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INDIA

Interview with
**Prof. M. S.
Swaminathan**
Member of Parliament
Rajya Sabha

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BRIDGE TO INDIA

Importance of climate change

How to adapt to climate change

India's climate change policies





PROF. M S SWAMINATHAN

**“To fight
climate change,
we have to start
with the people.”**
Prof. M S Swaminathan

A Member of Parliament (*Rajya Sabha*), Prof. M S Swaminathan is internationally known as the father of India’s green revolution. As an influential opinion leader in India’s green movement towards sustainable development and food security, BRIDGE TO INDIA spoke with him about the opportunities and challenges of climate change.



THE INTERVIEW

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Dear Prof. Swaminathan, thank you for having us! How are you today?

Prof M S Swaminathan

Thank you for coming! (*laughing*) Today is a good day – Mr. Ramesh (*Minister for Environment and Forest*) okayed the 10-year afforestation plan, the new “Green India Mission”. Just imagine, how much CO₂-emissions can be absorbed through that!

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Indeed, that means we are one step closer towards a systemic Indian climate policy. What is your view of the climate change debate in India?

Swaminathan

From my point of view, there needs to be a discussion on four different levels: the global level, the regional level, the national level and the local level. The last is the most important from my point of view. Only with the help of the people, can we fight climate change effectively.

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Please explain this further.

Swaminathan

Climate change is perhaps our single greatest challenge today. Dealing with it requires all kinds of actions. Without binding agreements in international negotiations and explicit national

regulatory frameworks and action plans, we will be stuck. However, in a country like India, with more than 1,2 billion people, you have to start with the people. Climate-related water shortages and changes in crop cycles are already affecting India’s vast agricultural population. Under conditions of climate change, we need to get more food out of our soils and water. We could go for plants with shorter crop cycles and we need to improve our irrigation techniques. We could start by changing our measures from calories per hectare to calories per day (or per litre). Therefore, we need to help the people in affected areas adjust to the changes taking place. This is the reason I propose to install Climate Risk Managers in each Indian village.

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What can Climate Risk Managers do?

Swaminathan

For enabling farmers to deal with climate change, we need to give them access to the best information and know-how. There are 128 agro-climatic zones in India, identified by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. Each one of them needs to have a Climate Risk Management Research and Training Center, which should develop alternative cropping patterns to suit different weather probabilities as well as methods of checkmating



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Prof. M S Swaminathan

adverse effects of climate change on food production. Along with a climate literacy movement, a woman and a man from every Panchayat and Nagarpalika will have to be trained there as Climate Risk Managers. They will be updated regularly and will be able to share their knowledge with the rest of the village.

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This is a great idea – but you will need many Climate Risk Managers!

Swaminathan

Imagine – there will be over half-a-million trained Climate Risk Managers! They will be highly sensitized to the environment and have some knowledge of climate change adaptation. Such a trained cadre of grass roots Climate Risk Managers will be the largest of its kind in the world and has the power to effect change – not only in India.

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How can India’s own actions and measures be brought into the international climate change discussion? Did you go to Cancun?

Swaminathan

No – it would have been a waste of time and emissions! *(laughing)* See, the Kyoto protocol will expire soon. The US and Japan are not interested in a renewal – but what does a country like India have to lose? Climate change is an opportunity for change and not only a threat. We have to take this chance; we finally have to wake up.

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How could this be done?

Swaminathan

Generally, willingness for change comes only from the creation of win-win-situations. Only if regions, like the European Union or the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), states and individuals all recognize a change of lifestyle with lower consumption as an advantage, change will happen. In this way, climate change could become a crucial trigger towards developing sustainable lifestyles. It is important to bring down patent barriers for international climate change relevant technologies. The Climate Risk Manager program is a concrete step for individual win-win-change. Let’s see how much initiative politicians can show! *(laughing)* Now I have to get ready for the Parliament session. I hope you are coming back soon for your next visit!

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It was a pleasure. Thank you for your time!



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BRIDGE TO INDIA is a consulting company with an entrepreneurial approach based in New Delhi. Founded in 2008, the company focuses on environmental technologies in the Indian market. Furthermore, BRIDGE TO INDIA links this expertise to urban planning and processes. Through customized solutions for its clients, BRIDGE TO INDIA contributes to a sustainable world by implementing the latest technological and systemic innovations where their impact is the highest.

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