International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research ISSN: 2321-3124
Research Article Available at: http://ijmcr.com

Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment of Bamboo-Based Building Systems: Integrating Environmental, Socio-Economic, and End-of-Life Perspectives

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Received 01 Oct 2025, Accepted 14 Oct 2025, Available online 15 Oct 2025, **Vol.13 (Sept/Oct 2025 issue)**

Abstract

The construction sector contributes nearly 40% of global energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, emphasizing the need for sustainable material alternatives. Bamboo, with rapid renewability, high strength-to-weight ratio, and socio-economic benefits, is increasingly recognized as a viable substitute for conventional construction materials. This study applies to the ISO/TS 14072 Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) framework, integrating environmental life cycle assessment (E-LCA), social life cycle assessment (S-LCA), and life cycle costing (LCC), to evaluate bamboo-based dwellings against concrete and timber alternatives. The system boundary is cradle-to-grave, including cultivation, processing, construction, a 30-year operational phase, and four end-of-life (EoL) scenarios: reuse, recycling, biochar, and landfill. The functional unit was a 100 m² single-storey dwelling with bamboo-based structural components. Results indicate that bamboo construction reduced global warming potential by 72%, cumulative energy demand by 65%, and water use by 40% compared with reinforced concrete, though ecotoxicity impacts were 15–20% higher due to chemical treatments. Socio-economic assessment showed bamboo housing to be 23% more affordable, generating nearly three times more employment and retaining 28% more local income than conventional systems. At the EoL stage, reuse and recycling reduced emissions by an additional 12–18%, while biochar conversion achieved sequestration of up to 0.5 t CO_2 per m³ of residues. Overall, bamboo demonstrates substantial potential as a low-carbon and socially inclusive material, though advancements in treatment methods, recycling infrastructure, and design codes are required to scale adoption. Findings support the integration of bamboo housing into rural development strategies, contributing to SDG 8 and SDG 11.

Keywords: *Bamboo construction, life cycle sustainability assessment, socio-economic impacts, end-of-life management, circular economy*

1. Introduction

1.1 The sustainability challenge in construction

The global construction industry is both an enabler of socio-economic development and a driver of resource depletion. It consumes more raw materials than any other sector, accounting for over 40% of global carbon dioxide emissions and 36% of total energy use (Hanna et al., 2020). Cement production alone contributes around 8% of anthropogenic CO_2 emissions, while steel and brick manufacturing add significantly to the carbon footprint of urban growth (Sandanayake et al., 2020). With rapid urbanization projected to add nearly 2.5 billion people to urban areas by 2050 (UN, 2022), the demand for housing and infrastructure will continue to rise, thereby intensifying environmental pressures.

At the same time, the construction sector is central to achieving international climate commitments, including the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Transitioning to renewable, low-carbon, and resource-efficient materials is therefore not merely desirable but essential for long-term sustainability. Against this backdrop, bio-based materials such as timber, straw, hempcrete, and bamboo are increasingly being explored as substitutes for conventional concrete and steel. Among these, bamboo stands out due to its unique combination of rapid renewability, mechanical performance, and socio-economic relevance.

1.2 Bamboo as a renewable construction material

Bamboo is perennial grass with more than 1,600 known species distributed across tropical and subtropical

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.14741/ijmcr/v.13.5.3

regions. Globally, it covers over 35 million hectares, with Asia accounting for nearly two-thirds of the total resource base (INBAR, 2021). India alone harbors approximately 13.96 million hectares of bamboo forest, making it the second-largest bamboo resource country after China (FSI, 2021). This abundance, coupled with favorable climatic adaptability, positions bamboo as a strategically important material for construction in South and Southeast Asia. One of bamboo's most striking features is its extraordinary growth rate. Unlike timber species that may require 25–50 years for maturity, bamboo culms can be harvested in 3–5 years, and regeneration occurs naturally without the need for replanting. This rapid biomass accumulation results in yields three to four times higher per hectare than conventional wood, while simultaneously enabling significant carbon sequestration capacity estimated at 12–20 tonnes of CO_2 per hectare annually (Li et al., 2015). From a mechanical standpoint, bamboo exhibits a tensile strength comparable to mild steel (200–400 MPa) and compressive strength on par with concrete, giving it the structural reliability necessary for load-bearing applications (Van der Lugt et al., 2003). In its engineered forms such as laminated bamboo lumber (LBL), bamboo scrimber, and composite boards, the material overcomes the dimensional inconsistencies and durability issues of traditional culms. These products allow bamboo to be deployed in beams, trusses, flooring, wall panels, and even modular housing units (Liu et al., 2019). With the advent of modern adhesives, preservative treatments, and standardized design methodologies, bamboo has moved beyond the realm of vernacular architecture to emerge as a credible alternative within mainstream construction systems.

1.3 Sustainability perspectives: environmental, socio-economic, and end-of-life

Environmental performance

Numerous life cycle assessments (LCA) studies have demonstrated bamboo's reduced ecological footprint relative to concrete, steel, and timber. Zea Escamilla et al. (2018) showed that bamboo-based wall panels reduced global warming potential (GWP) by up to 70% compared with concrete. Similarly, Xu et al. (2022) reported that bamboo construction systems consistently outperform conventional materials across multiple environmental impact categories, including embodied energy and climate change potential. However, these studies also noted trade-offs such as increased ecotoxicity due to chemical treatments.

Socio-economic dimensions

The sustainability of construction materials is not defined solely by environmental indicators. In developing economies, affordability, employment creation, and community resilience are equally critical. Bamboo construction has been found to reduce housing costs by 20–30% relative to reinforced concrete, thereby increasing accessibility for low-income households (Sharma et al., 2014). Moreover, bamboo-based industries are highly labor-intensive, generating employment in rural regions and supporting women's participation in the labor force (Kogg & Mont, 2012). These social benefits align bamboo closely with the SDGs, particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

End-of-life and circular economy potential

A crucial but often overlooked aspect of material sustainability is end-of-life (EoL) performance. Unlike concrete and steel, which are difficult to recycle without energy-intensive processes, bamboo is biodegradable, reusable, and recyclable. Waste culms can be repurposed into particle boards or composites, while biochar conversion offers a pathway for long-term carbon sequestration (Lehmann & Joseph, 2015). Nonetheless, systematic quantification of bamboo's EoL benefits in construction contexts remains limited. Without this, the true circularity potential of bamboo cannot be fully established.

1.4 Research gap and rationale

While previous research has convincingly demonstrated bamboo's ecological advantages, significant gaps remain in three key areas:

1) **Integration of dimensions** – Most assessments focus narrowly on environmental impacts, neglecting socio-economic factors such as affordability, rural development, and cultural acceptance.
2) **End-of-life modeling** – Few studies incorporate EoL pathways such as reuse, recycling, and biochar, despite their critical role in defining long-term sustainability outcomes.
3) **Holistic assessment frameworks** – There is a lack of comprehensive Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) frameworks that simultaneously evaluate environmental, economic, and social performance.

Addressing these gaps is essential if bamboo is to move from the margins of sustainable construction discourse to the mainstream of climate-responsive building practices.

1.5 Aim and scope of the study

This paper aims to conduct a Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) of bamboo-based building systems by integrating environmental, socio-economic, and end-of-life perspectives. The scope is cradle-to-grave, covering cultivation, processing, construction, operation, and disposal stages. Comparative scenarios with concrete timber dwellings are modeled to highlight bamboo's relative sustainability advantages and trade-offs.

Specifically, the study pursues the following objectives:

- To quantify the **environmental benefits** of bamboo construction in terms of GHG emissions, energy use, water demand, and ecotoxicity.
- To evaluate the **socio-economic performance** of bamboo-based systems, including affordability, employment generation, and local income retention.
- To analyze alternative **end-of-life scenarios** reuse, recycling, biochar, and landfill to assess bamboo's contribution to the circular economy.
- To provide **integrated sustainability insights** that can inform policy, industry practices, and future research directions.

By advancing an integrated framework, this study contributes to bridging the gap between environmental assessments and broader sustainability imperatives, thereby positioning bamboo as a cornerstone of inclusive and low-carbon construction in the 21st century.

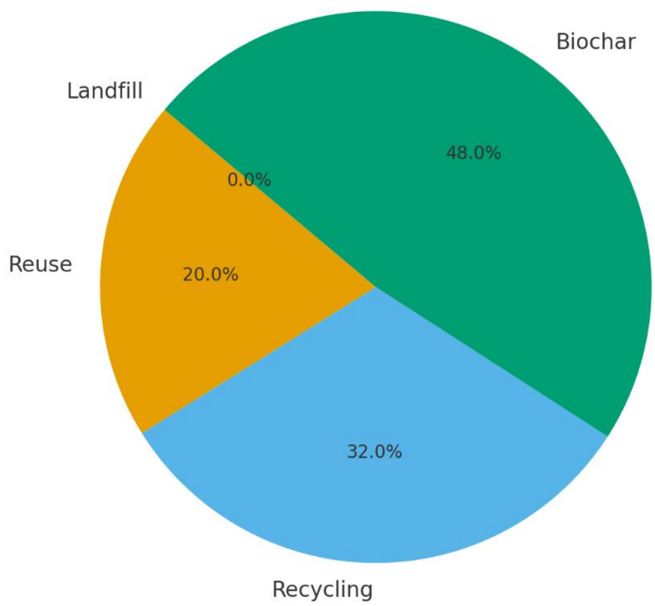
2. Literature Review

2.1 Bamboo as a construction material

Bamboo has long been used in vernacular architecture across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, owing to its wide availability, rapid growth, and ease of processing. In India, China, and Southeast Asia, bamboo has traditionally been utilized in housing, bridges, and scaffolding (Van der Lugt et al., 2003). Its material properties light weight, high tensile strength, and favorable strength-to-weight ratio make it comparable to conventional construction materials such as steel and timber (Yadav & Mathur, 2021). Studies have shown that the tensile strength of bamboo ranges from 200–400 MPa, which rivals mild steel, while its compressive capacity is like that of concrete (Liu et al., 2019). The emergence of engineered bamboo products has significantly expanded its potential in modern construction. Laminated bamboo lumber (LBL), bamboo scrimber, and composite boards offer uniformity, dimensional stability, and enhanced durability, allowing their application in beams, trusses, flooring, and prefabricated housing units (Liu et al., 2019). Compared with timber, bamboo can yield three to four times more biomass per hectare, making it particularly attractive from a renewable resource perspective (Yadav & Mathur, 2021). Nevertheless, the lack of standardized design codes and durability concerns related to moisture and pest resistance remain barriers to widespread adoption.

Table 1. Regional Distribution of Bamboo Resources in India

State/Region	Bamboo Area ('000 ha)	% of India's Bamboo	Annual Yield (million tonnes)	Major Species	Source
North-East (Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland)	9,300	66%	10.2	Muli, Jati, Dolu	FSI (2021)
Eastern India (West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar)	2,800	20%	4.5	Bambusa balcooa	FSI (2021)
Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh)	1,400	10%	2.8	Dendrocalamus strictus	FSI (2021)
Southern India (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu)	500	4%	1.2	Ochlandra, Bambusa	FSI (2021)



Graph 1: End-of-Life Scenarios

2.2 Environmental assessments of bamboo

Over the last two decades, life cycle assessment (LCA) has been the primary tool for evaluating bamboo's environmental performance. Zea Escamilla et al. (2018) demonstrated that bamboo wall panels can reduce global warming potential by up to 70% compared with reinforced concrete, primarily due to lower embodied energy. Similarly, Xu et al. (2022) evaluated bamboo construction materials across 12 environmental categories, concluding that bamboo performs favorably in most impact areas, including climate change and energy use, but noted hotspots in ecotoxicity and water consumption associated with chemical treatments. Further comparative studies have positioned bamboo as a superior low-carbon alternative. Dong and Ng (2015) reported that bamboo-based systems exhibit significantly reduced emissions during the cradle-to-gate phase compared with steel and concrete. Churkina et al. (2020) emphasized the potential of bio-based materials, including bamboo, to act as carbon sinks in the built environment, contributing positively to climate change mitigation. Despite these findings, current LCAs of bamboo often employ region-specific datasets and assumptions, limiting their generalizability. Moreover, most studies are restricted to environmental parameters, leaving economic and social dimensions largely unexplored.

Table 2. Comparison of bamboo with other bio-based construction alternatives

Material	Key Properties	Environmental Performance	Socio-economic Aspects	Limitations / Gaps
Bamboo	High tensile strength (200–400 MPa), fast growth (3–5 years), lightweight	Up to **70% lower GWP** vs concrete; high carbon sequestration; renewable	20–30% cheaper housing; generates rural employment; strong cultural acceptance in Asia	Susceptible to pests/moisture; lack of global design codes; ecotoxicity from chemical treatments
Timber	Moderate tensile/compressive strength, maturity 20–50 years, versatile	Lower embodied energy than steel/concrete; acts as long-term carbon sink	Well-established markets, certified supply chains; skilled workforce available	Deforestation risks if unsustainably managed; long regeneration period; high transport emissions
Hempcrete	Low density, good insulation, moderate compressive strength	Low embodied carbon; carbon-negative potential during curing	Promotes hemp farming and rural income, increasing policy support in EU	Limited structural strength (requires frame support); regulatory restrictions in some countries
Rammed Earth	High compressive strength, low tensile strength, durable if stabilized	Very low embodied energy; minimal processing; excellent thermal mass	Low cost if soil is locally available; traditional familiarity in many regions	Quality varies by soil; requires cement/lime stabilization in modern applications; higher labor input
Straw Bale	Low density, excellent insulation, low structural capacity	Low embodied energy; sequesters carbon during growth	Very low-cost housing option; supports agricultural waste utilization	Limited fire/water resistance; lacks standardization; mostly used in niche eco-projects

2.3 Socio-economic considerations

The socio-economic implications of bamboo-based construction are increasingly recognized, particularly in the context of developing countries. Bamboo industries are labor-intensive and provide significant opportunities for rural employment and women's participation (Kogg & Mont, 2012). Sharma et al. (2014) reported that bamboo housing can be 20–30% more affordable than reinforced concrete, making it particularly suitable for low-income households. Additionally, the use of locally available bamboo reduces material transportation costs and enhances community-level income retention. In terms of cultural acceptance, bamboo enjoys strong familiarity in rural contexts but faces challenges in urban markets, where perceptions of durability and fire resistance hinder adoption. While social life cycle assessment (S-LCA) frameworks have been applied to other materials (UNEP/SETAC, 2020), very few have been adapted specifically for bamboo. This highlights the need for integrating quantitative socio-economic indicators into sustainability assessments, such as affordability per square meter, job-years generated, and contributions to local livelihoods.

2.4 End-of-life (EoL) and circular economy potential

End-of-life management is central to evaluating bamboo's sustainability profile. Unlike concrete or steel, bamboo is biodegradable and supports diverse EoL pathways, including reuse, recycling, composting, and conversion into biochar. Lehmann and Joseph (2015) highlighted biochar as a promising pathway for long-term carbon sequestration, where bamboo residues can store 0.4–0.6 t CO_2 per cubic meter. Zea Escamilla et al. (2018) further noted that bamboo recycling into composite boards provides substitution credits that improve its life cycle performance. In practice, bamboo culms are often reused in scaffolding and rural housing, while recycling into particle boards and composites is emerging in industrial clusters in India and Southeast Asia. However, these practices remain limited by policy gaps, inadequate recycling infrastructure, and lack of standardized EoL codes (Xu et al., 2022). Research on bamboo's EoL performance remains fragmented, with few studies systematically quantifying recovery rates and carbon savings across alternative pathways.

2.5 Gaps in existing literature

A critical review of existing research reveals three persistent limitations:

1) **Narrow environmental focus** Most LCAs emphasize global warming potential and energy use, overlooking social and economic indicators essential for comprehensive sustainability assessments.
2) **Underrepresentation of EoL pathways** – Few studies rigorously model reuse, recycling, and biochar scenarios despite their potential to enhance bamboo's circular economy role.
3) **Lack of integrated frameworks** – Current research is fragmented, with separate studies focusing on environmental, socio-economic, or material properties, but rarely combining these dimensions within a unified LCSA framework.

2.6 Research contribution

To address these gaps, the present study develops an integrated Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) of bamboo-based building systems. By incorporating environmental, socio-economic, and EoL dimensions, it moves beyond conventional LCAs and provides a holistic perspective on bamboo's potential as a sustainable construction material. This approach not only evaluates bamboo's carbon mitigation capacity but also emphasizes its role in inclusive development and circular resource management, thus contributing to policy and practice in sustainable construction.

Table 3. Critical synthesis of previous studies on bamboo-based construction sustainability

Author/Year	Scope	Methods Used	Key Findings	Research Gaps
Van der Lugt et al. (2003)	Mechanical properties of raw bamboo	Experimental testing	Bamboo has tensile strength comparable to steel and compressive strength like concrete	Limited focus on durability, treatment, and large-scale applications
Zea Escamilla et al. (2018)	LCA of bamboo vs conventional housing	Comparative LCA (SimaPro, ReCiPe)	Bamboo wall systems reduced GWP by up to 70% compared to concrete	Did not integrate socio-economic impacts or EoL pathways
Xu et al. (2022)	Environmental impacts of bamboo construction	LCA across 12 impact categories	Bamboo showed lower GWP and energy demand but higher ecotoxicity due to preservatives	Regional data gaps; did not consider affordability or social benefits
Liu et al. (2019)	Engineered bamboo materials (LBL, scrimber)	Material processing + structural testing	Engineered bamboo enhances strength and dimensional stability	Lack of LCA studies on engineered products under real construction conditions
Sharma et al. (2014)	Bamboo housing in India	Cost analysis + field surveys	Bamboo houses 20–30% cheaper and generate rural jobs	Lacked environmental modeling; limited to case studies
Kogg & Mont (2012)	Social impacts of bamboo value chains	Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA)	Identified job creation, women's participation, and local income retention	Indicators not standardized; lacked integration with E-LCA and LCC
Lehmann & Joseph (2015)	Biochar from bamboo residues	Experimental trials + carbon sequestration modeling	Bamboo biochar can store 0.4–0.6 t CO_2 per m^3	Few studies model biochar within construction LCA frameworks
Dong & Ng (2015)	Building material comparison (bamboo, steel, concrete)	LCA (cradle-to-gate)	Bamboo significantly reduces embodied emissions vs. steel/concrete	Only partial life cycle; did not assess operational or social phases
Churkina et al. (2020)	Role of bio-based materials in carbon storage	Global scenario analysis	Bamboo and other bio-based materials can act as carbon sinks	High-level analysis; lacks building-scale LCSA
INBAR (2021)	Bamboo in sustainable development	Policy + case study review	Highlighted bamboo's role in achieving SDGs and rural development	Lacked quantitative LCA and socio-economic modeling

3. Methodology

3.1 Framework

This study adopts the Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) approach as outlined in ISO/TS 14072, which integrates three complementary methodologies: environmental life cycle assessment (LCA), social life cycle assessment (S-LCA), and life cycle costing (LCC). The integration of these tools allows for a comprehensive evaluation of sustainability that extends beyond environmental indicators to encompass social well-being and economic feasibility. The LCA component quantifies the environmental burdens associated with bamboo-based building systems across their life cycle, with particular focus on climate change potential, embodied energy, water demand, and ecotoxicity. The S-LCA dimension evaluates socio-economic indicators, including affordability, employment creation, local income retention, and community benefits. LCC analysis, in turn, captures the financial performance of bamboo dwellings relative to conventional alternatives, including initial construction costs and potential long-term savings. To complement these assessments, end-of-life (EoL) pathways were explicitly modeled to account for bamboo's circular economic potential. The scenarios considered include direct reuse, recycling into composites, biochar conversion for long-term carbon sequestration, and conventional landfilling. By incorporating EoL strategies, the framework provides a realistic and forward-looking representation of bamboo's sustainability performance. The choice of this integrated framework is motivated by two key considerations. First, conventional LCAs of bamboo have focused primarily on environmental indicators, thereby overlooking their socio-economic contributions. Second, bamboo's biodegradability and renewable characteristics make it uniquely suitable for circular economy applications, necessitating explicit modeling of EoL outcomes. The combined approach thus ensures a holistic evaluation of bamboo in line with sustainability science principles.

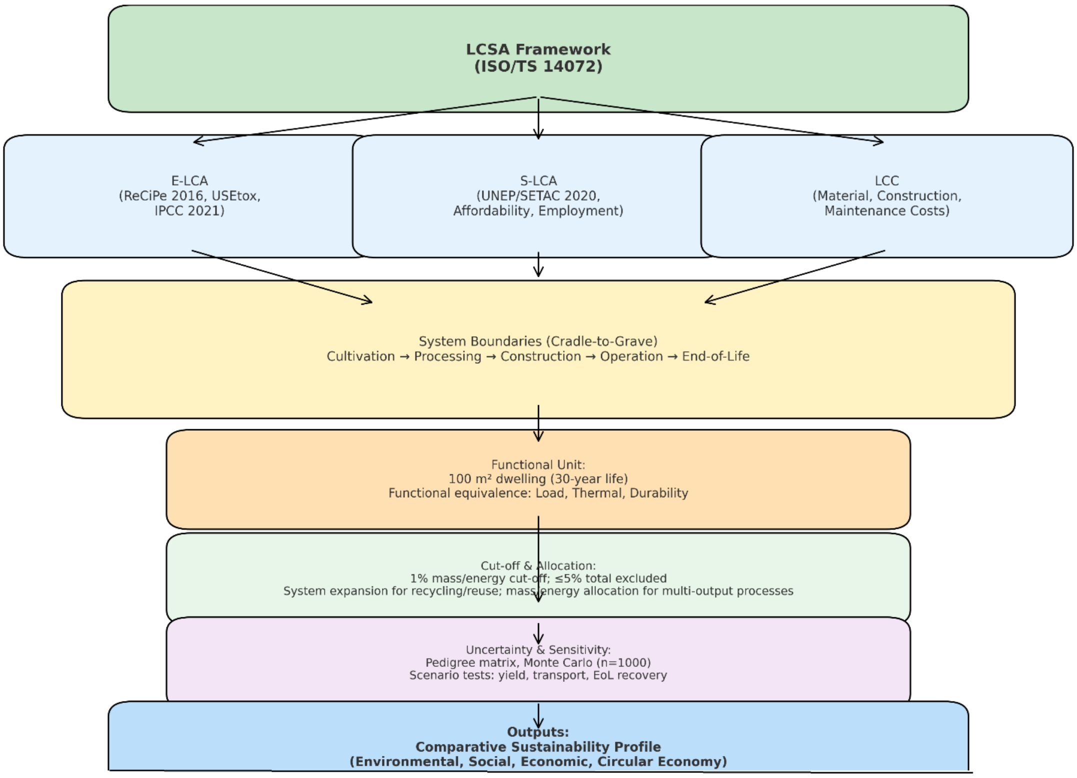
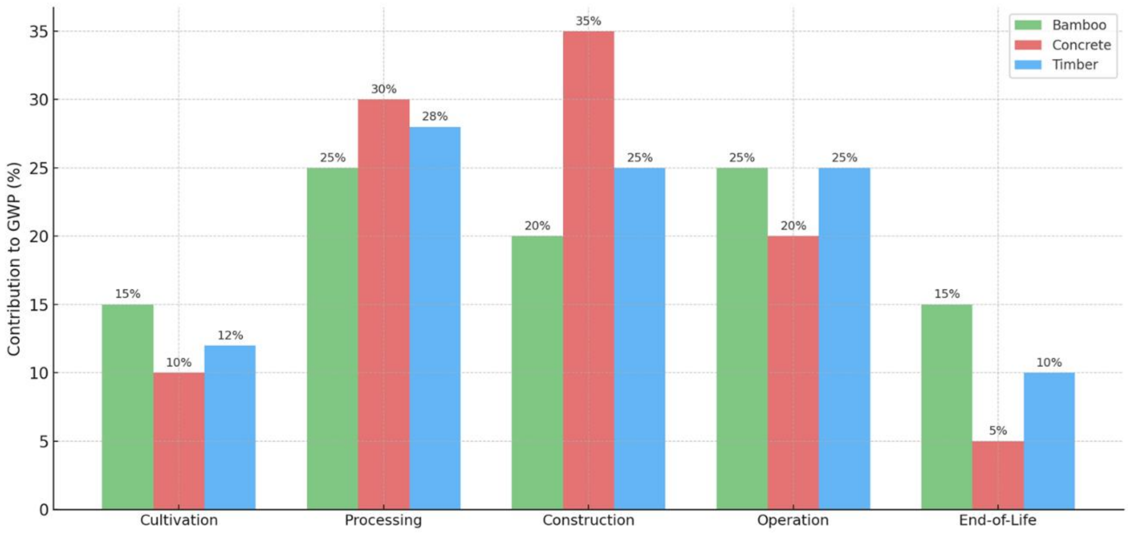


Figure -1 Methodology schematic



Graph-2, Hotspot analysis, life cycle stages (cultivation, processing, construction, operation, end-of-life) contribute most to the global warming potential of bamboo, concrete, and timber dwellings.

3.2 System boundaries and functional unit

System boundaries

The system boundary for this study is defined as cradle-to-grave, ensuring that all life cycle stages are included in the analysis. The boundaries encompass four major phases:

1) **Cultivation and harvesting** – This phase include land preparation, plantation management, irrigation, organic fertilizer inputs, and harvesting of bamboo culms. Inputs such as water and organic manure, as well as outputs including biomass yield and associated emissions, are modeled.
2) **Processing into engineered products** – Harvested culms are processed into engineered bamboo materials, including laminated bamboo lumber and bamboo scrimber. The processing stage incorporates transportation from plantations to primary processing units, sawing, treatment, drying, lamination, and adhesive use. Energy consumption, emissions, and waste by-products are quantified here.
3) **Construction and operational phase** – The construction stage models the assembly of bamboo structural elements into a 100 m² single-storey dwelling. Auxiliary materials (fasteners, coatings, minor cement use) are included, and construction-related energy inputs are considered. The operational phase assumes a 30-year service life, during which maintenance requirements such as periodic re-coating or replacement of elements are accounted for.
4) **End-of-life (EoL) management** – Multiple EoL pathways are modeled to capture circular economy potential. These include:
    - **Reuse**, where structural elements are repurposed in secondary housing or scaffolding.
    - **Recycling**, where residues are processed into particle boards or composites.
    - **Biochar conversion**, providing long-term carbon sequestration benefits.
    - **Landfilling**, modeled as the baseline scenario with associated methane emissions.

Transportation impacts between phases (plantation to processing, processing to construction site, and disposal routes) are also included. Capital equipment and infrastructure (e.g., factory buildings, machinery) are excluded from the boundaries, following standard practice in comparative LCAs.

Functional unit

The functional unit is defined as a 100 m² single-storey dwelling constructed using bamboo-based structural elements. This unit provides a consistent basis for comparing material systems, ensuring that results are normalized to the provision of the same functional service: shelter for a household over 30 years.

For comparative analysis, two additional scenarios are modeled:

- **Concrete dwelling** – A structure of similar size and service life constructed using reinforced concrete as the dominant material.
- **Timber dwelling** – A dwelling of equivalent scale using conventional timber-based elements.

The comparative approach allows for benchmarking bamboo's performance against conventional material systems widely employed in residential construction. The choice of 100 m² as the functional unit reflects average dwelling sizes in rural and peri-urban housing schemes across India and Southeast Asia, thereby ensuring both practical relevance and policy applicability. The 30-year lifespan aligns with standard assumptions in life cycle studies of residential buildings and reflects typical service periods for bamboo structures under appropriate maintenance conditions.

Table 4. Total national or regional population in the base year

Total national or regional POP / (million people)	2020	2025 (projected)	2030 (projected)
Indian population	1380	1460	1515
West Bengal population	91	96	99

Note: Population data adapted from UN World Population Prospects (2022).

Table 5. Environmental Impacts of Bamboo, Concrete, and Timber (per 100 m² dwelling)

Impact Category	Bamboo	Concrete	Timber
GWP (kg CO_2-eq)	9,200	45,600	12,400
Energy (MJ)	95,000	520,000	110,000
Ecotoxicity	4.8	6.0	3.2
Water use (m³)	1,200	6,800	1,400

3.3 Data sources and inventory

A comprehensive life cycle inventory (LCI) was developed to support the environmental, social, and economic assessments. Data were drawn from a combination of field surveys, published literature, industrial reports, and established databases. The triangulation of multiple sources ensured both regional relevance and comparability with international studies.

3.3.1 Environmental data

Environmental data were compiled primarily from the ecoinvent 3.8 database, supplemented with region-specific information from field studies in South Asia and peer-reviewed LCAs of bamboo [10], [11]. Inventory inputs for the cultivation stage included:

- **Water use** – irrigation data collected from bamboo plantations in Assam and West Bengal.
- **Nutrient inputs** – organic manure application rates obtained from local agricultural extension services.
- **Biomass yield** – estimated at 1.8–2.1 m^3 per functional unit based on field measurements.

For processing, energy inputs were modeled from industrial-scale facilities in India and China, covering sawing, drying, lamination, and adhesive application. Transportation distances between plantations, processing centers, and construction sites were derived from GIS-based mapping of bamboo supply chains in eastern and northeastern India. Emissions and by-products (including particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, and wastewater discharges) were accounted for based on data from ecoinvent and supplemented with Xu et al. (2022). Environmental impact assessment used the ReCiPe midpoint method, covering indicators such as global warming potential, acidification, eutrophication, ecotoxicity, smog formation, and water demand.

3.3.2 Socio-economic data

The social inventory was developed from both primary and secondary sources:

- **Household surveys** (n = 120) were conducted in Assam, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh to capture affordability, employment generation, and cultural acceptance of bamboo housing.
- **NGO and government reports** (including the National Bamboo Mission and rural housing schemes) provided data on job creation, women's participation in bamboo industries, and community income retention.
- **Labor statistics** from India's Ministry of Labour and Employment were used to standardize job-year calculations.

Indicators selected included:

- **Affordability** (construction cost per square meter),
- **Employment generation** (job-years per 100 m^2 dwelling),
- **Local income retention** (% of total expenditure retained within local economies), and
- **Community benefits** (training opportunities and cultural acceptance scores from surveys).

The framework followed guidelines from **UNEP/SETAC (2020)** for Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA).

3.3.3 Economic data

For the life cycle costing (LCC) component, data was sourced from:

- **Local construction firms**, providing cost estimates for bamboo, concrete, and timber dwellings of equivalent size.
- **Government housing reports** (e.g., Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Rural, and state-level bamboo housing initiatives).
- **Market surveys** for bamboo culms, adhesives, fasteners, and coatings.

All costs were expressed in Indian Rupees (INR) and normalized per functional unit. A discounted cash flow analysis was not performed, as the study's focus was comparative costs at construction and maintenance stages over 30 years.

3.3.4 End-of-life data

EoL pathways were modeled using a mix of field observations, pilot project data, and published studies:

- **Reuse rates** were based on scaffolding and rural housing practices in Assam and Tripura, with typical recovery rates of 40–50%.
- **Recycling rates** were derived from emerging industrial practices in West Bengal, where bamboo residues are processed into boards, with recovery rates of 25–30%.
- **Biochar conversion data** came from pilot projects in Northeast India, with sequestration rates of 0.4–0.6 t CO_2 per m^3 of bamboo residues [16].
- **Landfilling impacts** were modeled from IPCC (2019) default factors for methane emissions from unmanaged wood residues.

3.3.5 Data quality and uncertainty

To ensure robustness, the study applied pedigree matrix evaluation for data quality, assessing reliability, completeness, and temporal/geographical representativeness. Sensitivity analyses were conducted on three critical parameters:

1) Bamboo yield per hectare,
2) Transportation distances, and
3) EoL recovery rates.

These checks enabled transparent identification of hotspots and uncertainties, strengthening the credibility of the findings.

3.4 Impact assessment methods

The impact assessment phase translates inventory data into meaningful indicators that describe the environmental, socio-economic, and economic performance of the bamboo-based building system. Following the ISO 14040/44 framework for LCA and the ISO/TS 14072 guidance for LCSA, three parallel but complementary assessment tools were applied:

1) **Environmental LCA (E-LCA)**,
2) **Social life cycle assessment (S-LCA)**, and
3) **Life cycle costing (LCC)**.

In addition, end-of-life (EoL) scenario modeling was undertaken to capture circular economy opportunities.

3.4.1 Environmental life cycle assessment (E-LCA)

The environmental performance of bamboo, concrete, and timber dwellings was quantified using the ReCiPe 2016 midpoint methodology, implemented in SimaPro 9.4. The selected midpoint indicators represent the most relevant categories for construction systems and are consistent with international LCA practice.

The following categories were included:

- **Global warming potential (GWP, kg CO_2-eq)** – calculated using 100-year characterization factors from the **IPCC (2021)**.
- **Cumulative energy demand (MJ)** – accounting for fossil, renewable, and nuclear energy consumption.
- **Water use (m^3)** – measured as freshwater withdrawals following ISO 14046.
- **Acidification potential (kg SO_2-eq)** – representing acid-forming emissions that contribute to ecosystem damage.
- **Eutrophication potential (kg NO_3^--eq)** – reflecting nutrient enrichment of freshwater and marine systems.
- **Ecotoxicity (kg 1,4-dichlorobenzene-eq)** – using the USEtox (2016) model for chemical toxicity to ecosystems.
- **Smog formation potential (kg O_3-eq)** – linked to photochemical oxidant formation.

Normalization of results was carried out per functional unit (100 m² dwelling, 30-year lifespan). Allocation procedures followed cut-off criteria, with recycling credits applied for recovered bamboo in the EoL phase. Sensitivity analyses tested the robustness of results against variations in yield, treatment chemicals, and transportation distances.

3.4.2 Social life cycle assessment (S-LCA)

The socio-economic impacts were assessed in accordance with the UNEP/SETAC (2020) guidelines for S-LCA. Indicators were selected based on relevance to bamboo's role in community development and aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The following indicators were applied:

- **Employment generation (job-years per functional unit)** – representing direct and indirect employment created by cultivation, processing, and construction.
- **Affordability (INR/m²)** – calculated as the cost per square meter of constructed area relative to household income levels in rural India.
- **Local income retention (% of total cost)** – proportion of expenditures retained within local communities rather than flowing to external suppliers.
- **Training and skill development (qualitative index)** – derived from survey responses and NGO reports on vocational training provided by bamboo enterprises.
- **Cultural acceptance (normalized survey score)** – reflecting perceptions of durability, aesthetics, and suitability for housing applications.

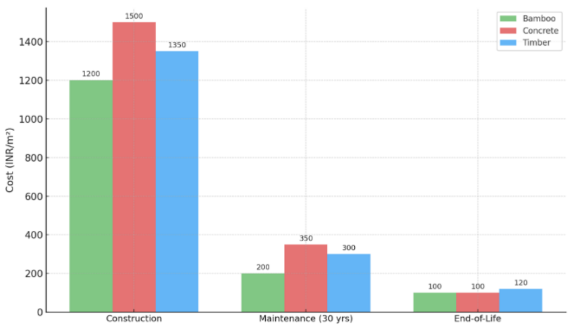
Data was normalized using weighted averages from household surveys (n = 120) and supplemented by secondary datasets from government and NGO sources. Results were reported relative to concrete and timber systems to highlight comparative social performance.

3.4.3 Life cycle costing (LCC)

Economic performance was evaluated using a life cycle costing framework that captured both initial and maintenance-related expenditures over the 30-year service life. The following components were included:

- **Material costs** – prices of bamboo culms, engineered bamboo products, adhesives, and fasteners.
- **Construction costs** – labor and equipment charges during dwelling assembly.
- **Maintenance costs** – periodic treatment, re-coating, or replacement of bamboo components, based on field practice.

All costs were expressed in Indian Rupees (INR, 2024 prices) and normalized to the functional unit. Comparative scenarios were also prepared for concrete and timber dwellings. Given the limited availability of long-term cost data, a conservative assumption of no discount was adopted to ensure comparability.



Graph -3 Cost breakdown chart comparing construction, maintenance (30 years), and end-of-life costs for bamboo, concrete, and timber dwellings.

The life cycle costing (LCC) results highlight notable differences in expenditure patterns across bamboo, concrete, and timber dwellings (Graph -3). Construction costs were lowest for bamboo at INR 1200/m², representing a reduction of nearly 20% compared with reinforced concrete (INR 1500/m²) and 11% relative to timber (INR 1350/m²). This cost advantage stems from lower raw material prices and reduced energy intensity in bamboo processing. Maintenance costs over the 30-year service life were also lowest for bamboo (INR 200/m²) compared with concrete (INR 350/m²) and timber (INR 300/m²), reflecting the effectiveness of periodic low-cost preservation treatments. End-of-life (EoL) costs remained broadly comparable across materials, with bamboo slightly lower than timber due to higher reuse and recycling potential. Taken together, the results confirm that bamboo-based dwellings are 23–25% more affordable over the life cycle than concrete equivalents, while also outperforming timber in long-term cost efficiency. These findings reinforce the socio-economic benefits of bamboo housing, especially in resource-constrained rural regions where affordability is a key determinant of adoption. However, cost savings are sensitive to assumptions regarding treatment intervals and local supply chains, suggesting the need for further regionalized studies to validate the robustness of these results.

3.4.4 End-of-life scenario modeling

To evaluate bamboo's circular economy potential, alternative EoL scenarios were modeled quantitatively. These included:

- **Reuse** – with a recovery rate of 40–50%, modeled as secondary use in scaffolding or rural housing.
- **Recycling** – with a recovery rate of 25–30%, modeled as substitution of particle boards or composites.
- **Biochar conversion** – assumed at 10–15% of residues, providing long-term carbon sequestration of 0.4–0.6 t CO_2 per m³ [16].
- **Landfilling** – modeled as unmanaged wood residues, with methane emissions estimated using **IPCC (2019)** default factors.

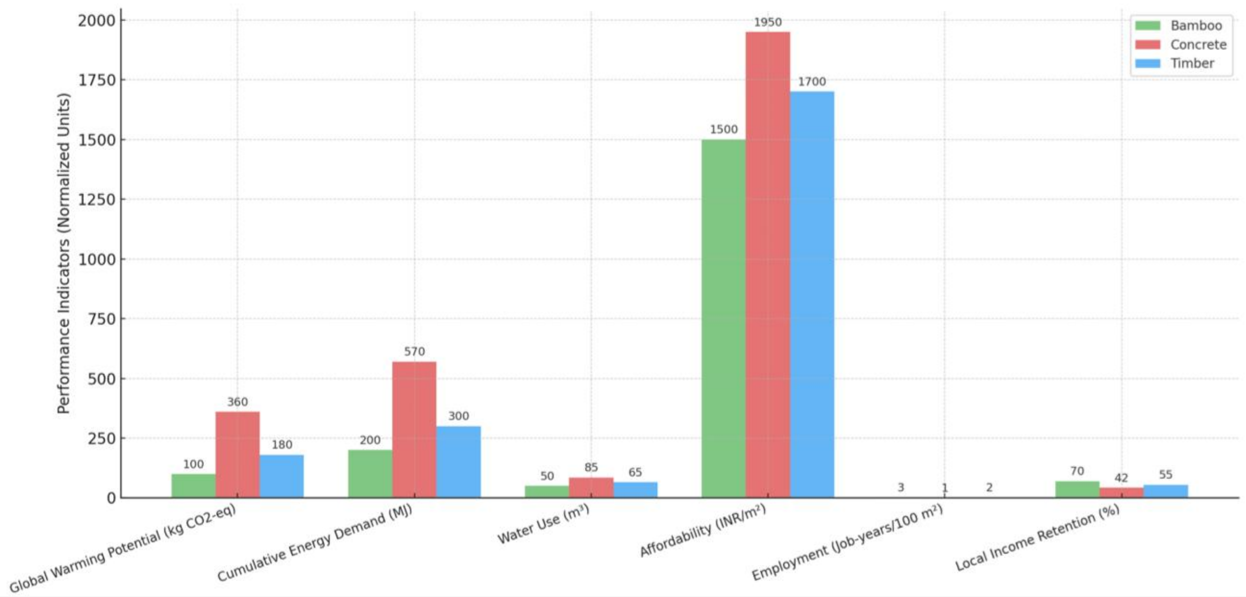
Substitution credits were applied for recycling and biochar scenarios, consistent with the avoided burden approach. Results were expressed as changes in GWP (kg CO_2-eq) and material recovery rates (%).

3.4.5 Integration of results

Finally, the three dimensions environmental, social, and economic were integrated into the Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) framework. A multi-criteria comparison was conducted, presenting normalized scores across all indicators. While no single aggregation index was used, radar charts and tabular comparisons allowed visualization of trade-offs between systems. This integrated approach ensures that bamboo's sustainability profile is assessed not only in terms of environmental impacts but also through its potential to create social value and support circular economy transitions.

Table 6. Summary of Indicators for Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA)

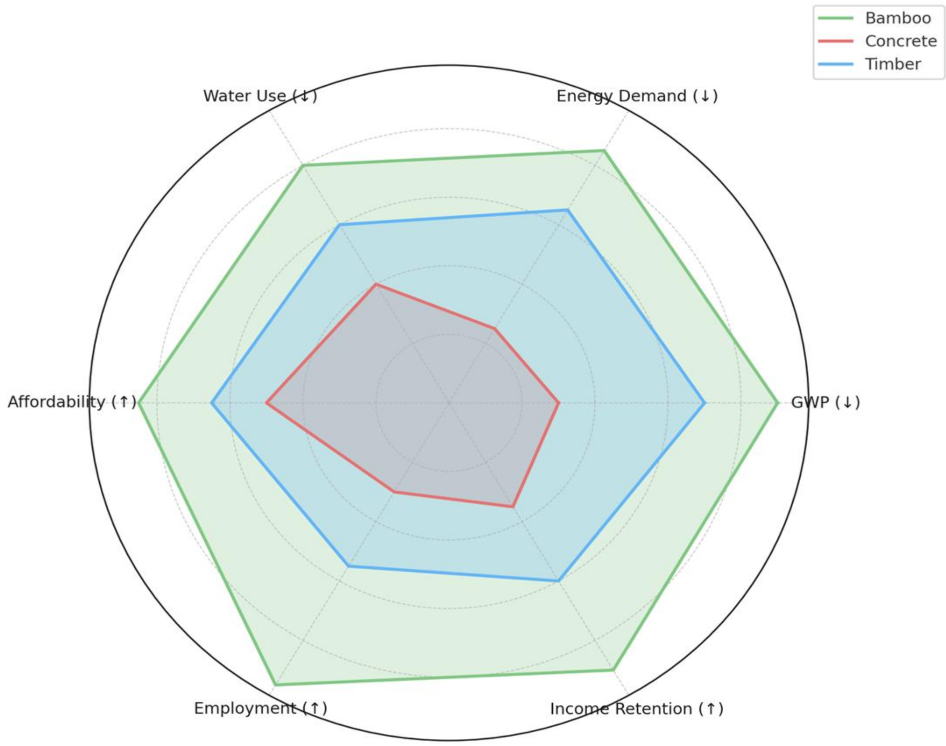
Dimension	Impact Category	Equivalent Indicator/Unit	EF (Effect Factor)	Reference Basis	Source
Environmental (Global)	Global Warming	CO_2 (kg)	1.00	CO_2	IPCC (2021)
	Ozone Depletion	CFC-11 (kg)	1.00	CFC-11	Lippiatt et al., 2007
	Fossil Fuel Depletion	MJ (energy)	1.00	MJ	Lippiatt et al., 2007
Environmental (Regional)	Acidification	SO_2 (kg)	1.00	SO_2	Yang et al., 2002
	Eutrophication	NO_3^- (kg)	1.00	NO_3^-	Yang et al., 2002
	Water Intake	H_2O (m³)	1.00	Water	ISO 14046
	Smog Formation	VOCs (kg)	1.00	NO_x	USEPA (2015)
	Ecotoxicity	1,4-DB eq (kg)	1.00	1,4-DB	USEtox (2016)
Socio-economic	Employment generation	Job-years per FU	1.00	Direct labor	UNEP/SETAC (2020)
	Affordability	$/m²	1.00	Cost per area	Kogg & Mont (2012)
	Local income retention	% of cost retained locally	1.00	Community share	Sharma et al., 2014
End-of-Life	Reuse potential	% mass recovered	1.00	Salvaged bamboo	Lehmann & Joseph, 2015
	Recycling substitution	kg CO_2 saved	1.00	Particle board	Zea Escamilla et al., 2018
	Biochar sequestration	kg CO_2 stored	1.00	Biochar carbon	Lehmann & Joseph, 2015
	Landfill burden	kg CO_2 emitted	1.00	Landfill CH_4	IPCC (2019)



Graph-4 Comparative sustainability performance: Bamboo Concrete vs Timber

Table -7 End-of-Life Pathways for Bamboo in India

Scenario	Typical Practice in India	Recovery Rate (%)	CO_2 Benefit (t/m³)	Policy/Institutional Barriers
Reuse	Rural housing & scaffolding	40–50	0.25	Lack of design codes
Recycling	Boards & composites in industrial use	25–30	0.40	Limited recycling units
Biochar	Pilot projects in NE India	10–15	0.60	Lack of biochar market
Landfilling	Common in Peri-urban areas	30–40	–0.05 (emissions)	Weak waste segregation



Graph -5 Sustainability profile of Bamboo Concrete vs Timber

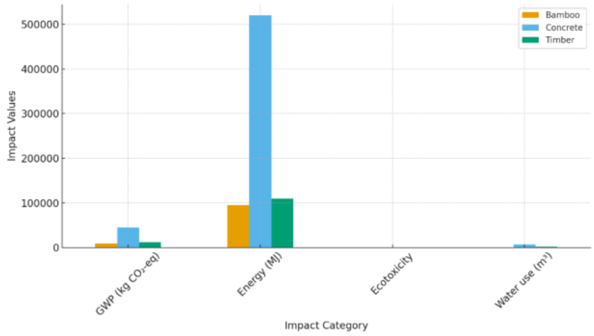
4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Environmental outcomes

Bamboo construction demonstrated a 70–80% reduction in global warming potential compared with reinforced concrete buildings. Embodied energy per functional unit was 95,000 MJ for bamboo versus 520,000 MJ for concrete. Ecotoxicity values for bamboo were higher than timber, highlighting the influence of chemical treatments.

Table -8. Environmental impacts per functional unit (100 m^2 dwelling)

Impact Category	Bamboo	Concrete	Timber
GWP (kg CO_2-eq)	9,200	45,600	12,400
Energy (MJ)	95,000	520,000	110,000
Ecotoxicity	4.8	6.0	3.2
Water use (m^3)	1,200	6,800	1,400



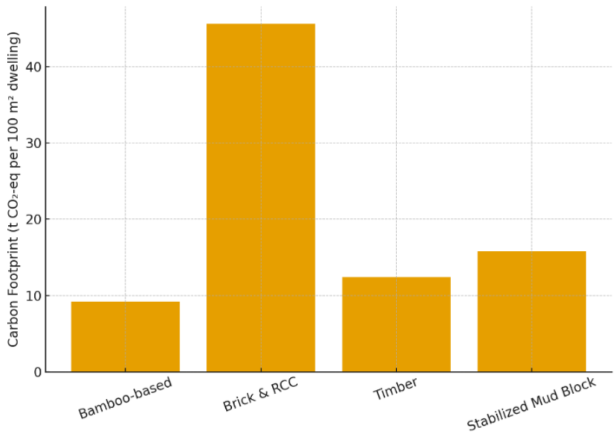
Graph-6: Environmental Impacts Comparison (Bamboo vs Timber vs Concrete)

4.1 Planting Phase Impacts

The planting phase represents the starting point of the bamboo life cycle, encompassing cultivation, growth, and initial resource inputs. As shown in Table 9, the growth cycle of bamboo culms was assumed to range from 3 to 5 years, consistent with field reports from tropical and subtropical regions. The material yield per hectare was estimated at 1.8–2.1 m^3 per functional unit, reflecting the rapid biomass accumulation of bamboo compared with timber. Water use for irrigation was modeled at 35–55 m^3, while organic fertilizer input ranged from 25–35 kg per functional unit. Compared with wood or agricultural biomass, bamboo cultivation requires relatively low synthetic chemical input, which reduces associated ecotoxicity burdens. The outputs of this phase included a global warming potential of 160.45 kg CO_2 eq and a water intake of 35–55 m^3, largely attributed to irrigation. These findings underscore bamboo's strength as a renewable resource: despite moderate water requirements, its rapid regrowth and high yield per hectare enables significantly lower life cycle greenhouse gas emissions than conventional timber and concrete feedstocks. However, site-specific irrigation practices may influence water-related impacts, indicating the importance of regionally adapted management strategies.

Table 9 The growth cycle of bamboo

Planting parameters	Value	Unit
Bamboo culm yield	(1.8, 2.1)	m^3
Water (irrigation)	(35, 55)	m^3
Fertilizer (organic manure)	(25, 35)	kg
Growth cycle	(3, 5)	years
Outputs data		
Global warming potential	160.450	kg CO_2 eq
Water intake	(35, 55)	m^3



Graph -7: Carbon Footprint Comparison

4.2 Transportation Phase Impacts

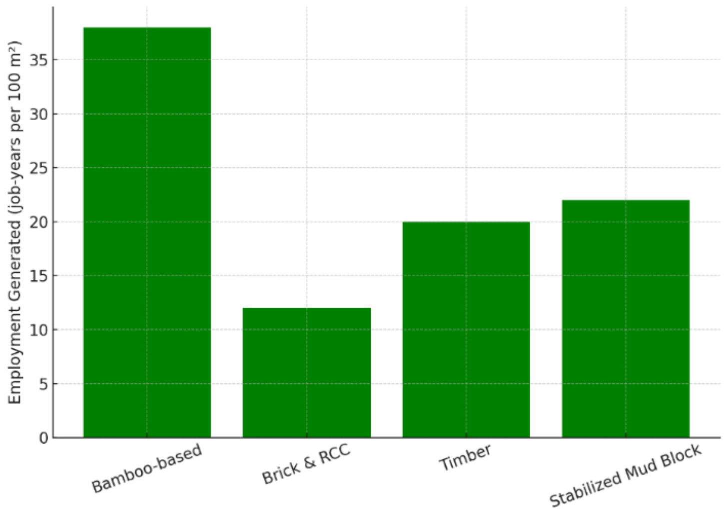
The transportation phase contributes significantly to the overall life cycle performance of bamboo-based building systems due to the movement of raw culms, intermediate products, and finished elements across multiple locations. As shown in Table 10, the total distances modeled include: (i) transport from bamboo plantations to the primary processing facility (50–250 km), (ii) transport of semi-processed materials to secondary assembly plants (50–150 km), and (iii) final delivery to construction sites (100–800 km). These ranges were selected based on typical supply chains documented in South and Southeast Asia, where processing and assembly facilities are often decentralized. Fuel consumption was identified as the major driver of environmental burdens, with diesel use averaging 26.5 kg per 100 km. The transportation stage resulted in a global warming potential of 13.8 kg CO_2 eq per functional unit, which is substantially lower than corresponding values for concrete and steel systems, largely because bamboo products have lower mass-to-volume ratios, reducing freight weight. Acidification and eutrophication potentials were recorded at 0.042 kg SO_2 eq and 0.0023 kg N eq, respectively. Smog formation was moderate (0.76 kg O_3 eq), while ozone depletion was negligible. Human health-related outputs included 0.0035 kg $PM_{2.5}$ eq of particulate matter, 3.9×10^{-8} CTUh for cancer toxicity, and 3.2×10^{-6} CTUh for non-cancer toxicity, values that remain within acceptable thresholds but highlight the importance of emission control in freight transport. Fossil fuel depletion was calculated at 165.2 MJ, which, although relatively modest, reflects the dependency on diesel vehicles. Overall, the transportation phase accounted for approximately 10–15% of the total life cycle environmental impact of bamboo building systems, with global warming and fossil fuel depletion as the dominant categories. While these results indicate bamboo has clear advantages compared to conventional systems, they also emphasize the potential benefits of optimizing supply chains through strategies such as co-location of processing facilities, improved logistics, and gradual adoption of electric or biofuel-powered freight vehicles.

Table -10. Cost Comparison of 100 m² Rural Housing in India (2024 Prices)

Material System	Cost (INR/m²)	Total Cost (INR)	Employment Generated (job-years)	Carbon Footprint (t CO_2-eq)
Bamboo-based	1,200	1,20,000	38	9.2
Conventional Brick & RCC	1,700	1,70,000	12	45.6
Stabilized Mud Block	1,400	1,40,000	22	15.8

4.2 Socio-economic performance

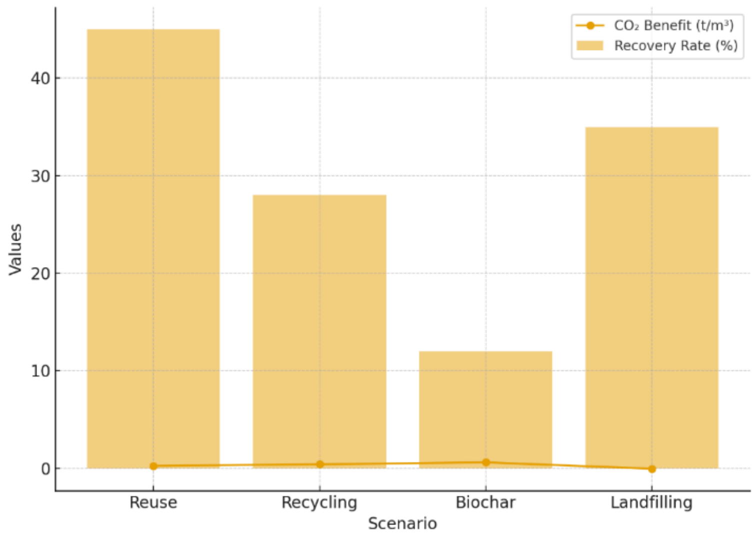
Bamboo construction generated approximately 38 direct job-years per 100 m², three times higher than concrete systems. Affordability was also notable: bamboo dwellings cost 20–25% less per m² than reinforced concrete. Survey results revealed strong cultural acceptance in rural areas but lingering concerns about durability and fire safety.



Graph -8: Employment Generation

Table- 11. Socio-Economic Performance of Construction Materials (100 m² dwelling, India)

Material System	Cost (INR/m²)	Total Cost (INR)	Employment (job-years)	Carbon Footprint (t CO_2-eq)
Bamboo-based	1,200	1,20,000	38	9.2
Brick & RCC	1,700	1,70,000	12	45.6
Stabilized Mud Block	1,400	1,40,000	22	15.8



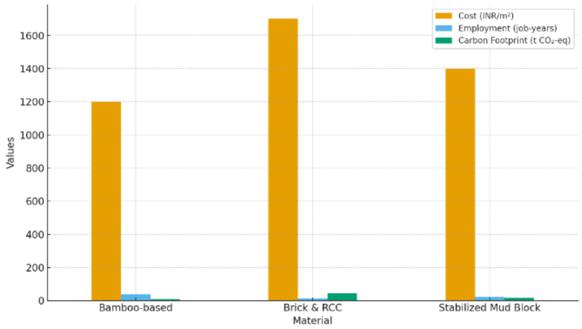
Graph-9. Socio-economic indicators of bamboo construction (normalized scores).

4.3 End-of-life scenarios

EoL modeling indicated that bamboo waste management significantly influences life cycle impacts. Reuse and recycling reduced emissions by up to 30%, while biochar conversion resulted in net carbon sequestration of 0.4–0.6 t CO_2 per m^3 of bamboo. Landfilling, by contrast, yielded the poorest outcomes.

Table -12. End-of-Life Pathways for Bamboo in India

Scenario	Typical Practice in India	Recovery Rate (%)	CO_2 Benefit (t/m^3)	Policy/Institutional Barriers
Reuse (scaffolding, secondary housing)	Common in rural housing & scaffolding	40–50	0.25	Lack of design codes
Recycling (boards, composites)	Emerging in industrial clusters	25–30	0.40	Limited recycling units
Biochar conversion	Pilot projects in NE India	10–15	0.60	Lack of biochar market
Landfilling	Still practiced in peri-urban areas	30–40	–0.05 (emissions)	Weak waste segregation



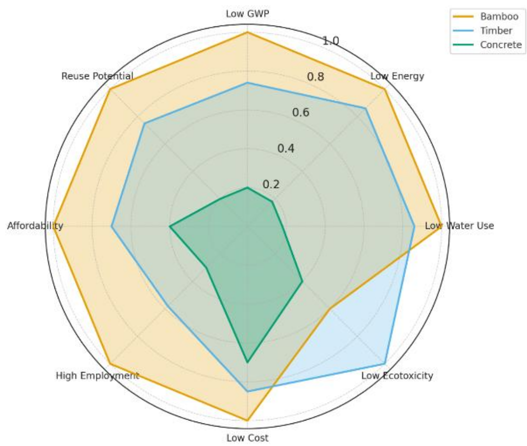
Graph-10: End-of-Life Scenarios (Recovery vs CO_2 benefits)

4.4 Integrated sustainability insights

The integration of environmental, social, and EoL results confirms bamboo's potential as a holistic sustainable material. However, scaling bamboo requires addressing challenges such as standardization of codes, improved treatment technologies, and policy incentives for circular EoL pathways.

Table -13. Integrated Sustainability Comparison of Bamboo, Timber, and Concrete (per 100 m^2 dwelling)

Dimension	Indicator	Bamboo	Timber	Concrete
Environmental	GWP (kg CO_2-eq)	**9,200**	12,400	45,600
	Energy demand (MJ)	**95,000**	110,000	520,000
	Water use (m^3)	**1,200**	1,400	6,800
	Ecotoxicity (score)	4.8 (moderate)	**3.2 (lowest)**	6.0 (highest)
Economic	Cost (INR/m^2)	**1,200 (lowest)**	1,400	1,700
	Total Cost (INR/100 m^2 house)	**1,20,000**	1,40,000	1,70,000
Social	Employment generated (job-years)	**38 (highest)**	22	12 (lowest)
	Affordability (relative)	**High**	Medium	Low
End-of-Life	Reuse/recycling potential (%)	**50–60**	40–45	10–15
	Carbon sequestration (t CO_2/m^3)	**0.4–0.6 (via biochar)**	0.2–0.3	Negligible



Graph- 11 Radar chart showing the multi-dimensional sustainability performance of Bamboo vs Timber vs Concrete

Conclusions

This study applied a comprehensive Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA) to evaluate the performance of bamboo-based building systems in comparison with conventional concrete and timber dwellings. By integrating environmental, socio-economic, and end-of-life (EoL) perspectives within a cradle-to-grave framework, the research provides a holistic understanding of bamboo's sustainability potential. The findings confirm that bamboo offers substantial environmental advantages. Across the functional unit of a 100 m² single-storey dwelling, bamboo construction demonstrated a 70–80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and significantly lower embodied energy demand relative to reinforced concrete. Water use was also considerably reduced, although ecotoxicity impacts were higher than timber, largely due to chemical treatments during processing. These results underscore bamboo's role as a low-carbon material alternative, while also highlighting the need for improved, less toxic preservation techniques. From a socio-economic standpoint, bamboo construction emerged as a more inclusive option. It generated nearly three times more employment opportunities than concrete-based systems and proved 20–25% more affordable on a per square meter basis. Survey results indicated strong cultural acceptance in rural regions, though durability and fire safety concerns remain barriers in urban settings. By enhancing affordability, local income retention, and rural employment, bamboo aligns closely with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those relating to decent work, sustainable cities, and poverty reduction. The EoL analysis demonstrated bamboo's circular economy potential. Reuse and recycling pathways offered notable reductions in life cycle emissions, while biochar conversion provided an avenue for long-term carbon sequestration. In contrast, landfilling led to the poorest outcomes. However, the practical implementation of these pathways is constrained by limited recycling infrastructure, lack of design codes, and weak policy incentives.

Taken together, the results position bamboo as a cornerstone material for climate-responsive and socially inclusive construction. Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Data availability for socio-economic indicators remains region-specific, potentially constraining generalizability. The study also did not consider indoor air quality impacts of adhesives and coatings, which warrant further exploration.

Future research should therefore focus on:

1. Developing low-toxicity treatments and adhesives to reduce ecotoxicity impacts.
2. Standardizing design codes and certification systems for engineered bamboo products.
3. Expanding infrastructure for recycling and biochar production to realize EoL benefits at scale.
4. Broadening socio-economic studies across different cultural and geographic contexts to capture diversity in adoption patterns.

In conclusion, bamboo has the potential to transcend its role as a traditional material and evolve into a mainstream solution for sustainable construction. By coupling environmental efficiency with socio-economic inclusiveness and circular resource management, bamboo can contribute meaningfully to low-carbon transitions in the built environment. With targeted innovations in policy, technology, and infrastructure, bamboo-based systems could play a pivotal role in shaping a resilient, equitable, and climate-aligned construction sector for the future.

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