

Inaugural Session of the Consultation Workshop of States of the Himalayan Region 10 March 2016

Talking Points for Swiss Ambassador Dr. Linus von Castelmur

Secretary DST, dear Prof. Sharma,
dear Dr Gupta and Dr Mendiratta,
distinguished representatives of the Himalayan States, Government of India officials,
dear colleagues from the Climate Change Division of the Swiss Embassy,
ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Government of Switzerland, it is my pleasure to address you at the inaugural session of the consultation workshop, which marks also the official launch of phase 2 of the Indian Himalayas Climate Adaptation Programme (IHCAP). The project is embedded in the bilateral framework agreement of Science & Technology Cooperation between Switzerland and India. I would like to express my gratitude to DST for the continued partnership and collaboration for strengthening research capacities and exchange among researchers of our two countries.

As we all know, the Himalayan ecosystem is vital to the ecological security of the Indian subcontinent through providing forest cover, feeding perennial rivers that are the source of drinking water and irrigation, conserving biodiversity, and providing a rich base for high value agriculture, as well as spectacular landscapes for hopefully sustainable tourism.

Climate change, apart from being an environmental threat, is also a social and development challenge. Mountains are among the region's most vulnerable to climate change due to likely impacts on cryosphere and the biodiversity they harbour. The Himalayas have continued to be one of the under studied systems and very little is known about them scientifically. This knowledge gap needs to be filled through research. It is also required to build and strengthen the capacity of various stakeholders to understand the impacts of climate change in the Himalayas and to plan and implement adaptation actions. Finally, it is equally crucial to exchange knowledge and learnings across various regions within the Indian Himalayas, other parts of the Hindu Kush Himalayas and also other mountain countries.

All these concerns are dealt with under this partnership between Switzerland and India. We appreciate the timely actions taken by Government of India for addressing climate change impacts and identifying measures under its "National Action Plan on Climate Change" and in particular the "National Mission for Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem" (NMSHE). We are pleased to collaborate on the implementation of this mission.

I fondly remember that in April 2013 India and Switzerland had come together to launch the Indo Swiss Capacity Building Programme on Himalayan Glaciology under phase I of IHCAP. Since then the IHCAP, has come a long way. I would like to highlight the following achievements:

- 52 young Indian researchers were trained in the field of glaciology and related areas and 127 officials of the Government of Himachal Pradesh underwent training in adaptation planning and implementation;
- Besides, 60 journalists (print and electronic) from national and local media were made aware on climate change impacts and have published articles about the topic thereafter.

- IHCAP has also been involved in undertaking innovative research studies.
 - Indian and Swiss scientists and researchers came together and developed a new integrated framework for assessing vulnerability, risks and hazard based on which a number of collaborative research studies were conducted in the Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh.
- Bringing together scientific communities and researchers from our respective countries to develop innovative products and approaches is exactly what the Year of Swiss Innovation in India, 2015-16 seeks to achieve.
- We are now at a stage where the experiences from the first phase can be scaled up and the workshop today and tomorrow will provide further guidance to achieve this. IHCAP in partnership with DST aims in its second phase of four years (2016-19) at enhancing knowledge, capacities and awareness in India about the vital role played by mountains in social, economic, regional and global development. It will function as a technical and knowledge partner for facilitating the implementation of NMSHE by
 - Establishing Indo-Swiss research networks across the Himalayas;
 - Organising training and capacity building programmes for Climate Change cells of the Himalayan States;
 - Generating awareness and disseminate knowledge among multiple stakeholders (through knowledge portal, media training, etc.); and
 - Supporting multi-stakeholder policy dialogue platforms for strengthening science-policy-practice connect.

I am confident that the collaboration between SDC and DST for the implementation of the NMSHE will further strengthen the scientific collaboration and partnership between India and Switzerland. Last year, we completed ten years of the Indo Swiss Joint Research Programme (ISJRP). Under ISJRP, over 130 projects and exchange visits have been funded and a new call will be announced this year.

I am also sure that our cooperation will pave the way for other innovative research programmes on new topics, such as low carbon cement or plastic recycling.

Once again let me thank Prof Sharma, Dr Gupta and the team at DST for their leadership in implementing the NMSHE mission. We are happy to join your efforts in this journey.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me wish you good luck for your deliberations over the next two days.