



WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2023

MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

February 22-24, 2023
New Delhi



OPENING SESSION

Leadership for People and Nature-Centred Approaches

Venue: Stein Auditorium

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Suggested Citation

World Sustainable Development Summit (2023), Leadership for People and Nature-Centred Approaches, Opening Session (Rapporteur: Madhuparna Maiti), New Delhi: The Energy and Resources Institute.

Making Words Count @WSDS 2023

“ When we started WSDS, 22 years ago, a lot of our focus was on informing people about Sustainable Development, Climate Change, and Land Degradation. Today, our focus is on actions we need to take in order to address sustainable development issues. And that is why the nature of our summit has progressed from an information summit to an action-oriented summit. Last year, we launched *Act4Earth*; it sought to bring together the leadership of the government, corporations, research institutions, and others to achieve sustainable development goals.

Mr Nitin Desai
Chairman, TERI

“ To deliberate on issues of climate change and sustainability, TERI through WSDS has brought together prominent leaders from the government, international organizations with academia and civil society to mainstream climate resilience for climate change. We have a long way to go especially in terms of horizontal and vertical integration of sustainable development across spheres. This edition of the summit becomes more important as India is holding G20 Presidency.

Dr Vibha Dhawan
Director General, TERI

“ If forests were a country, it'd be the third largest country after the USA and China. Still, until now, forests are not included in UNFCCC in a manner that will advantage us in preserving forests. In the last two years, we have expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy to focus more on forests into biodiversity, integrated water management, blue economy, etc. Sustainability means adaptation and we are developing a nature-based solution that has a global impact.

H.E. Dr Bharrat Jagdeo
Vice President, Republic of Guyana

“ We are amidst droughts, floods, heatwaves, and rising sea levels: everything that was projected. This world is not looking for each other. We are in an exhilarating crisis. The most positive news we have is that we have G20 Presidency in India's hands. This is a fundamental change in global politics which is underway. We are at the beginning of the multi-lateral world.

Prof. Jeffrey D Sachs
Professor, Earth Institute and Columbia University

“ Sustainable development is an integrated agenda. We cannot tackle climate change without recognizing poverty and development. And we cannot tackle poverty without tackling climate change, and there was a recognition that finance was central to both agendas. A 50% of staying below 1.5°C means we can emit only 9 years of emissions we emitted in 2022. As per Climate COP on finance report, the developing world needs 2.3 billion dollars to meet climate goals.

Mr Manish Bapna
President and Chief Executive Officer, Natural Resources Defense Council

“ By playing a constructivist role, the Summit and the Act4Earth Initiatives seek to reinforce commitment at all levels to enhance ambition and action to create a more sustainable and equitable world for present and future generations.

Dr Shailly Kedia
Senior Fellow and Associate Director, TERI

Actionable Messages

Message 1: With India holding the G20 Presidency this year, there has been a fundamental shift in global politics that may herald the emergence of a truly multilateral world. India must therefore seize this opportunity to elevate the voice of the Global South on issues relating to sustainable development and climate change.

Message 2: Sustainability should be viewed from the perspective of adaptation, which necessitates the creation of nature-based solutions. This will ensure a global impact on sustainability metrics while also preserving ecosystem biodiversity and harmony with nature.

Message 3: If vulnerable countries have to build viable sustainable development policies, the world must work together and give support for adaptation and mitigation strategies in these nations.

Message 4: Sustainable development goals is an integrated agenda because climate change cannot be tackled without addressing poverty and development, and conversely, one cannot discuss poverty without addressing climate change.

Narrative

Sustainable and effective climate action demands the joining together of a varied group of stakeholders to act for the planet, from global leaders to youth and corporations. This is especially crucial for the Global South that remains to be the most impacted by climate change. The developing world must continuously manage the fine lines of climate politics in its quest to adapt to and mitigate the intensifying extreme climate change events while simultaneously maintaining social and economic progress. Hence, strong and visionary leadership is essential in the Global South to mainstream sustainable development and climate resilience at the national and sub-national levels, as well as to present a united front demanding bold action in the developed world.

Biodiversity and nature have traditionally been considered minor concerns in the mainly anthropocentric debate surrounding climate change. It is necessary to acknowledge that environment and climate change cannot be viewed in isolation. Integrating strategies that mix nature with climate action is urgently needed because climate change threatens complex ecosystems. In light of this, the Opening Session of the World Sustainable Development Summit 2023 featured H.E. Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, Vice President, Republic of Guyana, Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs, Professor, Earth Institute and Columbia University, and Mr. Manish Bapna, President and Chief Executive Officer, Natural Resources Defense Council, who deliberated on how leadership for people in the developing and developed worlds needs to chart pathways for collaboration and the development of nature-centric approaches.

The session's objective was to examine current global progress made towards deliberating on a holistic and integrated approach to environmental management with regard to the significance of nature-centered approaches combined with leadership for people, with a focus on mainstreaming leadership and collaboration across disciplines and exercising creative thinking to address serious environmental concerns.

The session began with a keynote speech from **Mr. Nitin Desai, Chairperson, TERI**. He discussed the substantial transformation of the WSDS as well as the state of awareness regarding environmental consciousness among the populace. Mr. Desai praised the previous summits, which have a legacy of 22 years, and said that there had been little understanding of concerns like land degradation and biodiversity, and most of the attention had been on educating people about sustainable development, climate change, and related challenges. But, after 22 years and throughout, people's perceptions have altered. He described that today, much of the focus is on actions that need to be taken to address the issues of sustainable development, which also very much describes the nature of WSDS 2023, which transitions from an informational summit to an action-oriented one. He emphasized the significance of the summit's gathering of the heads of governments, corporations, research institutions, activists, and many other groups because they are the ones who can influence the course of action taken to address sustainable development. He also noted that the summit qualified as a world summit because it was global in scope rather than just addressing problems in one particular region of the world. Also, the summit was crucial for Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, who initiated it with the vision of offering a forum for discussion on sustainable development challenges.

Following the keynote address, **Dr. Vibha Dhawan, Director-General, TERI**, gave a flag-off address in which she expressed her gratitude for convening eminent figures from the public sector, academia, international organizations, and civil society to discuss climate action and sustainable development. Dr. Dhawan also made a brief mention of the Act4Earth Initiative, which was introduced during WSDS 2022 and aimed to consistently involve stakeholders through its components and SDG Charter based on research and discussions. On top of that, this year's summit was particularly significant because India heads the G20

presidency. Additionally, this year will see the crucial processes of the global stocktake and the climate negotiations at COP28, and both of these milestones present a golden opportunity to advance the voice of the Global South on matters related to sustainable development and climate action. The summit discussions looked at issues such as finance, ocean-based solutions, inclusive energy transitions, green development, and sustainable consumption.

Following Dr. Dhawan's address, the discussion steered towards understanding the role of forests, particularly in Guyana, where **H.E. Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, Vice President, Republic of Guyana**, stressed on the rudimentary dependence of economic systems on forests and talked about the urgent need to prioritize forest protection by giving the example that if forests were a country, it would be the third largest after the United Nations and China. Forests alone are able to remove about 10 gigatons of carbon dioxide by 2050. Forests are an integral factor in the subjects of climate solutions, ecosystems, and biodiversity. He emphasized the Global South's (forest-rich countries') concerns about protecting their forests while sustaining economic growth. Being large carbon sinks, Guyana's forests have been instrumental in helping the nation reach its net zero target goals. Dr. Jagdeo underlined the need to offer these nations incentives and substitutes so they will continue to maintain their forests. He stressed that until the world works together to give support for adaptation and mitigation, vulnerable countries cannot be expected to build viable sustainable development policies. Dr. Jagdeo was certain that Guyana will be able to meet its goal of decreasing emissions by 70% by 2030, despite the recent finding of oil there. He proposed using the money generated by the oil business to support the development of a green economy. Dr. Jagdeo also questioned the methodology being used to calculate the Environmental Performance Index, arguing that, despite having built their economies on the exploitation of natural resources, first world countries, such as the United Kingdom have been regarded as environmental leaders. Guyana, which has forests covering more than 87% of its territory, comes in at a lowly 105th place. This calls into question the efficiency of the current mechanisms for evaluating environmental performance and the requirement for a more thorough strategy.

He emphasized the progress made in incorporating forest incentives to highlight the importance of forest protection by creating incentives for countries with forests to preserve them. In 2009, Guyana developed a Low Carbon Development Strategy where forests were placed on the global agenda as part of the formal compliance trading markets that were even resisted by some international NGOs. One of the milestones achieved by Guyana, as Dr. Jagdeo mentioned, was the first sale of forest carbon at five dollars per tonne (a total of 250 million dollars) at the bilateral level. Guyana's certified forest system is set to undergo significant upheaval in the coming decades, as they were able to develop a robust monitoring reporting verification system and happen to be the only jurisdictional certified forest in the world and have one of the lowest deforestation rates in the world, but more importantly, Guyana, as Dr. Jagdeo pointed out, has managed to sell 30% of the credits for 700 million US dollars at a minimum, that if traded in securitized securities, 15% of this money will go to indigenous people, and the remaining 85% will be used mainly to deal with adaptation issues. He concluded by stressing on the significance of developing nature-based solutions that have a global impact.

The discussion was carried forward by **Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs, Earth Institute and Columbia University** after he made his opening remarks about the WSDS being held in its 22nd year in 2023. He cited an instance where he and his wife visited a small, remote village in Kenya recently and were stopped by a completely destitute, impoverished pastoralist community that had lost all of its cattle to a dry spell in the region. This translates to a more serious crisis that the Earth is facing as a result of the 0.4°C increase. Prof. Sachs explained that the crisis has exacerbated into a world that is already experiencing massive climate and environmental predicaments. He remarked that the G20 presidency being held by India, however, is by

far the most encouraging development on this occasion, as it marks the beginning of a true multilateral world, and it is crucial for India to make the most of this opportunity.

In his keynote address, **Mr. Manish Bapna, President and Chief Executive Officer, Natural Resources Defense Council**, stressed how important it is for India to confront the climate catastrophe. He said that three crucial conferences—the Addis Ababa conference on financing for sustainable development, the New York conference on the post-2015 sustainable development framework with its 17 goals and 169 indicators, and the Paris Agreement on climate change at the end of 2015—took place quickly after each other. He said that this period was marked by an exceptionally high level of enthusiasm and positive energy. The goal embodied in those agreements was innovative. The Paris Agreement brought the world together around the aspiration to create a world below two degrees Celsius, close to 1.5°C. He discussed the intertwined nature of sustainable development and added that there is a recognition that the SDGs are an integrated agenda because one cannot tackle climate change without addressing poverty and development, and conversely, one cannot discuss poverty without addressing climate change. He stressed that support for the poor world needed to be provided if we were to accomplish this objective of an integrated agenda, and equity needed to be incorporated to these agreements. He accentuated the importance of taking action now, as we are nearly halfway to the 2030 targets and will be in the middle of completing the agenda. Prof. Sachs highlighted the unpredictability of the numerous overlapping crises that have taken place, like the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflicts that were not foreseen, as he exclaimed that one quarter of the global population lives in conflict-affected countries. Talking about significant challenges in finance, Prof. Sachs cited a report that stated that the developing world needed 2.5 trillion dollars to achieve its climate and environmental goals, but only 500 billion dollars in public and private funding had been allocated for 2019. Simply put, the world is failing to fulfil the promise of 2015. He opined that the optimism that existed in 2015 no longer exists today, as he reiterated that the conference taking place in India at this moment is crucial because India has so much to give to the world. The policies, investments, and solutions are already present for the world to rekindle its optimism and enthusiasm toward sustainability and green growth.

Dr. Shailly Kedia, Senior Fellow and Associate Director, TERI, underscored that by playing a constructivist role, WSDS and the Act4Earth initiatives sought to reinforce commitment at all levels to enhance ambition and action to create a more sustainable and equitable world for present and future generations. She thanked all speakers, participants, and all partners, for creating an engaging forum for dialogue and discourse on issues pertaining to sustainable development and climate change. She expressed her gratitude for the support extended by the Nodal Ministry - Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India. She thanked the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, IKI, European Union, World Bank, Tata Capital, TERI School of Advanced Studies, International Energy Agency (IEA), Carnegie Climate Governance Initiative, Johnson Controls, Capgemini, and McKinsey. She also thanked WSDS 2023 International Steering Committee Members, Advocacy Committee Members and Outreach Partners. She thanks the WSDS team for tirelessly working towards organizing the Summit.
