Insight Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Interlink International Research Journal
Peer Reviewed International, Open Access Journal.
ISSN : 3065-7857 / Website: https://ibrj.us / Volume-3, Issue-5 / May - 2026

Original Article

India's Green Innovations for Sustainable Development: Materials, Energy, and Environmental Management

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Manuscript ID:
IBMIIRJ -2026-030563

Submitted: 23 Apr. 2026
Revised: 30 Apr. 2026
Accepted: 20 May 2026
Published: 31 May 2026

ISSN: 3065-7857
Volume-3
Issue-5
Pp. 327-331
May 2026

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OPEN ACCESS
Quick Response Code:
Web. https://ibrj.us
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22140859
DOI Link:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22140859

Abstract

The exponential growth of artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and hyperscale digital infrastructure has transformed data centres into critical components of the global economy. However, this rapid digital expansion has also intensified concerns regarding energy consumption, carbon emissions, freshwater usage, and environmental sustainability. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), global data-centre electricity demand reached approximately 415 TWh in 2024 and is projected to exceed 945 TWh by 2030 due to AI-driven computing growth. Simultaneously, emerging economies face additional challenges related to fossil-fuel dependence, water scarcity, and weak sustainability governance. This paper investigates the decarbonization of data centres through Green AI frameworks, renewable energy integration, carbon-aware computing, and sustainability-oriented regulatory policies. The study compares policy and infrastructure models from Bengaluru, Singapore, Amsterdam, and Pune. Pune is analysed as an emerging Indian data-centre ecosystem with the potential to either replicate Bengaluru's resource-intensive trajectory or evolve into a sustainable digital infrastructure model. The paper proposes a multi-layer Green AI governance framework involving renewable energy mandates, carbon accounting, water-neutral cooling, and AI workload optimization. The analysis demonstrates that sustainability outcomes are strongly dependent on policy enforcement rather than technological capability alone. The findings suggest that emerging economies require economically viable and enforceable sustainability frameworks to balance digital growth with climate and resource security.

Keywords: *Green AI, Data Centres, Decarbonization, Sustainable Computing, Renewable Energy, Carbon Emissions, Pune Data Centre Ecosystem, Environmental Policy*

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become a foundational driver of global economic and technological transformation. Large language models, AI inference systems, cloud platforms, and hyperscale computing facilities increasingly depend on energy-intensive data centres. These facilities operate continuously, requiring uninterrupted electricity supply, high-density computing infrastructure, and advanced cooling technologies. The environmental implications of AI infrastructure expansion are becoming increasingly significant. Data centres currently account for nearly 1.5% of global electricity demand, with projections indicating substantial growth over the next decade due to accelerated AI adoption. The International Energy Agency estimates that global data-centre electricity demand could more than double by 2030 under AI expansion scenarios.

In addition to electricity demand, modern AI-driven data centres create environmental stress through:

Carbon emissions, Freshwater consumption, Heat generation, Grid pressure, electronic waste

Emerging economies face particularly severe risks because digital infrastructure growth often outpaces sustainability governance. India represents one of the fastest-growing digital economies globally, yet lacks a unified Green AI or sustainable data-centre regulatory framework. This paper critically examines global decarbonization strategies for data centres and evaluates Pune as an emerging Indian case study for sustainable AI infrastructure development.

How to cite this article:
Dhage, N. S. (2026). India's Green Innovations for Sustainable Development: Materials, Energy, and Environmental Management. InSight Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Interlink International Research Journal, 3(5), 327–331. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22140859

Global Expansion of AI Infrastructure and Data Centres

1. Growth of AI-Driven Computing

AI workloads are substantially more energy-intensive than traditional cloud services because they require:

- GPU-intensive computing, High-density server architecture, Continuous cooling, High network throughput

According to the International Energy Agency:

Year	Estimated Global Data-Centre Electricity Demand
2024	~415 TWh
2030	~945–1000 TWh
2035	~1300 TWh

The rapid expansion of AI infrastructure is expected to significantly increase energy demand worldwide.

2. Carbon Emissions from Data Centres

Global data-centre operations currently contribute approximately:

$CO2=E\times CI$

Where:

- (CO_2) = Carbon emissions, (E) = Electricity consumption, (CI) = Grid carbon intensity

This relationship demonstrates that emissions depend not only on electricity demand but also on the energy mix supplying the grid.

Regions dependent on coal-heavy grids generates substantially higher emissions for equivalent computational activity.

Environmental Challenges of AI Data Centres

1. Energy Consumption

AI systems significantly increase electricity demand due to:

- Large-scale model training, AI inference workloads, Continuous server operation

Recent estimates suggest that AI-related workloads may account for nearly half of total data-centre electricity demand by the end of the decade.

2. Water Consumption

Cooling systems represent one of the largest hidden environmental costs of modern AI infrastructure.

Large hyperscale facilities may consume billions of litres of water annually for cooling operations.

Major Risks

- Urban water scarcity, Groundwater depletion, Competing industrial and residential demand

This issue is especially severe in rapidly urbanizing Indian cities.

3. Carbon-Intensive Electricity Grids

The environmental impact of data centres varies significantly depending on regional electricity generation profiles.

Region	Grid Carbon Intensity	Sustainability Risk
India	High	Severe
Singapore	Moderate	Controlled
Netherlands	Lower	Reduced

Thus, identical computational workloads may generate very different environmental outcomes depending on policy and grid decarbonization levels.

4. Pune as an Emerging Reference Model for Sustainable Data Centres

1. Why Pune is Important

Pune is emerging as a major digital infrastructure and IT ecosystem in western India.

Key drivers include:

1. Expansion of IT parks, Proximity to Mumbai, Industrial and automotive growth
2. Lower infrastructure saturation compared to Bengaluru

Unlike Bengaluru, Pune remains at an earlier stage of large-scale data-centre development, creating a strategic opportunity for sustainable planning.

2. Estimated Data-Centre Capacity (2026)

Current Pune ecosystem estimates suggest:

Parameter	Estimated Value
Installed Capacity	~40–70 MW
Estimated Average Operational Load	~50 MW

These estimates are derived from industry reports and regional infrastructure assessments.

3. Energy Demand Analysis

Annual electricity consumption can be estimated as:

$E=P\times 24\times 365$

Where:

- E= Annual electricity consumption (MWh/year)
- P= Continuous power demand (MW)

Calculation

For a data centre with a constant load of **50 MW**:

$E = 50 \times 24 \times 365 = 438{,}000$ MWh/year

≈ 0.44 TWh/year

Equivalent Household Consumption (India)

This level of electricity consumption is roughly equivalent to:

- **400,000 – 600,000 Indian households**

4.4 Water Demand in Pune

Typical benchmarks for water usage in data centre cooling systems indicate:

- **20–25 million litres per year per MW** (depending on cooling technology and climate)

Calculation

For a **50 MW** data centre (using the upper benchmark of 25 million litres/MW/year):

Annual Water Consumption $= 50 \times 25{,}000{,}000 = 1{,}250{,}000{,}000$ litres/year

≈ 1.25 billion litres/year

Daily Consumption

$\frac{1{,}250{,}000{,}000}{365} \approx 3.4$ million litres/day

Contextual Insight

- **3.4 million litres/day** is a substantial demand, especially in water-stressed regions.
- Equivalent to the daily water needs of approximately **20,000–30,000 people** (assuming 120–160 litres per capita per day in India).
  Although lower than Bengaluru today, rapid AI infrastructure growth could significantly intensify urban water stress.

5. Carbon Emissions

Using India's approximate grid emission factor: $CI \approx 0.7$ kg CO_2/kWh

The annual carbon emissions can be estimated using: $CO_2 = E \times CI$

Calculation

1. Annual electricity consumption: $E = 440$ million kWh
2. Grid carbon intensity: $CI = 0.7$ kg CO_2/kWh

$CO_2 = 440{,}000{,}000 \times 0.7 = 308{,}000{,}000$ kg CO_2/year

$\approx 308{,}000$ tonnes CO_2/year

Equivalent Impact

This level of emissions is approximately equivalent to:

- **70,000 – 90,000 passenger vehicles annually**

Comparative Policy Analysis

1. Bengaluru: Unregulated Growth Model

Bengaluru represents rapid digital infrastructure growth with limited sustainability governance.

Key challenges include:

- Water scarcity, Grid pressure, Weak carbon reporting, No mandatory renewable targets

The city illustrates the risks of infrastructure expansion without coordinated environmental regulation.

2. Singapore: Controlled Sustainable Growth

Singapore implemented strong sustainability-oriented governance including:

- Temporary moratorium on new data centres, Mandatory efficiency standards, Water management plans. Sustainability-first approval systems

Singapore demonstrates that strong policy intervention can balance economic growth with sustainability.

3. Amsterdam: Climate-First Regulation

Amsterdam adopted restrictive sustainability measures including:

- Expansion controls, Renewable energy mandates, Grid allocation limits, Environmental permitting systems

The city prioritized climate governance over unrestricted digital expansion.

4. Pune: Early-Stage Opportunity

Unlike Bengaluru, Pune still possesses the opportunity to integrate sustainability frameworks during early expansion stages. However, current policy gaps include:

- No renewable mandates, Weak carbon accounting, No water-neutral cooling regulation, Limited sustainability reporting

Green AI and Decarbonization Strategies

1. Renewable Energy Integration

Key pathways include:

- Solar PPAs, Wind procurement, Renewable Energy Certificates, Hybrid energy systems

Renewable integration reduces emissions intensity but requires storage and grid balancing for reliability.

2. Carbon-Aware Computing

AI workload optimization can reduce environmental impact through:

- Time-shifting workloads, Dynamic resource allocation, Carbon-aware scheduling

These techniques improve computational efficiency without reducing digital growth.

3. Sustainable Cooling Systems

Advanced cooling technologies include:

Technology	Sustainability Benefit
Liquid Cooling	Reduced energy demand
Immersion Cooling	Higher thermal efficiency
Free-Air Cooling	Reduced water usage
Waste Heat Recovery	Urban energy reuse

4. Water-Neutral Infrastructure

Emerging economies must prioritize:

- Treated wastewater, Closed-loop cooling systems, Reduced freshwater dependency

This is particularly important for Indian urban regions.

Proposed Green AI Governance Framework

Layer 1: Mandatory Sustainability Metrics

Compulsory reporting of:

- PUE (Power Usage Effectiveness), CUE (Carbon Usage Effectiveness), WUE (Water Usage Effectiveness)

Layer 2: Renewable Energy Targets

Year	Renewable Target
2030	≥50%
2040	≥80%
2050	Net Zero

Layer 3: Water Governance

Mandatory:

- Wastewater reuse, Water-neutral cooling, Freshwater restrictions

Layer 4: Carbon Regulation

Implementation of:

- Carbon disclosure systems, ESG-linked compliance, Carbon pricing mechanisms

Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals that sustainability outcomes depend primarily on governance intensity rather than technological capability alone. Comparative Insight

City	Governance Model	Sustainability Outcome
Bengaluru	Weak regulation	High environmental risk
Singapore	Controlled sustainability	Balanced growth
Amsterdam	Climate-first regulation	Strong sustainability
Pune	Transitional stage	Strategic opportunity

Pune represents a critical opportunity for India to implement sustainable digital infrastructure before severe resource stress emerges.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of AI infrastructure has transformed data centres into a critical sustainability challenge for both developed and emerging economies. While technological innovation can improve operational efficiency, evidence indicates that effective decarbonization depends fundamentally on governance quality, renewable integration, and enforceable sustainability regulation. Pune provides a valuable emerging-economy case study because it remains at an earlier stage of hyperscale infrastructure development compared to Bengaluru. This creates a strategic opportunity to implement Green AI policies before severe environmental stress becomes structurally embedded.

The study concludes that sustainable AI infrastructure requires:

Renewable-powered operations, Carbon-aware computing, Water-neutral cooling, Mandatory sustainability metrics, Strong regulatory enforcement without proactive policy intervention, digital infrastructure expansion may intensify environmental degradation rather than support sustainable economic development.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, for providing the academic environment and resources that supported this research. Special thanks are extended to mentors, faculty members, and colleagues for their valuable guidance, constructive suggestions, and encouragement throughout the study. The author also acknowledges the insights gained from reports and publications of national and international organizations that contributed to the analysis of sustainable AI and green data centre policies. Finally, heartfelt appreciation is extended to family and friends for their constant support and motivation during the completion of this work.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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