

INDIAN NETWORK ON ETHICS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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April 27, 2020

To,
Shri Jairam Ramesh
Chairperson,
Standing committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forest and Climate Change,
Paryavaran Bhavan, Jor Bagh,
New Delhi, India.

Subject: Inputs from INECC on the report “Environment, Climate Change and Public health”

Dear Sir,

We are happy to recognize the efforts taken by the Ministry to come up with a report looking at the vital linkages between Environment, Climate Change and Public health. While such a perspective document has been long overdue, we appreciate the fact that the COVID-19 catastrophe has set this process in motion. We welcome the fact that public inputs are being sought under your esteemed chairmanship on this very important report.

The Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC) is a 28-year-old network engaged in understanding Climate Change and its impacts globally and locally. We are involved in articulating choices of action for various ecosystem communities to mitigate, adapt to the already deleterious impacts on life, livelihoods, private and common resources, health and well-being in order to build resilience for the future. We work with 20 partner organizations who are directly part of the network outreach across 15 states, covering 50 districts and 74 panchayats. The perspective of our work draws upon the principles of “Decentralization, Localization and Collaboration”. In this context, we promote the idea of sustainable communities and showcase solutions across ecosystems that promote low-carbon development pathways.

We take this opportunity to posit suggestions for the above-mentioned report. The suggestions emerge from experiential work with several marginalized communities that we have been engaged with over the past two decades.

INECC Partner Organizations Across India



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1. COMMITMENT TO CARBON NEUTRALITY ACROSS SECTORS SAFEGUARDING QUALITY OF HEALTH, PARTICULARLY IN THE URBAN CONTEXT

Achieving net zero carbon emissions (carbon neutrality) should drive development across sectors. India should look at a target year of 2050 or earlier to achieve neutrality. For this to happen vigorous low carbon actions are needed urgently especially in the most carbon intensive sectors like energy generation, transport, housing and infrastructure. This should begin by undertaking a carbon accounting process by all. While some of the actions are being pursued in a limited way, for example net metering, a far more aggressive approach needs to be adopted. More specifically we recommend:

- Each state should have a roadmap for meeting its energy needs and achieving neutrality which could be a combination of energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Streamline net metering system in a robust and transparent manner in urban areas
- Integrate carbon and emission perspective in *housing, infrastructure, and Smart City* projects

2. SCALING UP DECENTRALIZED ENERGY SYSTEMS TO ENSURE A LOW-CARBON PATH AND POSITIVE HEALTH, ESPECIALLY IN THE RURAL AREAS

We seem to have begun the transition from our linear carbon-intensive energy with increasing focus on renewables that is slowly decarbonizing the grid. Further the increasing flexibility provided by microgrids, limited so far, could immensely contribute to an alternate local green scenario together with expanding RE sources to include the diverse biomass-based energy systems that is so relevant in India's context, universalising e-mobility across all modes of transport among others. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- Service micro-grids, which have taken off successfully in some parts of our country, need to be upscaled in a big way. Synchronized to grid through a Net Metering system can further enhance rural livelihoods by generating additional revenues. This approach will promote green entrepreneurship, job creation, while also contributing to better health, lesser pollution and overall wellbeing
- Ensure last-mile delivery of healthcare services through RE based systems to Primary Health Centres (PHCs). Solar rooftop systems can meet the needs of lighting, refrigeration, water pumping, and in many cases, permit the use of advanced medical equipment in health facilities. Solar-powered refrigerators can be popularised for storing vaccines required for pandemics like COVID-19.
- Utilise the mechanism of carbon offsets to support pro poor carbon offset projects which help in meeting energy, health, education, gender and other development goals in line with India development objectives.
- Research and Development efforts should be aggressively pursued towards exploring and testing RE sources other than solar and wind such as bio mass based technologies
- Innovative business models that offer quality renewable energy services for provision of end-use services such as for lighting, heating and cooking especially in rural areas should be promoted.

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- We recommend a decentralized renewable energy based clean cooking programme (based on biogas, clean biomass, and solar cooking) to supplement the expansion of LPG connectivity
- Enhanced investment in low-carbon R&D for motorbikes and other modes of public transport for peri-urban, rural and tribal India for safe and clean transportation, which remains quite a challenge even to this day

3. LOW-CARBON AND CLIMATE FRIENDLY SUSTAINABLE FARMING APPROACHES TO HEALTHY LIVING

Several approaches are being taken up to promote chemical free adaptive farming strategies from the perspective of achieving food security while also safeguarding the environment. A plethora of alternative farming approaches are being experimented by farmer groups which include Low-Carbon Farming (LCF), Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF Palekar method), organic farming, natural farming/ sustainable farming, etc. which are also understood to be climate resilient. However, there exists a lot of controversial information on these approaches. Further, a gendered lens for approaching low-carbon sustainable farming and improved health wellbeing among women and children need special focus. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- A study which documents varied alternate farming approaches incorporating both success and failure stories, best practices that enables a clear understanding, dispels controversies, and points to a clear way forward
- Promote nutri-based sustainable farming measures, such as the revival of millets cultivation
- Gender responsive, low-carbon and energy efficient, time saving farming technologies especially for women should be given focus
- Promote climate resilient sustainable farming practices specially to ensure nutrition adequacy among vulnerable groups such as women and children who are lowest in the health index and highest on Climate Change impacts
- Promote models which are a ‘mix of settled cultivation and shifting cultivation’ developed by the Forest Research Institutions to restore the hill-forest ecosystem. One way of doing this could be via the ‘Shifting Cultivator’s Rehabilitation Scheme’, by engaging NGOs, CBOs along with the institutions like IIFM, FRI and the Forest Department

4. DEVELOP ECOSYSTEM BASED STRATEGIES FOR SAFEGUARDING BIODIVERSITY AND REVIVING ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

The standing committee should highlight the value in reviving and maintaining ecosystem integrity with respect to land, water, forest, and air. The increase in the outbreak of epidemic diseases like COVID-19 seem to have been triggered through processes of ecosystem destruction, land degradation and ensuing biodiversity loss. In this context, we recommend that:

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- The decline in the extent of dense forests should be reversed and degraded forests be restored by promoting natural regeneration, with locally suitable, culturally relevant, ecologically viable and technologically robust afforestation and reforestation measures
- A roadmap by MOEFCC with targets to restore ecosystem integrity with actions and accountability on water, land, air and forests should be developed
- Creation of a structured micro ecosystem restoration and management strategy (kind of a blueprint) at every panchayat level that draws on people's knowledge and local wisdom. This could potentially feed into the State Action Plan on Climate Change

5. PROMOTING CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Develop modules of learning content for varied target communities in formal and non-formal settings on the science of Climate Change and its impacts on public health, politics of health care systems which militate against wellbeing, the ethics underlying choices of medicinal systems and action perspectives to safeguard public health in the face of changing environmental and climate realities.

What we are experiencing today is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic telling us that we need an entirely new model of development and a new way of sharing this planet. Telling us that we need to evolve. Choices and decisions made at this unprecedented time in history of any pandemic, which is also the period in which we are entering into called 'Decade Zero' of the climate crisis where we either change now or we lose our chance, should not only take the community beyond immediate short-term coping measures but one that serves in building long-term resilience and sustainable development.

We hope that the report of the standing committee will take cognizance of this fact and usher us into a future that is healthy, safe and inclusive.

We look forward to the final report and a plan for its operationalization.

With hope and in solidarity,

Dr. Ajita Tiwari Padhi

(For INECC)

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