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**Climate challenge**

This Christmas will not be the same. The best gift the world is anticipating this year is from the scientific research community – the Covid-19 vaccine.

Next year, perhaps, will be all about the (fair) distribution of it. We have lost about 1.5 million people to this pandemic to date, which was once only a projection from public health officials. This pandemic turned it into reality. However, with the advent of the vaccine we may hope to return to normal life by 2022 or 2023.

But is there any takeaway message from the miseries of this pandemic for us? Yes, we can extrapolate a few things from this deadly pandemic for an even deadlier future catastrophe which possesses the potential to erase humankind from the face of this planet – human-caused climate crisis. We can learn and then act upon the lessons so as to avoid making the same mistakes.

Lesson one: behavioural changes, alone, will not fix the climate crisis. Why? because by changing lifestyles we were only able to reduce carbon emissions less than five percent even when the whole world was shut down. This is the amount of carbon emissions we need to reduce over the whole next decade if we want to keep the increase in average global temperature less than 1.5 C.

Does it look possible? No. What is the solution? Systemic change. We need to decarbonize our economy at the earliest. Everyone must adopt a lifestyle that can essentially reduce the carbon footprints. However, that alone is not enough.

Next, listen to scientists when it comes to dealing with global threats. It is important to block anti-science and anti-reason voices during such crises. Science denial is lethal, whether it is about denying to wear a mask or observing social distancing during this pandemic – which is advised by public health officials – or what climate scientists are saying about phasing out the fossil fuel industry. There is scientific consensus on climate change. About 97 percent scientists believe that climate change is real and is an existential threat. Listen to them and act on what they advise.

Number three: bring the climate discussion into the public via politics. We are at a stage in dealing with this pandemic that the economy at this stage matters less than politics. This virus apparently started from China, but more lives have been lost in the United States. The major reason seems to be policies that were employed to fight it.

Although the people in the street now know that climate change is happening; until it becomes a part of the discussion by governments, it will remain the same. By reshaping the political discourse around the climate crisis, much can still be achieved.

Like Covid-19, climate change is not a geographic challenge. It has started disrupting the ecological system of the planet already, but to mitigate it, the whole world has to work collectively. If it dismantles one part of Planet Earth, no one can stay unchanged. The population of this world is fragile and deeply dependent on each other. We learnt this recently. The Global South needs attention from the developed countries, and they cannot deny this assistance. Every government has to put their sincere efforts in. Leaving a few behind will not help. This will have a binary outcome – either it will get resolved completely or it will collapse everything. There cannot be a few that can be rescued, and others left to its damages.

There are a lot of problems viz-a-viz the climate crisis; nevertheless, we do have roam for guarded optimism. To mitigate climate change, we do not need a vaccine. We do not need to wait for a miracle, or to go for life-saving innovation. We have that already. We have sun, wind, and tidal power. We have the research community which can make these work for us. What we need is to design the right policies to incentivize the use of these naturally existing resources. We need to phase out fossil fuels.

As said above, the real need is to decarbonize the economy. And that too very rapidly without wasting time to listen to anti-science voices which are basically anti-people as well. Studies show that we can easily try and fulfil 80 percent of energy demands using renewable resources by 2030, and 100 percent by 2050, only if policies are placed correctly. This transition might cause certain economic turbulence in the initial stages, but it is a no-brainer that it would bring economic growth back on track, should we put the right incentives in place.

Unlike the Covid-19 pandemic, we still have an opportunity to work in the right direction and leave this planet a liveable place for future generations. Having this chance is very encouraging. It is now our obligation to not leave a degraded planet for our children.

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