Executive Summary
First Virtual Pre-Event

World Sustainable Development Summit 2021
4 June 2020

Redefining Our Common Future:
Safe and Secure Environment for All

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Acknowledgment

The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is a platform that has transformed into an intervening space for ideas, thoughts, musings, innovations, suggestions, and deliberations that cross-intersects each other to produce an outline that could define our future.

The Summit in its journey of twenty years has continued to engage, deliberate, and ideate with a simple governing idea: action now is a must; for which relevant, realistic, and resounding deliberations need to take place and be implemented in a stringent manner.

With the unprecedented times that the world has found itself living in, a multifarious and dynamic platform like ours has swiftly adapted itself to the need of the hour. To ensure that focus from climate negotiations is not lost while priority is laid on health; the WSDS presents itself as an opportunity for multiple stakeholders to remain connected with everything that is sustainable and the steps that need to be taken to meet our Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The first pre-event of the WSDS 2021 was launched on the eve of the World Environment Day 2020. We had the honour of the Hon’ble Minister for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Mr Prakash Javadekar’s presence who joined us through a video message where he laid emphasis on India’s biodiversity and a culture that resonates closely with nature.

The event brought together leading speakers and country heads from the European Union, Norway, and the United Kingdom. I thank the Ambassadors and High Commissioner from each of the countries for accepting our invitation to address the first pre-event of WSDS 2021. Your observations and interventions were individually appreciated and well received by the event audience. I would also like to thank Lord Nicholas Stern for joining us on the occasion and for his address that focused on the need for a greener road of recovery. My heartfelt gratitude to Mr Woochong Um for engaging with us as we mark yet another collaborative year with the Asian Development Bank. I also wish to thank our young speaker, Ms Shambhavi Singh in whose presence we launched the ‘Youth Unite for a Safe and Secure Environment for All’ Initiative that emphasises on the need for more engagement with our future leaders in decision-making processes.

I also thank the media for their presence during the event and for their extensive and wide coverage of the event discussions.

I thank all our participants who joined us on our webinar platform as well on the live YouTube streaming. Your questions, comments, and observations made the session lively and interactive.

I thank my colleagues from the IT Division who worked tirelessly to make the webinar platform a seamless experience for our esteemed speakers and participants. I also thank my colleagues in the WSDS Secretariat for all their efforts in putting together the virtual dialogue.

With this pre-event, we launched a series of virtual dialogues that will take place throughout the year. The themes of the virtual dialogues will cover clean transport, energy, nature & biodiversity, adaptation & resilience, and finance. These themes have been closely chosen to resonate with the COP26 focus areas. Additionally, the virtual dialogues will also cover the themes of resource efficiency, waste management, oceans, low-carbon economy, health risks, and water.

I look forward to the participation of all those who joined us for the event and hope to engage with each one of you during the future virtual dialogues and discussions of the WSDS 2021.

I thank you all.

Dr Annapurna Vancheswaran
Senior Director
Communication and Outreach Division
TERI
Background Note

Given the current global health crisis and its close inter linkage with climate impact, TERI’s annual flagship event, the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2021 will be held under the umbrella theme of ‘Redefining Our Common Future: Safe and Secure Environment for All’. Discussions at the platform will focus on the current crisis and the roadmap that nations need to adopt enroute a greener recovery. WSDS 2021 will additionally focus on a fresh ambit of subject areas, new interventions in policy development, and close engagement with multiple stakeholders, especially the youth. The Summit aims to extend its reach through closer engagement with its national and international networks to bring home the principle of, ‘action now is a must’. The Summit platform is hopeful for a healthy recovery from the current pandemic and preparations are underway for it to be held as an on-ground event scheduled from 10-12 February, 2021 at, New Delhi, India.

The WSDS platform has over the years held a series of international and regional pre-events on issues of global importance in the run-up to the Summit. The discussions held during these pre-events are then carried forward to the main Summit stage where they are further deliberated by subject experts. These pre-events have become building blocks of the Summit’s deliberations and play a crucial role in engaging with multiple stakeholders and regional practitioners throughout the year. With a special focus on the current pandemic and the global efforts being made to recover from it, the discussions of the WSDS 2021 pre-events held as either virtual dialogues or as on-ground events will be brought forward to the main WSDS 2021 stage in February where they will be further matured across the three days of the Summit.

It is with this background that the WSDS Secretariat and TERI launched the discussions in the run-up to the WSDS 2021 on an e-platform. The first such pre-event to the Summit was held on June 4 to commemorate the World Environment Day and brought together leading national and international experts from the Government, corporate, civil society and the youth sectors to focus on the modus operandi required in addressing the current health crisis while tackling global climate change.

Theme: ‘Redefining Our Common Future: Safe and Secure Environment for All’

What struck a single nation in December, 2019 has over the course of mere months, enveloped and ravaged the entire globe. The novel coronavirus has left the world exhausted and put an enormous strain on national resources. While countries shut down air spaces, and restrict internal movement; a deepening sense of fear and panic has waded through the global community. The COVID-19 crisis has thrown the world off its charted course of actions and efforts, and with no substantial end in sight. With struggling economies, strained resources, and most importantly, rising health risks; nations across the globe are redrawing their national and international policies and rules of governance.

However, what needs to be realised that though the current crisis may have weakened our economies and revealed shortcomings in our health infrastructures, but it also imperative that we treat the crisis as a wake-up call. It is crucial that global efforts are made to re-think, re-plan, and re-emerge with recovery plans that would not only strengthen our economies, but also our health infrastructures, our travel priorities, our business models, and most importantly, our climate negotiations. Now is the time when subject experts, scientists, economists, practitioners, civil society, the academia, and especially the youth need to come together to deliberate on actionable agendas that will constructively address climate change.

The pandemic has presented itself as an opportunity for governments and businesses to plan for ‘green recoveries’ as COVID-19 marks a turning point in the progress on climate change. The road to economic recovery can no longer ignore climate priorities.
First virtual sustainable action dialogue of WSDS 2021: A summary

As the world grapples with the current health crisis, the first pre-event of the WSDS 2021 shed light on how a greener recovery could be achieved while we tackled the current crisis.

Opening Remarks

Dr Ajay Mathur, Director General, TERI in his opening remarks welcomed the esteemed speakers and participants and laid the premise for the multifarious discussions that would take place as part of the WSDS platform in the run up to the on-site Summit in February, 2021. Dr Mathur focused his remarks on the demands of a global crisis that though may have distanced us physically, has brought the world closer together virtually. Outlining the crucial role that technological platforms are going to play in keeping the momentum on-going with respect to global climate efforts, Dr Mathur encouraged the participants to fruitfully leverage such platforms that opened the space for dialogue and deliberation virtually.

Dr Mathur thanked the Hon’ble Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Mr Prakash Javadekar who joined the event proceedings through a video message. Dr Mathur extended his gratitude to the esteemed speakers including the Ambassador of the European Union, HE Mr Ugo Astuto; Ambassador of Norway, HE Mr Hans Jacob Frydenlund; and Acting British High Commission of the United Kingdom HE Ms Jan Thompson. Prof Nicholas Stern, IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government, Co-Director of the India Observatory & Chair - Grantham Research Institute, LSE was welcomed warmly as the keynote speaker of the event. Emphasising on the long standing partnership between the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and TERI, Dr Mathur welcomed Mr Woochong Um, Director General, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, ADB who joined the event proceedings. Dr Mathur remarked on the overwhelming registrations of nearly two thousand participants that the event witnessed of which 50% were women. He concluded his remarks by opening the floor for interventions by the speakers.

“As we step into the circles of new normal, it is absolutely important that climate change and biodiversity stay at the top of our sustainable development agenda. The COVID-19 crisis has forced governments and businesses to plan for ‘green recoveries’. The road to economic recovery can no longer ignore climate priorities.”

- Dr Ajay Mathur,
  Director General, TERI

Brief Opening Remarks by the Esteemed Speakers

Address by: Prof Nicholas Stern, IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government, Co-Director of the India Observatory & Chair - Grantham Research Institute, LSE

Prof Stern at the outset congratulated TERI and the WSDS for playing a pivotal role in drawing all the speakers and participants together for an important discussion on the eve of the World Environment Day. Prof Stern categorised his address into three broad components – present global climatic issues while we tackled the pandemic; the efforts and action points that need to adopted globally to address the former; and lastly, internationalism and the need of the hour for a global reckoning.

Prof Stern emphasised that due to the sudden arrival of the global pandemic, the world was experiencing a global depression unlike any witnessed before. Given such
circumstances, the world can no longer rely on a bounce back as that would merely extend the depression which could have potentially disastrous consequences for social and national fabrics of all countries. The magnitude of the current economic crisis and especially on the impact it would have on developing countries across sectors including health and social security.

The need for a revival that does not go back to the old ways but instead relies on a different approach to structuring our national priorities is the need of the hour. Future pandemics of this nature would see close linkage with climate change and biodiversity, implying that to fix current collapsing economies, a sustainable approach would be imperative in order to prevent a resurgence of this nature in the future.

Recognising India's potential as the next global leader, Prof Stern emphasised on how India could lead the world in a sustainable recovery wherein strong policies are adopted that would enable investment opportunities into actual programmes of sustainable change. There is a need for financial institutions to play their important role in reviving economies through sustainable long-term measures. As India approaches its presidency year of the G20, its role would be vital in shaping the twenty first century as it adopts greener economic recovery plans that would be of enormous international importance.

"After the COVID crisis we will need to do things differently. We have to be together with a vision to reduce poverty and achieve SDGs. Recovery will have to be built around the idea of sustainability and give importance to measures that are fast, labour intensive, and are economic multipliers."

- **Prof Nicholas Stern**, IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government, Co-Director of the India Observatory & Chair - Grantham Research Institute, LSE

**Address by: HE Mr Ugo Astuto, Ambassador of the European Union to India**

HE Mr Ugo Astuto in his address was emphatic on the role that the EU-India partnership could play in paving the way ahead for a revival of our economic towards a greener and sustainable future. Recognising the pivotal role that the youth of the world could play in helping nations achieving their nationally determined contributions (NDCs), the Hon'ble Ambassador congratulated TERI and the WSDS for the launch of the ‘Youth Unite for a Safe and Secure Environment’ Initiative, launched as an effort to engage much more closely with our future leaders. Emphasising on the need to reshape our economies to build better ones that would lead the world towards a climate neutral future, Ambassador drew the attention of all to this. Citing the EU recovery package and the Green Deal as a new growth story, the Ambassador reiterated the EU’s plans to boost efficient use of resources by easing into a circular economy approach. The strategy would include massive renovation of infrastructure, rolling out of renewable energy projects including for wind, soil, cleaner transport and logistics towards strengthening a just transition fund to support and help businesses create new economic opportunities so that none were left behind. However, in order for a strategy like this to see the light of success, the European Union cannot act alone and draws upon the strength of its long standing partners for it. The Ambassador alluded to the many projects such as the new resource efficiency initiatives, the new India clean energy and climate partnership for building energy efficiency in India, as well as the Clean Ganga Initiative where the EU has developed India’s first every comprehensive river base in management plan, that have together strengthened ties between India and EU. The Ambassador concluded his address by mentioning the postponement of the COP 26 as an opportunity for nations to produce ambitious outcomes. Redrawing on the strength of youth initiatives, the Ambassador recognised their potential in leading world communities as a global endeavour towards a sustainable future of change.
“The COVID crisis makes it even more important to take action and to invest in a better and healthier world for our youth. We need to give them hope. The world requires a collective cohesive response for a greener, resilient, and just future. The cost of action is much smaller than the cost of inaction.”

- HE Mr Ugo Astuto,
  Ambassador of the European Union to India

Address by: HE Mr Hans Jacob Frydenlund, Ambassador of Norway to India

TERI and the WSDS take great pride in the long standing relationship that we have built with Norway over the years. HE Ambassador Frydenlund was kind enough to not acknowledge this association during his address but he also praised the choice of theme of the next edition of the Summit and pre-event as it rightly threw light on the COVID pandemic which would compel nations to re-assess how to move forward. As the world emerges from a massive and extended lock down, the reopening of the world economies would be a test of the world’s ability and commitment to further sustainability as we recover. The need for this reopening to be green, clean, circular, and inclusive is imperative. The achievements of the Rio Conference of 1992 that drew a balance between scientific, technological, and institutional capacities to further sustainability cannot be offset or endangered by this temporary global setback. Between India and Norway, areas of sustainability, such as biodiversity, waste management, marine litter, ocean management, and blue economy are crucial for further project developments and action points. Concluding his remarks by alluding to the massive work undertaken by the Hon’ble Prime Minister of Norway, Ms Erna Solberg in leading a massive blue economy agenda, the Ambassador drew another common ground of engagement between Norway and India- oceans where international cooperation would be of essence.

“The world is currently facing a giant lockdown which has impacted the global economy severely. The reopening of the world is an important test for our ability and our commitment to sustainability.”

- HE Mr Hans Jacob Frydenlund, Ambassador of Norway to India

Address by: HE Ms Jan Thompson, Acting British High Commissioner to India

HE Ms Jan Thompson was vocal in her address about joint efforts that would pave the way for a green recovery for a sustainable future. A sustainable and inclusive growth can be achieved through the creation of jobs designed for the future while integrating efforts made towards public health, climate change, and biodiversity. A stronger emphasis needs to be laid on partnerships and the COP26 is one such platform whose success depends on the many collaborations and partnerships that can be built across nations, sectors, and communities. COP26, being hosted in the UK would aim to keep the momentum for climate efforts on going as the world unites for a clean and resilient recovery. Priority of the COP26 discussions would be focused on- clean energy transitions, adaptation and resilience, clean transport, and health risks. Ms Thompson’s strong recognition of India’s role as a key partner to a successful and ambitious COP that would include an emphasis on the aforementioned key priority areas was well received. Ms Thompson concluded her remarks by drawing attention to the role of technology in rebuilding our economies as
well as its growing potential in accelerating the transition to a green future, marked by smart electricity usage, grid integration, and next zero emissions. Technology can help us in pioneering a greener growth.

“The UK is committed to working with the Government of India and partners like TERI as a force for good against climate change as we rebuild our economies and our relationship with nature.”

- HE Ms Jan Thompson, Acting British High Commissioner to India

Address by: Mr Woochong Um, Director General, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank

“To overcome the three global challenges of climate change, biodiversity decline, and COVID-19, we must design recovery packages which are inclusive and leave no one behind to build back better.”

- Mr Woochong Um, Director General, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank

Congratulating Dr Ajay Mathur and TERI for giving the Asian Development Bank the space and chance to participate in the webinar, Mr Woochong Um outlined three global challenges that the world is simultaneously facing. These include climate change; widespread diversity decline; and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these challenges are affecting several lives especially those of vulnerable women, youth, and local communities. The ADB thus is working towards acting as a ‘development partner’ to member countries to assist them in flattening their curves through the Bank’s grant assistance initiatives. The Bank has provided 20 billion dollar support package focusing on the purchase support in order to provide governments the means to be able to provide social protection as well as innovate ideas for a bounce-back strategies for a post-COVID scenario with a special focus on rebuilding national health systems. While efforts are made towards emergency assistance, environment, biodiversity, and climate change consideration cannot be delayed which requires the channelizing finances towards strengthening our infrastructures that would prevent future pandemics of such nature. The strategy that needs to adopted should focus on building a better future that focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals whilst incorporating financial assistance strategies for sectors such transport, energy, education, and health as we build a new normal for our shared world. Mr Um shed light on the long term strategy adopted by the ADB to extend their ambitious targets for climate change. As a preliminary measure, by the year 2030; 75% of the Bank’s committed operations would support climate change mitigation and adaption along with a commitment to deliver at least 80 billion dollars of climate finances from its own resources. The ADB’s action plan for healthy oceans and sustainable economies which was launched about a year ago, in the Bank’s annual meeting in Fiji; commitments were made to expand investments and technical assistance in the ocean health and the blue economy up to 5 billion dollars from now until 2024. ADB is also supporting investments in sustainable infrastructure biodiversity protection and restoration, air and water quality improvement, green business and jobs, integrated solid waste management and circular economy. Mr Um emphasised on how the Bank was committed to ensuring that on one is behind also as part of ADB’s 2030 strategy.
Launch of the ‘Youth Unite for Safe and Secure Environment for All’ Initiative

Youth are harbingers of change who will bring in an era of new governance models and a culture of start-ups to address environment and sustainability issues. TERI has initiated a special youth feature that will operationalise through it various outreach channels. Recommendations that will emerge from a set of youth driven webinars and competitions, will feed into the proceedings of WSDS 2021, and be a major takeaway for heads of state and other top leadership who will be in attendance.

We were honoured to have the presence of the Country Heads as well Lord Prof. Stern and Mr Woochong Um during the launch of the youth initiative. We were joined by a young speaker, Ms Shambhavi Sharma who is pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Humanities and Social Science from Cluster Innovation Centre, Delhi University. Ms Sharma began her address by invoking the profound words of the Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, that the ‘Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not every man’s greed’. She recognized the current crisis a physical manifestation of the Mahatma’s words where a warning bell from nature is beckoning the world to reset the course of our current development path. The youth of the country wish to have their voices heard and for this concrete and avenues for them to be heard need to be created. Their actions now, be it small or big, will change the world. Simple steps like nurturing community gardens, using bicycles, making organic compost through biodegradable waste, keeping bird baths, feeding stray animals, and most importantly inspiring families to spend more on renewable investments, are just few steps that if adopted by each one of us, they could give long term benefits. Ms Sharma concluded her remarks by drawing attention of the esteemed speakers to the youth of the country and the world and to recognize them as potential change-makers for a world that they would soon inherit.

“Let us youth, help this nation”

- Ms Shambhavi Sharma, Student, Delhi University

“Youth is the backbone of nation building activities. I congratulate TERI & WSDS for launching a youth initiative, ‘Youth Unite for a Safe and Secure Environment for All’. The initiative will engage with young minds who will soon inherit the Earth from us.”

- Mr Prakash Javadekar, Hon’ble Minister for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change on the occasion of the launch
The first pre-event of the WSDS 2021 had the unique honour of a Union Minister’s presence. We were joined through a video message by Mr Prakash Javadekar, the Hon’ble Environment Minister who observed India’s ambitious targets through the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) about reducing emissions intensities as well as to have 2.5-3 billion metric tonnes of carbon sequestration. Despite the physical constraints that India faces such as availability of only 2.5% land mass, 4% of water resources, and 16% of the human world population to cater to, India possesses 8% of the world’s biodiversity. The Minister mentioned how perhaps India is one of the few nations of the world that worship our trees, and other wild life. With the ethos to one with nature, India’s biodiversity can be expected to expand and thrive in the coming years. A future roadmap for the country as suggested by the Hon’ble Minister would be to action sustainable health lifestyles, envision a climate friendly growth, focus more on climate change adaptation, increase investment in climate finance, and improve technology and capacity building. The Minister concluded his remarks by acknowledging the strong partnership between the Ministry and TERI and looked forward to extending this partnership through future endeavours.
WSDS Observations Repository

With a plethora of questions, comments, and opinions that earmarked the virtual dialogue, a repository of them has been created and a sincere effort will be made to address these observations over the course of the WSDS Virtual Sustainable Action Dialogues series that will take place from now up till the on-site WSDS 2021 and beyond.

1. Can world leaders come forward and create International Law of Environmental Protection?
2. Annual global savings are approx. $20 trillion; OECD pension funds have assets under management of around $28 trillion. While there is momentum building behind green finance, what policies would accelerate the shift in investment towards green investment?
3. How do we close the gap in India between the Government’s climate ambition and actual progress on the ground?
4. Looking at the EU-India strategic partnership, can we expect better funding opportunities in research and innovation between India and EU under Horizon Europe and the current H2020? Especially in societal challenges cluster.
5. In the rush to achieve financial recovery there is great risk that governments around the world will forget about the environment. How can we convince the politicians to look for sustainable and sustained recovery and not for quick fixes?
6. Will the next industrial revolution focus on the renewable resources usage and producing zero waste?
7. COVID crisis showed that sanctuary considerations became a priority versus economy and that too worldwide. The consequences on national budgets are huge and will last for years and more to come.
8. Given the tendency of the current USA administration to undermine the environment policies and efforts in sustainability because of economic concerns or uselessness, is it not true that not taking the sustainability measures will have a greater economic impact in the long-term? If so, can we not demonstrate the economic side of this argument, and also find a balance between their agreement to the most serious concerns and the need to do as much as can be done?

The Youth’s Voices

1. Given the current rate of growth and unemployment in India, would the talk of recovery appear too optimistic?
2. We need to reduce the dependency of local communities on forests and wildlife by providing alternative sources, for instance, energy security, and enhanced livelihoods.
3. How can start ups and young entrepreneurs contribute towards making a greener society?
4. How can industries, for example chemical manufacturing companies, balance sustainable development, efficiency and productivity?
5. Can we not use indigenous ways of sustainable communities to achieve our goal of safe and sustainable globe?
6. How important is Carbon capture and storage for sustainable development? Is it feasible economically?
7. Post lockdowns, people are less likely to use public transport. Transition to electric vehicles would be time-consuming. What can be done to maintain the air clean?
8. Can the Government of India introduce sustainable living lessons in school curriculum on order to teach students importance of eco-friendly living?
9. We can conserve earth by controlling the population of world because as an increasing population has a direct impact on the consumption of resources.
Glimpses from the Pre-event

Address by Chief Guest, Mr Prakash Javadekar, Hon’ble Minister for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Government of India

Dr Ajay Mathur chairs the session
Esteemed speakers during the pre-event

Youth representative, Ms Shambhavi Sharma addresses the panel
Media Coverage of the pre-event

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Virtual Sustainable Action Dialogues: August, 2020 to February, 2021

With the 4th June launch, a multitude of virtual discussions will be taking place from now up till the WSDS in February, 2021. In order to engage closely with our multiple stakeholders and participants, the themes of the virtual dialogues will be expansive and covering a broad spectrum of current global issues.
For more information, please contact:
WSDS Secretariat, The Energy & Resources Institute (TERI)
Tel. +91 11 24682100 | Email: wsd@teri.res.in | http://wsds.teriin.org

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