

## Foreword

# DATA POINTS US TO THE AGENDA FOR CHANGE

This is our annual report to measure the state of the environment using data; it provides a snapshot of the state of affairs through numbers. This is important because we know that you get what you measure; more importantly, what gets measured is also what, subsequently, gets done. Data, thus, is key for driving the action that is so critical in our world.

I write this when temperatures have breached 50°C in my city of Delhi. It is scorching, burning heat, and now we are being informed that a water crisis looms as well. All this is worse for people who work outside; they have no choice but to cope with the heat, and with little resources. This is a time when we cannot help but understand the crisis of a changing climate. This is borne out by the data in this report: there is clear evidence that heat is rising. It is not only heat; it is also extreme weather events that are breaking the backs of the poorest in our world. This report tells you how 69 weather stations across 23 of the 36 Indian states and Union Territories shattered their monthly highest 24-hour rainfall in 122 years. This means more rain on fewer number of rainy days, which in turn will add to the challenge of more frequent floods, followed by longer droughts.

I also write this when India is electing a new government. We will soon know the results of this massive celebration of democracy, and the question then is, what do we learn from this data as far as an agenda for the new-old government goes?

The first thing that is clear is that whatever the priority of the government, it must be understood that this is the age of climate change. It means that there will be unseasonal weather, intense heat and cold and extreme rain. This will take away the development dividend. But it also means that a development strategy has to be designed for this climate-risked world.

The fact is, farmers will need all the help they can get in these times of variable weather. The data shows us that the flagship crop insurance scheme of the government to provide that crucial support is flagging; it needs a reboot. It needs a rethink, also so that it can take into account the local impact of crop losses because of unseasonal weather.

This is not all; we know that we need to change our energy-pathway so that we can grow economically, but we also need to reduce our local emissions (from burning coal) that are toxic for health. And if we do this, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to a burning planet. This is particularly important as temperature increases will mean a greater need for energy. If this is fueled using dirty sources like coal, it will be disastrous for us and for the planet.

The Indian government's strategy has been to invest in renewable energy; to reduce our dependence on coal, even as we double our energy consumption. But data reveals that thermal power is still king; and if we take renewable energy to include big hydro-power then generation declined in the past year, in spite of the increased investment in building new infrastructure. It is the same with electric vehicles; we can see an increased uptake of e-vehicles, but if you deep dive into data it reveals that the bulk of these are in the 2-3 wheeled category and e-vehicles do not displace new diesel vehicle – specially not in the case of private cars or buses. This then is the other challenge – of reinventing mobility for clean air – and data shows that bus infrastructure is going down and public bus agencies are deep in red. We need to rework strategies for the future in all these areas.

The report points to these priorities for planning: water scarcity, water pollution, air pollution in cities and declining public transport. The fact is, this is where our focus has to be. This is a world where plans have to be crafted keeping in mind the crisis of climate change; but this is also a world where we would have the opportunity to address this crisis. We need clever solutions that will work for us—growth, livelihoods and wellbeing for all—and also address climate change. This is the opportunity. This is where the data takes us. Now we need to act. And act with speed, scale and imagination.

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