

# Future Earth South Asia and Future Earth National Committee India Meeting Report

**Date:** 6 April, 2021

**Time:** 3 PM to 5:38 PM

## **Attendees:**

Future Earth National Committee-India

Dr. M. Rajeevan, Dr. Sandeep Tambe, Dr. Suresh Babu, Dr. T. R. Shankar Raman, Dr. Vimal Mishra

Invited Guests

Mr. Jagdeesh Rao Puppala, Dr. H. Paramesh

Future Earth South Asia

Dr. Smriti Basnett, Ms. Sruti Devendran, Ms. Anupama Nair

## **Meeting Highlights**

This meeting was the third and last meeting of the Future Earth National Committee-India (NC-India) convened by the Future Earth South Asia Office to help assist the NC in better engagement and planning. This was held over Zoom on 6 April, 2021. Many crucial decisions regarding the functioning and immediate action plans of the NC were made during the meeting, highlighted below.

**Thematic Working Groups:** NC India members decided to work as four thematic Working Groups - Climate, Ecology and Biodiversity, Health, and Water-Energy-Food Nexus. NC Members in each group will be expanding their respective Working Groups to include 8-9 members in total. Further planning and activities will take place within the Working Groups.

- **The Climate Group** decided to organize a webinar series in August and September, divided into four sub-themes - 1. Climate Change Science, 2. Climate Change Impacts, 3. Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change, 4. Climate Change Mitigation. The group will prepare a Stakeholder List and expand their group to 9 members. A webinar program will be decided by early May, and a document will be prepared after the webinar series by October, leading up to the COP26.
- **The Ecology and Biodiversity Group** decided to focus on Land Ecosystem Restoration as a starting point. They will enlist Stakeholders to be included in this sub-working group, and send invitations through Dr. Rajeevan's office. The sub-working group will meet on a monthly basis, to understand and convey various perspectives on current status, problems and requirements to do with land ecosystem restoration, following which further plan of action will be developed.
- **The Health Group** decided to plan their activities and events according to the upcoming 2021 Global Conference on Health and Climate Change. They plan on connecting with the Future Earth KAN on Health, and expanding their group as well. They would also like to develop a synthesis report on the current status of climate change, ecology and health in India, leading up to the COP26 with the support of the Future Earth Secretariat and DCCC.

**Hiring New Staff for NC Coordination:** It was decided that one coordinator and one policy analyst/researcher need to be hired for NC India collectively. Office space for these two staff members can be provided by Future Earth South Asia Office at Divecha Centre for Climate Change (DCCC).

**Synthesis Centre:** The idea of a Synthesis Centre can be pitched to various potential institutes and universities that can host them, by Future Earth NC India. The NC could establish a mini secretariat, which could act as a catalyst in the process, comprising young professionals who can help in coordinating.

**Engagement with Future Earth South Asia:** The roles of the Future Earth South Asia Office with regards to the NC India were also discussed. It was conveyed that the South Asia Office will only engage with the NC India while conducting webinars; including networking, outreach and hosting webinars.

**Coordination with other Future Earth Networks:** Dr. Sunder, Dr. Shankar and Dr. Sandeep volunteered to attend the monthly Future Earth All-Hands-In meetings to represent NC India, as per their availability.

**Working Strategy within Future Earth National Committee:** Hence forth, the respective groups (see Thematic Working Groups) will organise meetings amongst themselves to plan their outreach activities and consult with the Chair via email.

**Stakeholder Listing:** A few Government representatives were listed as potential stakeholders to be involved with the Future Earth NC India's activities ([Government Stakeholder List](#)). This list will be further populated by all NC members and the Chair for every Working Group. Each Working Group also will develop their own Stakeholder Lists including representatives of non-government sectors as well ([Working Group Stakeholder List](#)).

**Group Email and Social Media:** It was decided that a group email will be created for all NC members for faster communication when required. It was also suggested to develop a social media presence for Future Earth India, to publicize its activities and initiatives. Support for this can be requested from the Future Earth Global Hub in Colorado, USA. *(The management for this function and assisting the Chair and coordinating the work of NC-India will be effective once two office staff for FE NC will be hired. FE South Asia, DCCC will provide the working space for these staff members.)*

## Detailed Summary of the Meeting

I. Overview of Progress by Health and Climate Groups .....	3
II. Suggested Roadmap for Future Earth NC India .....	4
III. Discussion on Motions and Proposals .....	4
IV. Stakeholder Listing - From Government Agencies (link to Google sheet) .....	5
V. Summary of Group-wise Breakout Sessions .....	5
VI. Concluding Remarks and Discussion.....	6

**Dr. Smriti Basnett** opened the meeting and began by going through the meeting agenda. She said that NC members involved in the Health group and the Climate group had met after the previous NC meeting, which will be summarised by Dr. Sunder and Dr. Vimal respectively.

### I. Overview of Progress by Health and Climate Groups

**Health Group: Dr. Sunderrajan Krishnan** began by giving a brief overview of the webinar session that was organized in the previous Future Earth South Asia webinar, and noted that there is a lot that can be looked at in India with regards to the interconnections of health, ecology and sustainability. He suggested connecting with the global Future Earth Knowledge Action Network (KAN) that focuses on Planetary Health and the intersections between ecosystems and spread of diseases. He suggested preparing a synthesis of the current status of key issues, programs and policies with regards to these interrelationships across India, in the form of a status paper. He informed attendees that Dr. Paramesh is helping develop this document about air pollution and health, but he emphasized that more people will be needed to produce the document and he said that the group is currently looking to expand and include a few post-docs. He ended by noting that such considerations are all the more important in the post-COVID world.

**Climate Group: Dr. Vimal Mishra** began by explaining that the webinar sessions on Climate Change would be divided into four parts: 1. Climate Change Science, 2. Climate Change Impacts, 3. Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change, 4. Climate Change Mitigation. This could cover a wide range of topics and appeal to a wide audience. Another point that was decided was that the webinar sessions would be conducted over four days, with two sessions each, spread across 2 months--August and September. Through these sessions, recent findings and solutions can be learned about from various speakers on all four topics, and there will also be sufficient time to plan the events and develop documents based on the outcomes of the sessions. Another point that was decided was the Climate Change webinar series could be kick-started with a session focusing on journalists and the public at large.

## II. Suggested Roadmap for Future Earth NC India

**Dr. Sandeep Tambe** presented a Roadmap and Strategy for the NC that he suggested after the previous NC meeting. He said that, as part of Future Earth, the NC could aim to achieve a little higher in terms of trying to impact or shape policy changes in the themes of climate change, water, biodiversity, pollution, etc. Based on his experience working at the interface between science, policy and practice, he suggested to first engage with policymakers, find out what their requirements are, and then to convene around their requirements and issues and prepare a document that could be useful for them. He added that the process of webinar sessions would also be more effective if policymakers are involved from the beginning, cautioning that policymakers are difficult to engage with due to their lack of time.

With regards to Synthesis Centres, which he reported are nascent in India, the objective is to convene experts from different fields and prepare synthesis documents on certain complex, multi-faceted issues. He therefore suggested trying to contact various universities and institutes in the country, and try and pitch to them this idea of establishing some Synthesis Centres in the country. He noted that there is a lot of information and guidelines available regarding establishment of such centres, and he ended by saying that if Future Earth NC India could establish a Synthesis Centre, that would be a good initiative.

**Dr. Rajeevan** appreciated the idea of the Synthesis Centre, and requested help from the Future Earth office and networks. He proposed the NITI Aayog as being an important institute that the Future Earth NC India could engage with, since all major policies are backed by their support. He offered his office's help with approaching them for any requirements.

He emphasized on air pollution as a serious issue in the northern parts of India, adding that a lot of credible work is going on in science and practice with regards to air pollution. He said that the NC could contribute significantly to this issue, through a white paper, or communicating with the public, or associating it with public health, since there is a lack of good data linking air pollution with its health impacts in the context of India. He therefore suggested developing a white paper about the actual science behind air pollution, qualitative analysis of what its impacts can be, and what can be done to mitigate it.

He endorsed Dr. Vimal's idea of the sub-themes of the Climate Change group sessions. He said that the development of a white paper with regards to Climate change action in and by India leading up to the upcoming COP meeting in 2021, would be a very good achievement by Future Earth. This document can be taken to the MoEFCC and the PMO. He said that theoretically, there is a lot Future Earth NC India can achieve, but more people are required to support this initiative.

## III. Discussion on Motions and Proposals

**1. Thematic Working Groups:** It was decided that the NC would work in four thematic groups: Climate Change, Ecology and Biodiversity, Health, and Water-Energy-Food Nexus. Each Working Group will have up to 8 people, with more members to be added to the NC too. Each NC member would need to commit a few hours on a monthly basis for the activities and functions of their respective Working Group.

**2. Hiring New Staff for NC Coordination:** It was decided that there is no need to hire coordinators and network leads for each Working Group. One coordinator and one policy analyst/researcher need to be hired for NC India collectively. Office space for these two staff members can be provided by Divecha Centre for Climate Change (DCCC).

**3. Synthesis Centre:** Dr. Sandeep Tambe explained that Synthesis Centres are very specialised centres, generally housed in top government institutes or universities. This idea can be pitched to various potential institutes and universities by Future Earth, which could act as a catalyst in the form of a mini secretariat comprising young professionals who can help in coordinating. He explained that Synthesis centres in various universities have specific areas of focus, on which they engage with experts from different fields for a few days--experts who otherwise would not have met--and then a synthesis document is prepared. It was decided that this idea can be taken forward by the NC, with the coordination team for the Synthesis Centre hosted by DCCC.

**4. Coordination with other Future Earth Networks:** Dr. Sunder, Dr. Shankar and Dr. Sandeep volunteered to attend the monthly Future Earth All-Hands-In meetings to represent NC India. In case Dr. Sunder is unable to attend a meeting, Dr. Shankar would attend, and if not Dr. Shankar, then Dr. Sandeep would attend.

**5. Webinar Planning:** The Climate Change group will organize a webinar series first, in August and September. They will also prepare a document by mid-October, which can be circulated afterwards. The Ecology and Biodiversity group will decide what kind of event to organize at a later stage, following inputs from various stakeholders whom they will meet on a monthly basis. The Health group decided to plan back from the Global Conference on Health and Climate Change (November, 2021), and organize activities and prepare documents accordingly.

#### **IV. Stakeholder Listing - From Government Agencies ([link to Google sheet](#))**

Note: Consideration of diversity of representation while enlisting stakeholders--gender, region.

#### **V. Summary of Group-wise Breakout Sessions**

##### **Climate Group Breakout Session**

**Attendees:** Dr. Vimal Mishra, Dr. Suresh Babu, Ms. Sruti Devendran

In the Climate Group Breakout session, it was discussed the need to expand the working group to 9 members. Currently there are 4 members in the group. After a fully functional working group is formed, then it was discussed that it would be possible to plan the webinar, and possibly work out the stakeholder exercise. The group will aim that by the first week of May, the program of the webinar will be ready. Following this, a participant list will be decided, and a list of invited guests for the webinar will be ready by the 2nd week.

Dr. Mishra suggested developing a working document on the impacts of climate change on public health after this webinar series is done.

### **Ecology and Biodiversity Group Breakout Session**

**Attendees:** Mr. Jagdeesh Rao Puppala, Dr. Sandeep Tambe, Dr. T. R. Shankar Raman, Ms. Anupama Nair

The Ecology and Biodiversity Group decided to establish a Working Group on Ecological Restoration, focusing on land ecosystems including forests, pastures and wastelands. This could be a good topic to explore the science-policy-practice interface: questions regarding how science can help improve policies with regards to ecological restoration, and how the related political economy functions. Specific policies that can be focused on include CAMPA, and the national employment guarantee schemes. Stakeholders that can be brought into this group include representatives from the Niti Aayog, MoEFCC, state government bodies working on CAMPA, experts from an Ecological Economics background, and other stakeholders.

It was suggested that these Working Groups can be convened to meet on a monthly basis, in order to understand how policymakers and administrators are working and what they require. This would also encourage discussions between different stakeholders, with perspectives from all backgrounds being brought to the table. Discussions from these closed-door meetings could inform the development of targeted white papers or policy documents, which can be shared at a later stage with the public as well. Any other events, including a webinar, that could be organized can also be discussed and planned on the basis of the proceedings of the monthly meetings. Further discussions on topics such as carbon credits, biodiversity credits and offsets, or any other topics of interest, can also be brought into the overall discussion at a later stage.

A [stakeholder list](#) was being populated by the group towards the end of the meeting, which all group members decided to continue filling in over the next few days. They suggested requesting Dr. Rajeevan to send out invitations to the listed stakeholders on behalf of his office.

### **Health Group Breakout Session**

**Attendees:** Dr. Sunderrajan Krishnan, Dr. H Paramesh

The Health group decided to plan their activities and events according to the upcoming 2021 Global Conference on Health and Climate Change. They plan on connecting with the Future Earth KAN on Health. They would also like to develop a synthesis report on the current status of climate change, ecology and health in India, leading up to the COP26 with the support of the Future Earth Secretariat and DCCC.

## **VI. Concluding Remarks and Discussion**

It was decided that there is no need to fix NC meetings regularly, and that the NC will meet as and when required. Each Working Group can continue to meet informally when required on a more regular basis. The formation of a Future Earth NC India Whatsapp group was discussed,

but it was decided to create a group email instead, for faster communication. It was also suggested to develop a social media presence for Future Earth India, to publicize its activities and initiatives. Support for this can be requested from the Future Earth Global Hub in Colorado, USA.

Dr. Rajeevan closed the meeting by noting that the discussions during the meeting were very fruitful and good points of action have been chalked out in each breakout session. He said that the way forward for the NC is to keep doing all the action points. He said that rather than taking on many responsibilities and not being able to achieve much, it would be better to plan a few achievable activities and work on achieving them effectively.