

For a sustainable future

It's time to get sensitised to water challenges, solutions and opportunities



“India has been at the forefront of economic development,” acknowledges Peter Bakker, president & CEO, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), a CEO-led organisation of some 200 forward-thinking global companies. “The National Mission for Clean Ganga is the largest environmental engineering project of its kind in the world. The smart cities initiatives and the sanitation campaign also place huge responsibility on the water community to step forward”.

“Managing water and sanitation would play a key role for this development to be sustainable and ongoing,” adds Anil Jain, vice-chairman & managing director, Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd, one of the 10 other Indian companies headquartered in India that have joined the 25-year-old WBCSD, which was formed after the Rio convention and is committed to galvanising the global business community to create a sustainable future for business, society and the environment. Together with its members, the council applies its respected thought

leadership and effective advocacy to generate constructive solutions and take shared action.

“Leveraging our strong relationships with stakeholders as the leading advocate for business, the council helps drive debate and policy change in favour of sustainable development solutions,” adds Bakker, who was CEO, TNT NV, the Netherlands-based holding company of TNT Express and Royal TNT Post, until June 2011. Under his leadership, TNT had risen to the forefront of corporate responsibility via a ground-breaking partnership with the UN World Food Programme and ambitious CO₂ reduction targets from its ‘Planet Me’ initiative, holding multiple-year top-ranking positions in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index. Bakker, also the recipient of Clinton Global Citizen Award (2009) and SAM Sustainability Leadership Award (2010), has been an ‘ambassador against hunger’ for the UN World Food Programme since 2011.

As a matter of fact, WBCSD provides a forum for its member companies – which represent all business

sectors, all continents and has a combined revenue of more than \$8.5 trillion, with 19 million employees – to share the best practices on sustainable development issues and to develop innovative tools that change the status quo. “The council also benefits from a network of 70 national and regional business councils and partner organisations, a majority of which are based in developing countries,” explains Bakker. He has been in India since mid-August 2017, when WBCSD released a first-of-its-kind document in India. It has also worked with the 10 Indian members on the programme ‘Water-smart Agriculture’.

The ongoing activity under this programme is about highlighting business solutions in water-efficiency in the agriculture space. The member companies have worked together to compile such business solutions in India into a report titled ‘Co-optimising solutions in water and agriculture: Lessons from India for water security’. This is an initiative of the water-smart agriculture working group of members, which include Lafarge-Holcim (Ambuja Cements), ITC, Jain Irrigation, Monsanto, Nestle, Olam, PepsiCo, PwC, Rabobank, UPL, Yara International and Yes Bank. The report is a compilation of case-studies of efficient and scalable business solutions in sustainable agriculture (with focus on water efficiency) from India. “The context to the implementation of each of these solutions, along with the impacts recorded on key indicators (crop yields, farmer incomes and water savings) is included in the document,” says Jain.

The key findings Agriculture consumes almost 90 per cent of the freshwater available in India, and so holds the key for unlocking sound water management in the country. If efficiencies are improved, business solutions hold an enormous potential for scaling-up and addressing the food security and nutrition-related challenges of India. These solutions bring value to both businesses and farming communities, and pave the

way for a more resilient future. “They advance the Indian government agenda of ‘more crop per drop’ and ‘water to every farm,’” says Jain. “The key enablers to scale-up the solutions (as identified in the Indian context) are availability of funds, sound government policies, trainings and on-site support to farmers, productive partnerships”.

More importantly, this report is being used by the member companies in India to initiate partnerships to scale-up the identified solutions. “Several business-to-business partnerships within the group members have been initiated, as also partnerships with external knowledge providers (like International Water Management Institute),” sums up Bakker, stressing on the importance of the topic in the Indian context, as well as the potential of the business solutions documented in addressing the food security challenge of India and the world. “The report can serve as an input into the development of government-policies supportive of scale-up of smart solutions”.

♦ LANCELOT JOSEPH

lancelot.joseph@businessindiagroup.com