Engaging India at Almedalen

Seminar 1

India Sweden Collaborations on Sustainability & Innovation

Visby, Gotland

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Interview

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1. **Welcome Ambassador once again to Gotland and to Visby which has been the centre point of Almedalen week for over half century. We really hope you are enjoying being here at Almedalen week.**

   Thank you for this interaction.

   We had met last year also here in Almedalen. But that time was different in view of Covid19 constraints.

   This is the first time I am experiencing the energy and excitement of this week that is iconic for Sweden in so many ways.

   This year there is added and heightened interest in these interactions in view of the wider geopolitical context.

   Whether it is the post pandemic recovery, the tensions in this region, Sweden's application for membership for NATO, and not least the upcoming next national elections in two months' time.

   So, it is definitely a very interesting time to be here for the Almedalen week.

2. **At Engaging India at Almedalen 2021, there was a lot of interest on triple helix of industry, government and academia to collaborate on research and innovation. Could you share with us the research cooperation that have been initiated between India and Sweden?**

   Research and Innovation are among the main themes of India Sweden collaboration.

   And the fundamental theme of these such research & innovation is **sustainability**.

This cuts across a number of fields. For instance, these include – **Health, Clean Technologies** for instance in automotive or mining or other industrial sectors, **Renewable Energy, Energy efficiency, Smart Grids, Waste recycling, Water, and Circular Economy** among many others.

A number of stakeholders from both sides are actively encouraging these partnerships.

Joint Calls for proposals that are **co-funded** by both sides are regularly announced. A Joint call on Circular Economy is currently in process. A Joint Call on Smart Grids was concluded some months back.

Departments of Science & Technology, Biotechnology, Ministry of Earth Sciences and BIRAC are among those engaged on the Indian side. The Global Innovation & Technology Alliance (**GITA**) is another platform that brings Indian government & industry together, which is active in this respect.

Vinnova, Swedish Energy Agency, Swedish Research Council, Forte and Formas, which are the agencies for Research in Health and Sustainability solutions, are among those engaged on the Swedish side.

This is quite unusual and encouraging that so many stakeholder agencies are working on this collaboration on both sides.

There are a number of other **universities, academic and research institutions** on both sides that are also engaged in such collaborations.

An **India Sweden Healthcare Innovation Centre** has started operating at the AIIMS Jodhpur. It has multiple partners. This is an innovation incubation centre that can be utilised by both Indian Swedish researchers and startups.

A number of leading Swedish businesses such as Ericsson or Volvo and many others have large **Research Centres** based in India.

A number of **Indian big IT & consulting companies** are working with Swedish businesses to design and provide for them **sustainability solutions**.

A number of **Startups** both in India and Sweden are also working to engage more with each other on technology-led development solutions. We are also working to establish an **Innovation bridge**.

3. **A global energy transition to net zero at a planetary scale is required to achieve climate neutrality, and the contribution of government, industry, academia and the communities is required towards attaining climate neutrality. Could you throw light on the existing and potential energy and industry transition partnerships between India and Sweden?**

   There are a number of areas where **India and Sweden** are working together on climate action.

   Renewable energy, energy efficiency, circular economy are some areas where a number of joint projects are going on as I mentioned before.

   In addition to these bilateral projects, India and Sweden have also taken an important joint initiative at a global level.

   This goes back a long time. You may recall that in **1972** at the **First ever UN Conference on Human Environment** hosted by Sweden in Stockholm, India was the only other country represented at the Head of Government level.

   More recently, in 2019 at the United Nations Climate Summit hosted by the UN Secretary General, India and Sweden launched the **Leadership Group on Industry Transition LeadIT**.

   LeadIT aims to encourage and facilitate the **decarbonization of hard to abate industrial sectors** such as mining, steel, cement, aviation and others.

   LeadIT is supported by the **World Economic Forum** WEF and the **Stockholm Environment Institute** is its Secretariat.

   Despite Covid19 constraints, its interactions and deliberations have continued. Its membership has now grown to 37. The group now comprise **18 countries,** including **US**, which joined last year. **Japan and South Africa** have joined recently. **France, Germany, UK, Austria, Denmark and Finland** are also members.

   The group also includes **19 large companies**. India's **Dalmia Cement**, **Mahindra** Group and **Spice Jet** are among these. Sweden's major companies **Volvo, Skanska, Hybrit Steel, LKAB, SSAB, Vattenfall** are also members.

   Earlier last month, a day before the Stockholm+50 Conference, a Ministerial meeting of LeadIT was held which was co-chaired by the Ministers of Environment from Sweden and India. Ministers from a number of other countries including UK and US participated.

Several big companies such as Volvo, Dalmia and Mahindra were there. Many Startups who are working in decarbonisation field were also there.

The LeadIT Secretariat at the Stockholm Environment Institute has been working on several **useful studies** for instance on the **supply chains for building and construction industries**, and the **role of international financial institutions** in supporting **green steel**.

There have been discussions on **Sustainable Mining** & **Green Hydrogen** also.

4. **India's advantage on the ability to scale is being witnessed through its advancements in Digital Transformation like iStack for example - what are the ways in which these technologies can benefit people and nations?**

   Today **all major challenges are global** and all **solutions can also only be global**.

   Any global challenge – such as achieving **SDGs** or combating **global warming**, or fighting **pandemic** or countering **terrorism** – requires global cooperation.

   India represents around **one fifth of the global population**. It is also one of the **fastest growing large economies** in the world today.

   Therefore, whether it is the achievement of sustainable development goals, eradication of poverty, fight against climate change or pandemic, and building peace & security by countering terrorism and conflicts, **India has a big role** in solving any of these global challenges.

   Digital and other technology interventions today are able to **scale up development solutions**.

   Over the last few years, a complete **digital transformation** is happening in India. This was further accelerated during pandemic.

   This transformation is led by the extensive **digital infrastructure** or the **iStack** that has been built by the Government, which is unique in that it is both **open** and **free**.

   The creation of biometric-based unique digital identity for all 1.3 billion Indians, the opening of hundreds of millions of bank accounts for the previously

unbanked population and linking of these accounts with the digital identity; the creation of digital payment interface; and the consent-based digital data sharing has led this transformation.

On the one hand this has allowed **financial inclusion, public services & welfare** and **delivery of e-services at an unprecedented scale and speed in a transparent and accountable manner**, on the other hand this is leading to an unleashing of **private enterprise** in coming up with digital solutions across a number of sectors using the open and free iStack.

In the last **five years,** the **subscriber base** for mobile broadband in India has **doubled to 765 million**. India's share of **mobile app downloads is 15%** of the world's total. **Mobile phone subscriptions** are around **1.2 billion.**

Average data use has increased **three times to 18 GB per month per user**. India has the **lowest cost of mobile data** in the world – at **0.07 USD for 1 GB**.

All this is translating to huge advantages of scale - you can take any sector – offering digital services through **FinTech, EduTech, HealthTech, AgriTech**.

The **Startup scene** is exploding in India. Despite Covid19 pandemic, last year, as many as **44 unicorns** came out of India. This reflects **huge investor confidence in the technology solutions that are targeting scale**.

Similarly, another advantage of scale is seen in renewable energy sector where the **per unit operating cost of solar** has already fallen to below that of thermal in India. The **International Solar Alliance** is also helping by scaling up the such solutions at an international level.

India's big push and huge ambitious targets towards climate action means that **all cleaner technology or renewable energy solutions such as electric vehicles, green hydrogen, solar power, green batteries** and so on will benefit from the **advantage of scale**. This will **reduce cost of funding** and **help innovation**.

All these technology-led developments are of some interest to a number of our partners – whether in the digital delivery of services or in renewable energy and many other sectors.

5. **The Indian start-up ecosystem recently added its 100th unicorn and today every 3rd unicorn globally is from India - As Ambassador what would be**

your message to the youth in Sweden considering starting up? Why should they look at India?

Both India and Sweden have emerged as hubs for startups. While Sweden has been known for its vibrant Startup scene for some years, in the last few years, India has quickly emerged as the world's **third largest Startup ecosystem**.

Despite Covid19, the maximum number of Unicorns – **44** to emerge during 2021 was from India!

This shows the tremendous **energy and dynamism** in the Indian youth, the **digital transformation** and the **ecosystem** that facilitates **seed money, technology and incubation**.

It also shows the **confidence of investors**, which flows from the fact that the startups in India have a **huge market to service**. That **scale advantage** is almost unique.

This is true for almost any sector – **Fintech, Edutech, Healthtech, Agritech, Spacetech** …

Pandemic constraints have further speeded up this transformation through innovative solutions.

We are in touch with the Startup ecosystem here in Stockholm. There is lot of **interest** towards India. **Many Indian entrepreneurs** are also active in the startup ecosystem here.

Swedish companies such as Truecaller and Spotify have had success in Indian market.

There is **clear realization of the scale advantage** that India offers.

6. **India and Sweden have strong value systems of circularity or zero, (which is *shunya* in sanskrit,) and lagom, (which means in moderation or in balance in Swedish) - and if we connect these to this year's theme, where we approach sustainability from the lens of 'The World is One Family' - which in the Indian ethos translates to 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' then how can India and Sweden can work together and help achieve circularity and a balance for the planet as one family (especially in development partnerships) and a more sustainable world) ?**

Yes, circularity is an important theme for both India and Sweden. The concept of balance or harmony is an important thread in Indian tradition. Sweden represents a modern approach towards sustainability.

The **Indian tradition** of treating the whole world as a family understands this fundamental **inter-connectedness** and **interdependence**.

The ancient Viking symbol of Tree of Life also emphasises this interconnectedness and balance and cycle of life.

The **millennia old concept of Mother Earth** across many societies or the **more recent Gaia Hypothesis** that treats earth as a self-regulating system are also similar holistic understandings.

Today, sustainability of our **economic models, production and consumption patterns, our lifestyles** have become the most urgent themes before all of us.

Today, **economies** on different continents, **peace & security** of distant nations, **health** of societies are all inter-dependent.

The recent **Covid19** Pandemic; Global **financial crises**, the international **energy, food and fertilizer crises**; **supply chain disruptions**; the global ramifications of **terrorism** and **regional conflicts** all tell us that wherever we may be living, our lives, wellbeing are more and more inter-linked.

Pandemic and **Global Warming** have, especially brought home this realisation very sharply.

Solutions to these global challenges can also only be global and collective.

This means that **only through real cooperation** one can achieve a more sustainable world. The **rich and developed** economies have to play an active part not only in terms of **moral responsibility** but for **their own survival** and the survival of the next generation.

We are all in it together. The World is One Family.

This theme also extends to our engagement with our partners.

Both India and Sweden have long traditions of working with partners on development projects.

If I may briefly recall, **despite being a developing economy**, ever since she became **independent**, India has been coming forward to offer assistance by way of **higher education, capacity building, training and appropriate technological solutions** to fellow developing countries, many of whom were not even independent at the time.

This was aimed at helping nations build their own capacities and become self-reliant.

Gradually Indian development partnership projects have become **much larger in scale** both in our **neighbourhood and in Africa, small island states, and other developing** economies.

India's development partnership projects are based completely on the choice and priorities of the partners.

Many of these focus on providing **people-centric development solutions** such as **public transport, renewable energy, irrigation, public health, hospitals, education, infrastructure, low-cost housing** etc.

There is a special focus on the environment protection in these projects by way of **energy efficiency, renewables, waste management, water harvesting, use of cleaner technologies, light materials, weather forecasting, digital transformation** and so on.

There is a clear focus on the **sustainability, climate action and adaptation, disaster risk resilience**.

India has also launched two major global initiatives with partners - the **International Solar Alliance** and **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure** in recent years.

India is also working with the United Nations through the **India UN Fund** to support a range of projects in **LDCs** that help **attain SDGs, Agenda 2030 and help build disaster resilience and promote climate action**.

India is also working with Brazil and South Africa through the **IBSA Fund** to assist fellow developing countries meet their **development objectives**.

All these efforts are aimed at helping countries **build their capacities** towards **sustainable development**.

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