

Statement by Dr. Arvind Kumar, President, India Water Foundation

COVID-19 is a reminder that we all are connected through a web of cooperation and compassion and despite the many difficulties we all face, moments like this, leads to retrospection how pandemic has created a truly unprecedented situation affecting us all.

We understand that the pandemic is taking heavy toll on our health, economy and social indices. However, that is not the case with the environment. On a positive note, we see air pollution levels dropping, thriving wildlife, improved natural vegetation, clean rivers like Ganga & Yamuna in India which is a good sign of nature healing itself and the entire globe has shown solidarity to combat the crisis. Upholding such impacts, it is necessary to preserve the gains earned during the pandemic.

We're called upon to be our best selves with patience, understanding and compassion with the needles switching our SDGs thinking accustomed towards an undefined 'new normal' life. However, we also witness that progress towards our climate agenda and SDGs 2030 stalled or reversed with manifold consequences. The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of our world and laid risks we have ignored for decades such inadequate health systems; gaps in social protection; structural inequalities; environmental degradation which are direct and indirect drivers of the climate crisis. It is warned that the world is currently "way off track meeting either the 1.5°C or 2°C targets that the Paris Agreement calls for", referring to the commitment made by the international community in 2015, to keep global average temperatures well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. It is time to unlock the value of pandemic resilience and lay down effective strategies to bring desirable change.

2020 is a year of 'countless commitments' marking the triple onset of 'the beginning of Last Decade of Action for realization of SDGs (2020-30), Super year of Nature and Biodiversity along with the outbreak of COVID-19'. There are diverse pathways to achieve this and relationship between paradigms, policies, and practices shall be assessed, with an emphasis on how they contribute to strategies that maintain or restore healthy human-environment relationships. However, require fundamental changes in development paradigms, entailing changes in society in conjugation with human development.

At India Water Foundation, we are working our understanding towards peer review, scoping assessments of IPBES, CBD, IPCC, UNEA, UNFCCC, etc., towards biodiversity, climate action and SDGs realization under various capacities and understanding perspectives in the light of pandemic. Our Jal Mitras (Friends of Water) have shown keen interest to align with our mandate and objective to foster sensitization of educational awareness and scientific temper through their networks and send us feedback regarding the same.

Gaining a better understanding of how the drivers of climate change can be changed or shifted would inform the development of policies, practices and actions to trigger a shift towards sustainability and good quality of life at many levels, from individuals through communities and businesses to society at large.

- “OUR SOLUTIONS ARE IN NATURE” and therefore, protecting our nature is very important as it shields us from various catastrophe including zoonotic diseases. Our actions shall give a clarion call towards conserving natural resources and preserving ecological integrity, restoration of degraded areas, capacity building of local communities, innovative approaches and building partnerships, etc. Ecosystem Services are *raison d'être* for human existence and is vital to natural development and human development as well and collaborative efforts are necessary to be taken to make human co-exist with Nature and realize the socio-economic and ecological value of ecosystem services. Preparation to COP26 with a follow up of outcomes envisaged in COP25 and the UNFCCC process can tap the potential of new best practices, such as climate-resilient approaches and science & nature-based solutions, ecosystem restoration strategies as well as their better promotion and increased implementation critical for ensuring effective climate actions and frameworks.
- It is essential to adopt a broad, trans-disciplinary perspective working as ‘Partners-in-Development’ through multi-stakeholder partnership we can contribute to strategies that maintain or restore healthy human-environment relationships through a ‘whole-of-society’ approach. There shall be a call to recognize the diverse nature of the various demands for transformative changes with respect to climate actions in which values of mainstream, inclusiveness, justice and equity are considered. Identification of priority knowledge gaps and areas where capacity building, and the development of policies and tools that facilitate the implementation of the policy options presented in the assessment and provide options and solutions for addressing them at the relevant levels. For instance,
- Resource Efficiency” has raised opportunities towards ‘beyond 3R strategy’ on circular principles to tackle contemporary challenges posed by plastics, solid and liquid wastes, marine litter etc. The management shall embark the need to embrace circular principles and priority area of actions shall be highlighted to reduce wastes both on ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ side and encourage us to minimize the increasing ‘Upward Source’ trash that is produced but also optimize our consumption limits. Optimize practices like waste-to-wealth/energy, strengthen technologies, scientific and capacity building practices related to waste management. Moreover, communities shall practice eco-friendly options in their everyday lives which have a potential to lead to transformational behavioral change towards discarding plastics or waste litter in any form.
- Incorporating climate change agenda forward necessitates synergistic efforts of both top-down and bottom-up approach via advocacy, knowledge deepening, policy analysis, engaging key partnerships & stakeholders for collaboration to bring impactful outcomes, integration of environment and social sustainability and strengthening participatory governance. It is strongly asserted that agencies from global to local level, development partners, civil society organizations must join hands under a common platform to help

realize strategies through 'cooperation-collaboration-convergence' and we can together build back better.

Combining climate change adaptation and mitigation amidst COVID-19, through partnerships is a win-win proposal which shall go a long way to improve the provision of quality lives and livelihoods opportunities and combat the menace of climate change happening due to the pandemic. We have faced the situation with self-reliance and perseverance and are demonstrating an ability to rise to the challenges. Uncovering opportunities through collaborative support and convergence will also help ensure that the responses taken at country level or local level are comprehensive as well as equitable and inclusive, so that no one is left out and we can continue to make progress in realizing our recovery and the goals