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Email: mediarelations@ishafoundation.org

Cauvery Calling Could Meet 8-12% Of India's Carbon Sink Target: Sadhguru To Prakash Javadekar

5 September 2020, Coimbatore: “Just by doing Cauvery Calling project, that is 2.42 billion trees in 83,000 sq km, 5.2 million farmers will benefit, 9 to 12 trillion litres of water will be sequestered and 200 to 300 million tonnes of CO₂ will be sequestered,” said Sadhguru, Founder, Isha Foundation in an online conversation with Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change Shri. Prakash Javadekar. The session was aired on 3 September on Sadhguru’s 63rd birthday which Isha celebrated as a day dedicated to River Revitalization. Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) also released a message on restoring degraded land and spoke about Cauvery Calling, a 12-year mission launched by Sadhguru last September to revitalize river Cauvery. Cauvery Calling marked its first anniversary on 3rd September.

Sadhguru revealed that the Cauvery Calling project alone would contribute 8 to 12% of the nation’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the 2030 goals of the Paris Agreement on carbon sequestration.

The central focus of the conversation between the Union Minister and Sadhguru was on the game-changing solution of tree-based agriculture or agroforestry which at once addresses a multitude of problems related to soil, water, nutrition and climate change. The Minister who began by wishing Sadhguru on his birthday spoke about the several far-reaching reforms and programmes that have been instituted by the government to encourage farmers to embrace tree-based agriculture. He welcomed

Sadhguru's views on aspects of restoring soil & water health, and sustainable means to ensure the nation's prosperity and progress. "Ideation comes from people like you. Government has to implement it. Your power is ideation, our power is multiplication," he said.

The hour-long conversation covered a range of topics including the recently announced Nutrition Month by the Prime Minister; accessing global funding for states to sustain incentivizing tree-based farming; policy regulations for sand mining and timber harvest and sale; self-sufficiency in timber to reduce imports and ways to achieve the nation's commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Acknowledging the potential, Shri. Javadekar stated, "The Prime Minister himself is very much convinced that agroforestry is the way forward," and spoke about its potential to generate jobs and wealth for farmers. Referring to India's timber imports which cost the exchequer INR 63,000 crore, the Minister said, "(By importing) to this tune, we are exporting jobs. Instead, let us do the required commercial timber here, we will create jobs here. Therefore, I believe that agroforestry and afforestation are the way forward."

In order to address the reluctance of some farmers in adopting tree-based farming, Sadhguru suggested that "a clear statement from the central government that whatever you grow in your land, it belongs to you" would go a long way in allaying farmer fears of growing high-value trees on their farmlands. Responding positively to the suggestion, the Minister said, "Yes, very good suggestion Sadhguru ji, and we will definitely be declaring it in very clear terms. Today, on your forum we are making this very clear that anything a farmer grows on their own farm, it will belong to him." Sandalwood farming has gone because you cannot cut the sandalwood tree, so we are removing these restrictions, Shri. Javadekar added.

On the government's initiatives to address challenges of farmers, the Minister spoke about the water and fodder augmentation programme in 28 forests in 28 states to reduce man-animal conflict that destroys several hundred hectares of harvest-ready crops annually across the country. Further, he said "We have taken up the world's

largest target of converting and restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land. We want to incentivize people in every possible way. Those schemes are being worked out.”

Sadhguru agreed that the main problem for states was funding. “Karnataka government has a very effective scheme in this direction. It's very supportive, that's why it's such a big success out there,” Sadhguru said referring to the state’s Krushi Aranya Protsaha Yojane (KAPY) that incentivizes farmers to the tune of Rs. 125 per sapling over a 3-year period to encourage farmers to plant saplings on their farmlands. “Right now they are giving the subsidies, but in the next three to five years they may have trouble giving the subsidies. I would like the Environment Ministry to look at it kindly. States which are taking proactive action to save the soil of this land, their funding resources (must be) replenished so that they can continue the support they're giving to the farmer.” He suggested tapping into the many opportunities in international funding. “Particularly for agroforestry, if we go as a mission, I'm sure these funds can be accessed. The Government of India is definitely capable of that,” said Sadhguru.

He also appreciated the digital platform set up by the Central Government to facilitate timber sale “where people can sell their timber on the digital platform and transport it wherever they want,” calling it a good move that would encourage farmers to take up plantation but still it is in various entanglements... a little more clarity has to happen.

Sadhguru’s suggestions on framing a practical sand mining policy that would allow farmers to use riverbed sand in a minimal way while curtailing use of mining machinery in river beds was also well received by the Minister. He responded, “I entirely agree and this is what we call in our parliamentary language ‘suggestion for action’. I have already noted, will deliberate and we will communicate to you what we are going ahead with.”

On the subject of nutrition, Sadhguru said that over 70% of children below 3 years of age and 55% of women are anemic in India. “If we don't make sure that the women and children are well nourished, we are producing an underdeveloped generation for the future,” he said while appreciating the Prime Minister’s declaration of September

as Nutrition Month. “If nutrition has to happen, the most important thing is the soil has to be rich. Studies show in the last 25 years, the vegetables in India have lost 40% of their nutrients. Without agroforestry, I don't see a solution as to how we will provide nutrition for this nation. This Nutrition Month is very important to bring awareness, but in terms of action without enriching the soil, there is no way to enrich human life,” said Sadhguru.

The session closed with Ibrahim Thiaw’s message on the urgent need to address soil degradation and the role of projects like Cauvery Calling in achieving this goal.

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