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Chairman

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“Wastewater – New Economic Resource”

Water is becoming new oil of future with serious economic, social, political and environmental considerations. Being world's fastest growing economy and home to 17 percent of world population with just 4 percent of fresh water sources, India is sooner going to be confronted with a serious resource challenge. The available resource has reduced over the years but demand escalated and it is projected to very soon overtake the availability of water. With rapidly changing urban face of India and increasing demand for more quality water and better sanitation services, the most important issue we are facing is to deal effectively with our wastewater. Reuse of treated wastewater is still at emerging stage in India. We must treat wastewater as economic resource and promote use of treated wastewater on a sustainable basis with integrated plan to maximize collection and treatment to reduce our dependence on fresh water sources. Globally, many countries are using treated wastewater for potable and non-potable purposes. Singapore is a classic example of using it for drinking as well as for industrial supply. Treated water is used as main source of potable water in Namibia. China has developed wastewater reuse network across Beijing and almost 22 percent of total water supplied in city is reclaimed water.

The major challenge in urban India is that estimated 80 percent of water supplied to household is coming back as wastewater to be treated and reuse. But in reality, only a fraction of it is treated due to insufficient treatment facilities and not being reused due to lack of infrastructure support. This leaves a big gap of almost 80 percent of generated wastewater is not being treated and untreated sewage is released to water bodies thus contaminating the already depleting groundwater sources. From public health perspective, impact of water borne diseases in country affects almost 40 million people annually including death of 1.5 million children from diarrhea alone. There is an ardent need to think deeply and adopt new perspective towards wastewater to counter water scarcity and other challenges and work towards enduring solutions.

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“Water Is Too Precious To Be Used Just Once”

Water management has assumed a critical role both for Governments & industries across globe in last few years and more so in coming decades in view of water scarcity affecting quality of life, human productivity as well as industrial output. Water is a limited resource which needs to be managed effectively and consistently to reduce strain that we exert on our Mother Nature. Unfortunately, there is an attitude among people, especially in developing countries across world that unlimited access and unmindful consumption of water is a right. Thus this calls for a serious intervention to find viable, reliable and sustainable alternatives to handle serious threat of water scarcity.

Governance plays a major role in terms of developing a framework to ensure accountability in right places and that people adhere to them in practice. In India, we are moving in right direction, with some major initiatives taken in this direction such as Namami Gange, Integrated city waste water management, AMRUT Projects, Desalination on coastal areas, emphasis on reuse & Zero Liquid Discharge for Industrial usage, including new initiative by Niti Aayog on rating States based on status of their water management, which shall promote competition among States and create a platform to share best practices. Another key success factor is public acceptance, which needs to be established through comprehensive and adequate information and educational programmes.

The advanced water infrastructures of today are capable of converting municipal and domestic used water an alternative source for water reuse, which has been employed in many countries like Namibia, Singapore NWater and California. The mind-set that sewage is not a liability, but a resource with economic value will spur concepts that promote treated water reuse, green power generation and sludge management as fertilizer as a means for sustainable revenue generation. By promoting a resource recovery model in water treatment, we are providing urban local bodies a means to become self-sustaining in terms of financials. Chennai has been a pioneer in this regard where STPs have incorporated and successfully operated a resource recovery mechanism for over a decade, earning global recognition.

Such initiatives not only make decision makers take notice of where they stand, but also put onus on industry to identify issues and come up with innovative solutions which are not only cost effective but also improve quality of water based on wide range of applications. I feel, with these ground rules & directions getting well defined, we are going to be part of an exciting period in coming decades where disruptive solutions and models will emerge to redefine industry, much like what happened in Road sector and even Power sector now.