

Biography

Dr Arvind Kumar
President
India Water Foundation



“Be a Jalmitra!! Pledge to turn Water Conservation into a public movement through integrated approach”

Dr. Arvind Kumar, President, India Water Foundation is a distinguished environmentalist who fosters enhancing community resilience through ‘Putting People First’. Leading a compelling voice to the most pressing problems of climate change i.e. water, he firmly affirms Water is an asset and an indispensable catalyst for almost all developmental activities considering WATER as the new OIL’ which holds true in contemporary times. A pioneering environmentalist, who has changed the perspective of ‘Thinking Water’ and how most of us still find water as an infinite resource has endeavored to elevate awareness of water sustainability from local to global level. His relentless efforts to synchronize water with transversal enveloping sectors like energy, health, agriculture, etc. offers symbiotic synergies towards integrated sustainable development. An encyclopedia of knowledge and wisdom, his contribution towards environmental protection, natural resource management and sustainable development is noteworthy. His fearless and relentless advocacy efforts towards environment have earned him credibility and a crusader of environmental conservation in India and beyond.

The environmental values and moral principles imbibed were a result of his upbringing, cultural and educational background, intellectual perceptions at his school & college and his unique experiences that informed a deepening sense of understanding with nature. This is attributed to a strong influence by leaders like Mahatma Gandhiji, Leo Tolstoy, Acharya Narendra Dev, Sundarlal Bahuguna. Inspired by the Green Gandhian Shri Vinoba Bhave, the man behind ‘Sarvodaya’ philosophy supported principles of ‘upliftment of all’; Dr Kumar wanted to extend the element of “No One Left Behind’ into common man’s life within the realms of environment.

Playing freely with childhood friends in natural environments was an important part of childhood experience, which initiated a love for nature and a precursor to his environmentalist activity. Education pursued as a positive path for promoting change and sustainability. As a committed conservationist during his boarding school days in Uttarakhand, the young Kumar was an activist who took up the case for environment with focus on cleanliness drives, tree plantation

and water conservation efforts and was involved in various club activities and campaigns in school. Another time, he was an active participant of tree plantation during Van Mahotsav organized June 5th every year and nurtured saplings along with his fellow class mates. His hobbies of nature walk, jungle camping and sightseeing reflected his appreciation of nature. An ardent follower of Swachhta, he influenced cleanliness of school premises, waste collection and segregation and also influenced communities and residents to promote similar activities in their respective capacity. These early experiences influenced and stimulated his later motives towards environmentalism and the aesthetics of his school learnings still lay at his heart.

1970s heralded the emergence of the so-called environmental movement in response to reports of threats from human activity, such as pollution and resource depletion, ecosystem destruction and was a critical time when environment movement like Chipko Andolan in Uttarakhand was happening in 1970s and his mind wanted to act urgently and constructively to find solution to the pressing problems. Inspired by a thought provoking quote from Bhagwad Gita that “Man is made by his belief. As he believes, so he is”, Dr Kumar abiding in affirmation recognized that that a morally correct attitude and sense of responsibility is needed towards environment conservation. Starting as a career in media the year 1996, he propagated various environmental issues through his write-ups and articles. His overall experience as a journalist and amateur environmentalist entailed a sense of awe & connectedness; empathy & care; responsibility & reverence for the nature. However, Journalism was a mission and not a profession to carry service to society.

Prelude to the establishment of India Water Foundation (IWF), he came across significant developments in theoretical terms. His first interface with ‘Sustainable development’ came from Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" made by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. Along the way in the mid-90s, he heard about Rio Convention that promoted a call for sustainable planet for future generations. His early experiences influenced his pro-sustainability motives towards taking environment as a professional career. Experiencing a sense of oneness, connectedness and integration with nature, he dedicated his lifetime to the case for water and environment and paving a way for comprehensive climate action.

He felt that India, once a water-surplus country, entails the likelihood of becoming a water-deficit country in the near future in the wake of fast depletion of its groundwater resources and pollution of surface water resources including its river systems. However, this water crisis is

predominantly a man-made problem owing to extremely poor management, lack of focused and unambiguous laws. Absence of environment-friendly disposal of industrial and human waste/garbage is further aggravating this water supply crunch and corruption is having a multiplying effect on this malady. People alone have sufficient potential to prevent this man-made water scarcity from devastating water-dependent sectors like agriculture and energy; and in turn the entire economy. Imbued with missionary zeal and humanitarian passion to contribute to the society and the nation, he embarked on this mission and established India Water Foundation in March 2008 focusing on Knowledge exchange, Capacity Building measures, Sustainable Funding & Branding, Technology Interventions, Policy & Governance. Beginning with envisaging water as a Valuable Resource and conservation of environment and its judicious utilisation through an integrated approach, he fostered a new paradigm of Cooperation, Convergence and Collaboration which became the cornerstone of his mission thereafter.

Since Dr Kumar was trying a unique experiment through this civil society by generating awareness among the people on water-related issues, sans any glamour and monetary advantage, he was bound to face odds of various sorts. Undoubtedly, paucity of fiscal resources proved a major hindrance in fulfilling his yeoman mission; nevertheless, he remained undaunted and continued his onward journey. It was also difficult to convince the government as well as corporate sector about the worth of making people, the genuine and ultimate stakeholders aware about the programmes and policies in water and environment sectors with a view to ensure their involvement. There existed a big hiatus between policy-making and its implementation process. Policy making is facilitated at the Central Government level of State Government level and its implementation takes place at grassroots level in the village and municipal level in cities but lacks an integrated approach. This testified to the gap between theory and practice.

No policy can be said to claim its successful implementation unless the people are made aware about the very purpose and objective of that policy through capacity-building programmes. The government is well-equipped in fiscal and technological resources but lacks in trained personnel who can make people aware and build up their capacities. Here lied the role of a civil society which has a pool of trained personnel to generate awareness and build up the capacity of the people. At IWF, he regarded water as not merely a sector, but a connector that provides

solutions because water community makes available holistic solutions that can support strategies to tackle effectively climate change and facilitate hassle-free adaptation. Water connects policy areas, economic sectors and societies and as such it is a tool for cooperation and for building trust. His positive environmental attitudes and the possession of environmental knowledge created new environmentalism with extended scope and application.

In the aftermath of water having been accorded priority in negotiations on climate change, especially World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg (South Africa) in August 2002, describing water as integral to sustainable development, also asserted that, water is relevant to all three strands of development – social, economic and environmental, this development galvanised the much needed momentum towards envisioning water in holistic terms. In the same year, when the National Water Policy adopted by Government of India in 2002, he identified its failures to incorporate the national and international political environment, and failure to consider water policies within a dynamic economic, technological, and social environment. Besides, the policy offered an inappropriate modeling of supply and demand scenarios and other issues such as social inequalities and inappropriately defined property rights. Not only is it difficult for departments within national government and State governments to collaborate effectively, but problems are compounded when many management decisions have to be taken at sub-national and community levels, as the linkage and cooperation between different levels of government is often tenuous at best.

In the wake of an explicit role of water in the process of Climate Change, under UNFCCC institutional mechanisms and processes, especially since 2016 onwards, he observed a transitional trend towards viewing water as critical to both climate mitigation and climate adaptation. He shifted the course of activities of IWF under the new perspective of growing nexus between water and climate change and its indispensability for tackling climate-induced and water-induced calamities which was fast attracting the attention of almost all countries which were signatories to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and consequently civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alongside the realization of sustainable development goals 2030. Besides, he fostered close rapport and cooperation with UN specialized agencies, international agencies, organizations and institutions.

Under his stewardship, the activities of IWF are designed to create an inclusive culture that is the basis for sustainable development, harmony and progress. As a crusader, he has played a pivotal role in influencing national policies in areas of water, environment, science, health,

biodiversity communicating more than 10,000 letters to various Ministries and agencies in India and beyond since inception. Through his various communications addressed to the government as well as through his various writings in leading magazines, he has always emphasized on bringing water from the State List of the Indian Constitution to the Concurrent List to make Right to Water as a Fundamental Right. Having espoused the cause of a Regional Water Hub located in India at the UN World Water Day at Nairobi in 2010, IWF launched a campaign for establishing India Water Hub in India in cooperation with other ministries/ department of the Government of India.

Major activities undertaken by IWF, under his guidance veered around major themes of water and climate change, exchange and sharing of views on salvaging river Yamuna, rejuvenating river Ganga, focus on SDGs and proposal for generating awareness among school children about abandoning the use of plastic. While referring to Delhi's geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economic significance nationally and internationally, he drew the attention of the Government towards degrading environmental conditions and water-related woes of Delhi, with special focus on urgency for central government's intervention in salvaging river Yamuna, Delhi's perennial problem of pollution – air and water – and their resultant adverse impacts on the people of the NCR. Even prior to the launch of Clean India or Swachh Bharat Mission, he has been emphasizing on sanitation along with water with its stress on "Water is Life and Sanitation is Life-style. In this regard, keeping in view the fact that bulk of the diseases are water-borne, he addressed a communication to Union Health Ministry in 2014, pleading for adoption of Health-Plus approach by aptly managing water and sanitation sectors. Recently, he has communicated a suggestion for creation of task force to spearhead the paradigm of 'Think Water-Think Health'.

Stressing on actor-sector synergy, Dr Kumar has focused on assimilation and dissemination of knowledge, innovative technologies and good governance practices, etc and strongly feel that ideas and notions pioneered by him in water sector viz capacity-building, inter-sectoral convergence, holistic and collective approach, equal emphasis on soft approach along with hard or technical approach are equally applicable to other sectors as well. Working in the North-Eastern states of Meghalaya and Sikkim, his painstaking efforts have created a model of 'sustainable development' and the learnings are being customized in Aspirational districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. He inspired dynamism in Ganga action Plan project in Varanasi, where his team worked tirelessly for sensitizing the public under PAPP activities (People's Awareness and Participation Programme). Travelling extensively to villages & being

available at the remotest place with his team; touring countries for observation and insights, he studied various challenges, confronted barriers and showcased his learnings through his papers and presentations at national, regional and global forums. His experience of 24 years in the 'media' could not bring him closer to address people's plight at large. However, as a civil society working more than a decade has made him traverse nearer to community, especially at grass root level.

He holds PhD in Defense Studies, is a renowned political commentator, frequently contributing articles on contemporary political, socio-economic, environmental and defense related issues in prominent journals. He has published over 400 plus research articles in recent years on national and international issues in reputed journals. He has pioneered approaches like Sustainable Water Integrated Management (SWIM), Water-Energy-Food Nexus approach, Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) approach. IWF's Environment-Plus Model visualizes a holistic approach of integration of sustainable development. His areas of interest include Integrated Water Resource management (IWRM), Environment, Climate adaptation & Mitigation, Nature based Solutions (NbS) along with Science based Solutions (SbS), Ecosystems and biodiversity, Ecosystem governance, Eco-disaster risk reduction, reviving cultural-traditional practices, Gender mainstream, etc.

As a member of World Water Council's Task force on Transversality, he presents key strategies in water related areas for the perusal of water security, mainstream water related agendas and share practices in various policy initiatives of World Water Council. As member of the 'National Wetlands Committee, MoEF&CC, Gol, he proposed an "integrated approach" and also advised enumerating the wetlands in land records and preventing encroachment of the wetlands in drafting the guidelines to Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 towards wetland management, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services protection. Similarly, in the capacity of member Technical Advisory Committee for India's Third National Communication and Biennial Update Reports to UNFCCC, MoEF&CC, Gol foundational strategies towards sustainable climate adaptation & mitigation strategies was shared. As member of Meghalaya State Water Resources Council and State Council for Climate Change and Sustainable Development, his inputs on water budgeting, water conservation and enhancing water availability, especially during lean season, proved instrumental to formulate the provisions of Meghalaya State Water Policy and other bills etc and strategies on climate adaptation to deal with the impending climatic stress on Meghalaya's natural ecosystems. As a member of CAPART, he suggested professional & structural changes post its merger with National Institute



of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) towards rejuvenating rural development prospects.

He is the editor of online e-Magazine Focus Global Reporter published from New Delhi, India. He is also the lead author of publication with SAC Dhaka titled “SAARC Outlook on Water-Energy-Food Nexus in SAARC Region” published in December 2015 and upcoming book ‘Ecosystem-Based Adaptation shall be published by Elsevier in July 2021.

He is conferred with the 40th Matrishree Media Awards on 26th April 2015 for his outstanding contribution as journalist and Triveni Award for his contribution in the field of Environment and water in May 2015. He is conferred with “Achievers Award” for his exemplary contribution and commitment for protecting environment by India Eye international human rights observer in collaboration with United Nations Information Centre for India & Bhutan on the occasion of celebration of World Environment Day June 5th, 2017 in New Delhi. Under his dynamic leadership, IWF has been conferred with Water Digest Water Award in the category of Best NGO - Water Education 2017-18 and Best NGO – Water & Sanitation in 2018-19 for consecutive two years in a row.