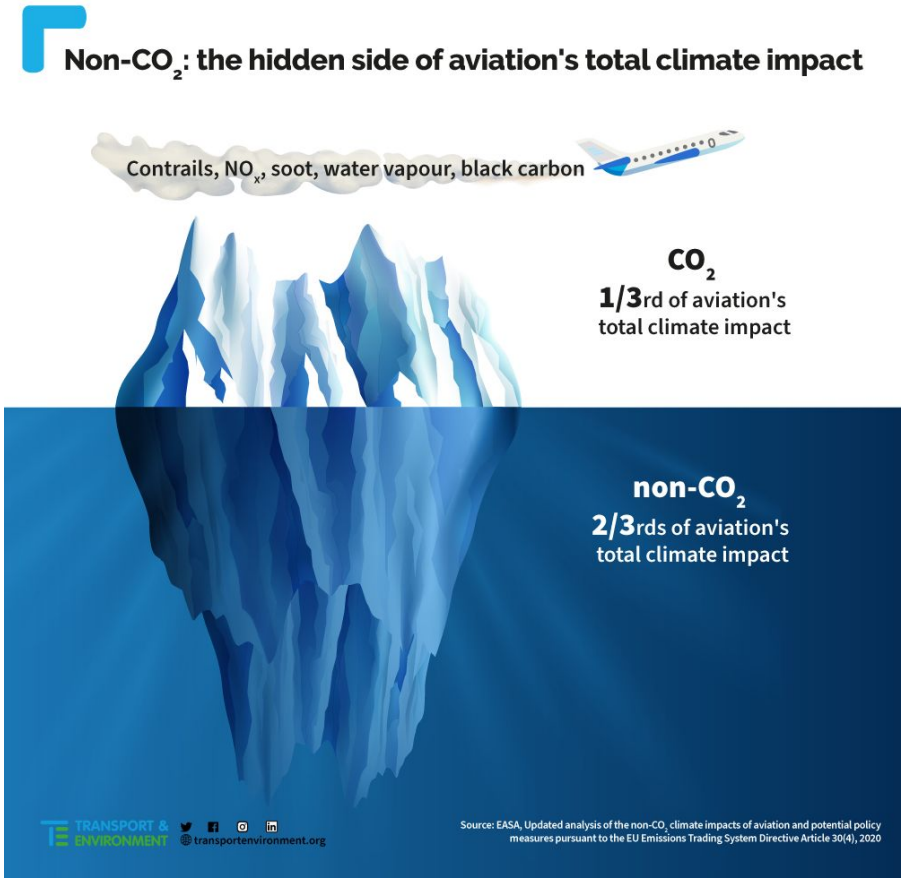
- Indian domestic aviation market is fastest growing on the planet: 3rd largest by 2025 vs. 7th largest in 2017
- About to reach “air-travel-as-default” lock-in for business professionals, reinforced by corporate travel policies, and buttressed by its becoming part of normative behaviour in industrial societies
- Paradoxically, air travel is an untouched subject despite widespread awareness within their sustainability team that air travel is their single largest climate pollution hotspot
- 2 largest IT Companies in India added approximately 55,000, and 74,000 tonnes of climate pollution from Air Travel in 2008
- In 10 years, 88,000 and 135,000 tonnes of CO2e, respectively (year-on-year rise ~ 6% to 8%)
- Contrastingly, electricity emissions declined (3.8% decline per year for Infosys)

Aviation + Indian IT Companies = Climate Injustice

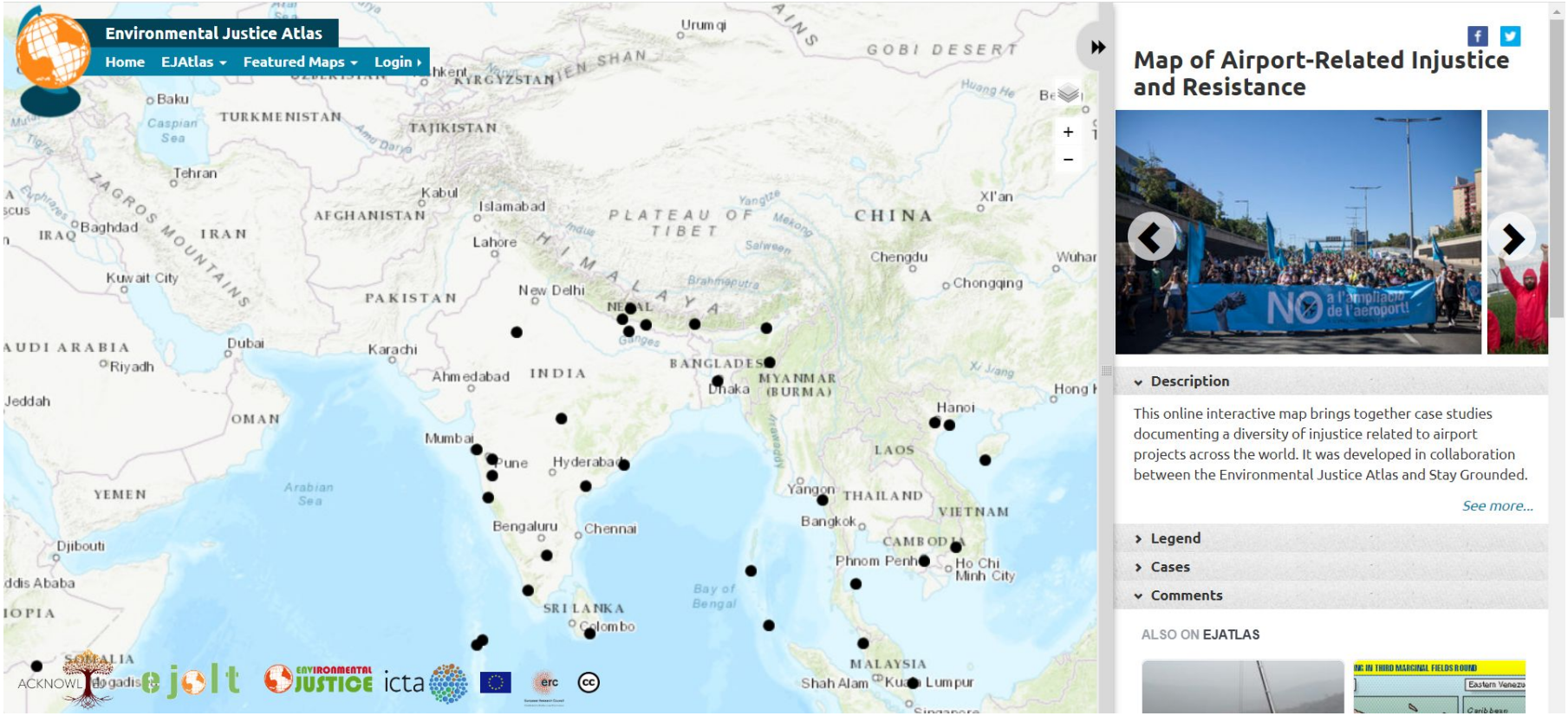
- Indian Aviation industry is becoming a target of significant civil society actions that are escalating in 2022; Environmental Justice Atlas reports 16 active airport-related resistance movements
- Indian IT Companies enjoy immense social sanction and legitimacy in India and carry the expectation of thought-leadership in ecological responsibility.
- An industry known for ‘innovation’ in India sticks to business-as-usual mode when it comes to excessive flying
- Climate emergency and Climate injustice is still interpreted as a ‘future threat’, not a reality that’s already here

Elites do the flying, rest suffer the ‘fry’ing

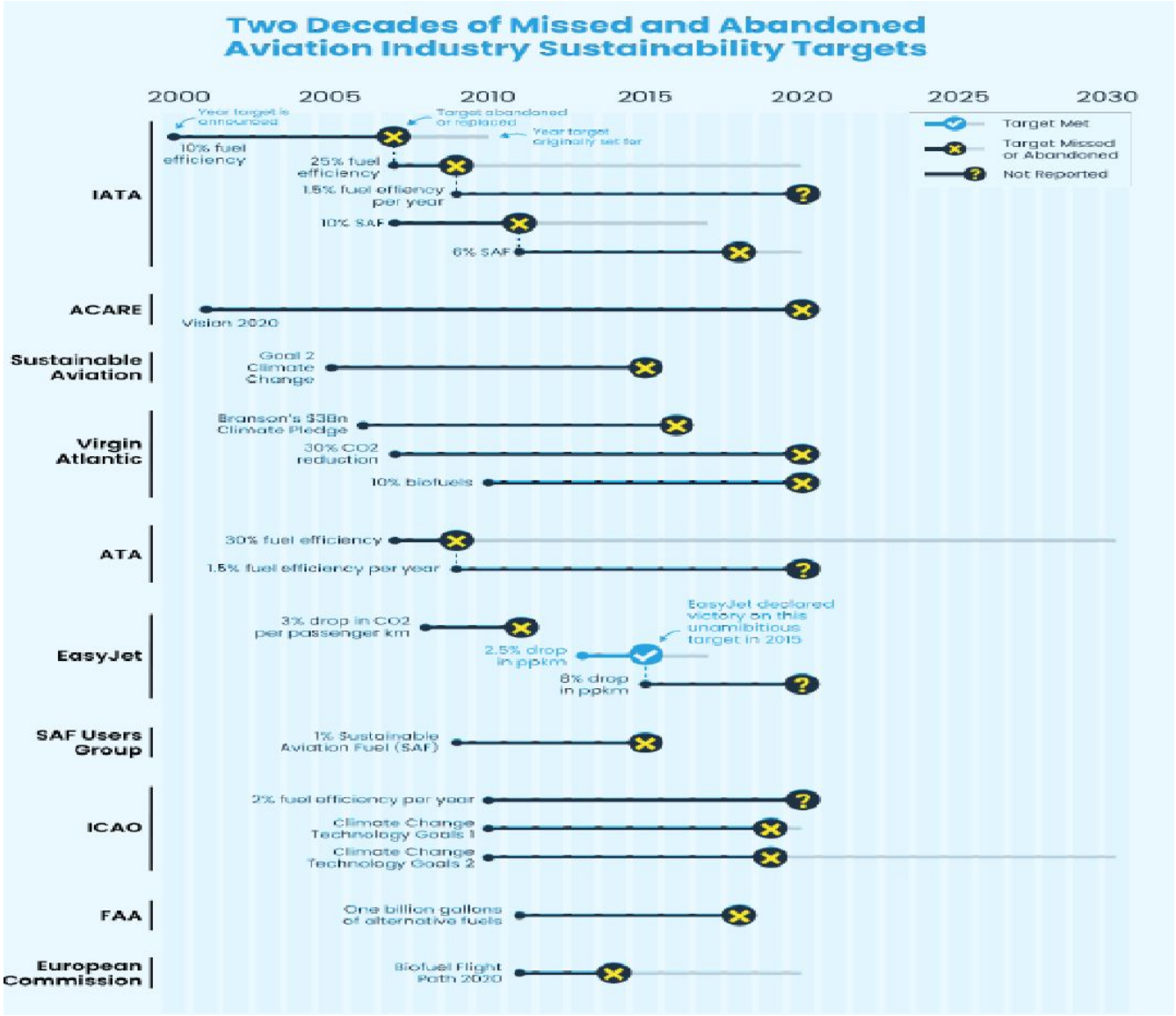




Aviation-related Conflicts in India



History of missed targets by Aviation Industry



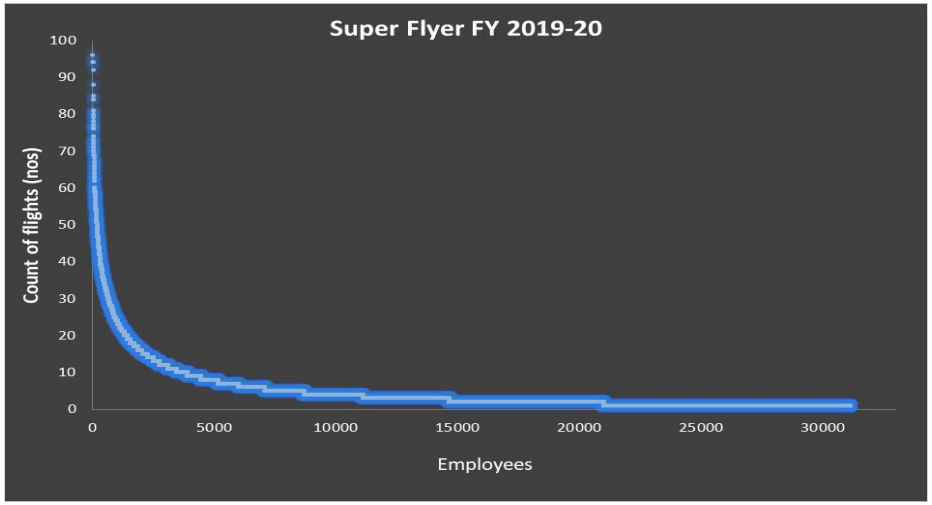
Source: Missed Targets: A brief history of aviation climate targets of the early 21st century. May 2022. Produced by Green Gumption for Possible.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Problem Statement

- ’Green’ initiatives @ Indian IT companies exist , yet air travel untouched despite awareness it is largest source of climate impact
- Senior Management fly indiscriminately; internal super-flying is rampant (500+ flight legs per year)
- Magical thinking about Sustainable Aviation Fuel, Sectorial Net-Zero ‘Targets’, Hydrogen/Electric Aircrafts leading to complacency
- COVID-19 was an opportunity to un-learn ‘air travel as default’, to break hegemonic thinking; unfortunately flying by Indian IT companies is taking off again
- IT industry’s claims of championing high ethical standards are severely discredited through this conspicuous association with a conflict-ridden infrastructure industry

Problem Statement



	Value	Units
Avg. flyer	**3.2**	tonnes CO2e/yr
Super flyer	**23.3**	tonnes CO2e/yr
Avg. flyer	**5**	Flights/yr
Super flyer	**46**	Flights/yr

- ‘IT Super Flyers’ took 10 x flights vs. avg. IT flyer.
- ‘IT Super Flyers’ emit 7 x climate pollution vs. avg. IT flyer.
- If Indian IT ‘Super Flyer’ = avg. IT flyer, reduction of **19,521** tonnes CO2e.

POSSIBILITY

Possibility

- Proof-of-Concept project at 1 Large IT Company, from 2015 to 2020, resulted in 15-20 % reduction of air travel emissions over 3 years.

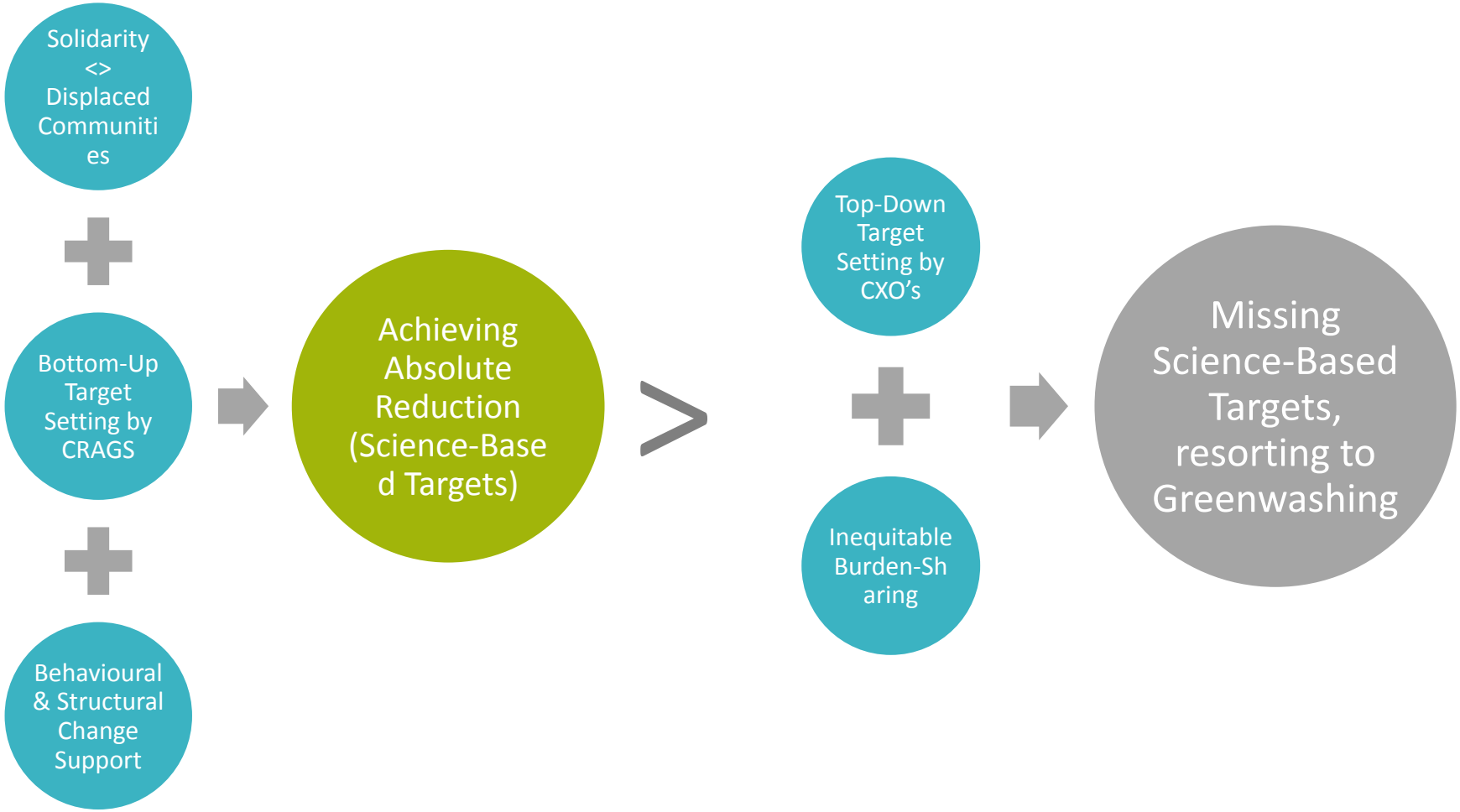
- If implemented across NASSCOM's 2300+ member companies ~ 25 Million Tonnes of CO2e per year reduction possible

- Multiplier effect: 0.8 Million Indian Middle-Class x 4 (approx.) friends-family through Carbon-Conversations Models

- 3.2 Million 'hard to reach and impossible to effect' affluents Indian Citizens dropping out of 'flying as default'

HYPOTHESIS & THEORY OF CHANGE

Hypothesis


Solidarity <> Displaced Communities
Bottom-Up Target Setting by CRAGS
Behavioural & Structural Change Support
Achieving Absolute Reduction (Science-Based Targets)
>
Top-Down Target Setting by CXO's
Inequitable Burden-Sharing
Missing Science-Based Targets, resorting to Greenwashing

Theory-of-Change

Input

A. Program Design Co-Creation Stakeholder Consultations with Launch Cohort, Aviation-affected Civic Groups, cBalance/Stay-Grounded

B) Company-specific Air Travel Emission Inventory and Analytics:
1. Airline Choice Switch Scenario Analysis
2. Flying Class Switch Scenario Analysis
3. Stop vs. Non-Stop Switch Scenario Analysis
4. Modal Shift (Plane -to-Train) Scenario Analysis
5. Super-Flyer Analysis
6. Strategic-Business-Unit / Vertical Emission Intensity Benchmarking

Activities

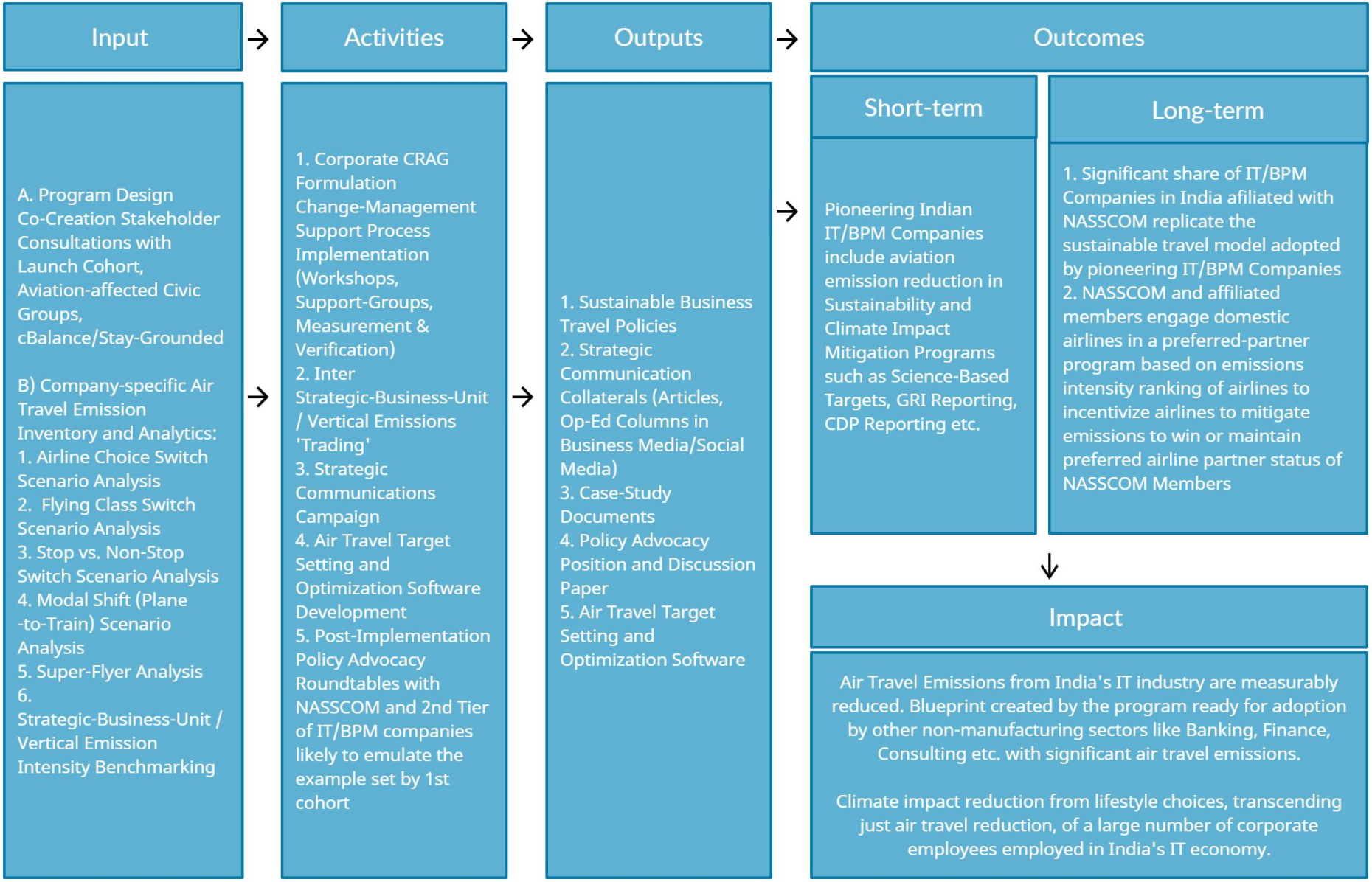
1. Corporate CRAG Formulation Change-Management Support Process Implementation (Workshops, Support-Groups, Measurement & Verification)
2. Inter Strategic-Business-Unit / Vertical Emissions 'Trading'
3. Strategic Communications Campaign
4. Air Travel Target Setting and Optimization Software Development
5. Post-Implementation Policy Advocacy Roundtables with NASSCOM and 2nd Tier of IT/BPM companies likely to emulate the example set by 1st cohort

Outputs

1. Sustainable Business Travel Policies
2. Strategic Communication Collaterals (Articles, Op-Ed Columns in Business Media/Social Media)
3. Case-Study Documents
4. Policy Advocacy Position and Discussion Paper
5. Air Travel Target Setting and Optimization Software

Outcomes

Short-term



Pioneering Indian IT/BPM Companies include aviation emission reduction in Sustainability and Climate Impact Mitigation Programs such as Science-Based Targets, GRI Reporting, CDP Reporting etc.

Long-term

1. Significant share of IT/BPM Companies in India afiliated with NASSCOM replicate the sustainable travel model adopted by pioneering IT/BPM Companies
2. NASSCOM and affiliated members engage domestic airlines in a preferred-partner program based on emissions intensity ranking of airlines to incentivize airlines to mitigate emissions to win or maintain preferred airline partner status of NASSCOM Members

Impact

Air Travel Emissions from India's IT industry are measurably reduced. Blueprint created by the program ready for adoption by other non-manufacturing sectors like Banking, Finance, Consulting etc. with significant air travel emissions.

Climate impact reduction from lifestyle choices, transcending just air travel reduction, of a large number of corporate employees employed in India's IT economy.

*f*air travel

WORKPLAN

Workplan

- CRAG sets targets based on Emissions Analytics (provisional ‘policy’)
- Monthly Workshops to navigate challenge (structural, psychological), reflect / course-correct
- Strategic Communications of ‘do-ability’ to mobilize peers
- Establishment of formal company wide air travel reduction policy and practice guidelines
- Roundtable with NASSCOM to amplify across IT economy in India

Dialogical themes for CRAG Workshops

- **hold a mirror** to excessive air travel; quantitative information necessary but not sufficient
- emphasise connection between excessive flying and growth of mega airports in the future; conduct **immersion workshops at contested sites** to shape critical social discourse
- stories of past disruptions caused by airports well established, additional work needed to **connect socio-ecological disruptions with travel mode 'choice' going forward**
- work on **disentangling two growth stories** - IT Industry growth (which IT companies defend vehemently) and aviation growth; former possible without latter; COVID restrictions have proved (revenue growth continues vs. flatlined air travel distance)
- **Addressing inexorable 'need'** to travel more important 'brake' to apply than promoting train travel (in India)
- COVID response shows that 'facts of life' can be questioned; **'non-negotiables' are negotiable**

Dialogical themes for CRAG Workshops

- Showing the **sales team reports on performance before vs. during COVID** to prove ‘decoupling ‘ of sales from flying intensity is possible
- Don’t limit intellectual and ethical stimulation to air travel; **sensitise employees on all aspects of climate emergency**
- **Incentives (monetary or otherwise)** to employees for reducing flights can galvanize action
- improved **efficiency and comfort of alternative modes** of transport
- enabling account managers/ salespeople to hold **conversations with clients around reducing air travel;** finding other ways to build the relationship
- ensure **CEO and senior management leads by example** by setting flying reduction targets and achieving them

Dialogical themes for CRAG Workshops

- check if clients already value GHG mitigation; **project-based carbon budget** control can be established
- **employee activism** to influence senior management
- Internal **business-unit level ‘cap and trade’** schemw

INSIGHTS (EVOLVING)

Psycho-social challenges

- **travel-ego**; people worked hard to get to upper echelons of company, do not want to be told not to travel
- **dopamine hit** from travel and perks; system built on gaining miles
- IT is booming; **image** that IT world is doing only good and are heroes – cannot possibly be harming the earth
- travelling not quest to learn about the world; **transactional** and quantified in time and money; any deviation held in suspicion
- no contagion effect for people to take up as a cause; **no role models** and not yet part of discourse
- depletion of motivation when **top management excuses itself**; equity important for employee buy-in
- air travel is ‘fact of life’ for IT employees (though COVID proved otherwise)

Systemic/structural challenges

- parochial notion of **productive use of time**
- company **insurance policies** privilege perceived safety of air travel
- continuing aspirations for **expanding market share** and global **geographical spread** of 'clients' demands air travel
- formal systems don't exist to plan **clubbing of travel**
- flying not seen as part of sustainability; linked to **bringing in business**, not source of pollution
- flying stems from **client requests** or to maintain relationship; perception of low or no 'agency' to change this
- average age of employees ~ 25 years; high **preference for travel**

Systemic/structural challenges

- desire for **teams to travel together** engenders requests for some employees to be shifted to air travel despite company policy
- **trains more expensive** than flights in some regions
- quality of other modes of transport in India; **efficiency and cleanliness**
- **exaggerated claims**/projections by airlines to achieve zero-carbon emissions targets in the future
- **magical thinking** about hydrogen aircraft and ‘sustainable’ aviation fuel

DISCOURSE SHAPING PRAXIS

Handout at Conferences

Co-creation at Alternate Economy Applied Research Sites

Co-creation at Alternate Economy Applied Research Sites

PROGRAM STATUS

Program Status

- 7 year track record of air travel emissions reduction ‘with’ Wipro Ltd.
- Intimate relationships with Stay Grounded, Academia in EU working on Behavior-Change Science (Carbon Conversations)
- Pilot Program being implemented with Wipro from Jan 2022 and ongoing. Pilot Program being implemented with LTIMindtree from Jan 2024. Pilot Program to be kickstarted with Thoughtworks from June 2024.

PARTNERS

Knowledge Partners

STAY GROUNDED

climateworks FOUNDATION

TRANSPORT & ENVIRONMENT

icct
THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON CLEAN TRANSPORTATION

ESG
Environment Support Group - Trust

STAND .earth

Pilot Project Partners