**Prayagraj Kumbh 2019: Demonstration and Communication of India’s Commitment and Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, a divine and majestic event, took place between 15th January 2019 until 04th March 2019, total duration of 49 days. It was attended by over 250 million people from across India and overseas from over 192 countries including mission heads of 72 nations and over 5,000 Non-Resident Indians. Of the total footfall of 250 million over 49 days, around 45% of it was just during the three days of royal bath, 22.5 million on first day of royal bath on 15 January. The day of second royal bath, 04 February, was considered most auspicious and, therefore, it attracted most people, 55 million in just 24 hours. On the third and last day of royal bath, 10 February, over 20 million took the holy dip. Other than the three days of royal bath, there were another three important bathing days, 21 January, 19 February, and 04 March. Besides the six important days, people came on all the other days also.

Besides the general public, Prayagraj (formerly known as Allahabad, changed to Prayagraj in October 2018) Kumbh 2019 was attended by high government officials including the Prime Minister and the President of India, the Governors and the Chief Ministers of many states, several Union ministers as well as ministers from the States, many celebrities, people from films, media, academic, research and religious institutions, Government Departments, Corporates, NGOs, CBOs and who so ever wanted to put up their stalls showcasing their programmes, schemes, products, activities. The Kumbh was a fantastic opportunity to reach out to people so effectively, in such a short duration and just at one place.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 made three Guinness World Records, the first one, for plying the largest ever bus fleet to a pilgrimage site, successfully parading 503 buses along a 3.2 km stretch of National Highway on Thursday, 28 February 2019; second one, for the World’s largest and quickest handprint painting created by 7664 people putting the impression of their palms on a canvas on the theme ‘Jai Gange’ (Glory to Holy River Ganges) in the span of just 8 hours on 1st March 2019; and the third one, for a mammoth sanitation drive, most people, more than 10,000 cleanliness warriors led by Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Mr. Siddharth Nath Singh, sweeping multiple venues at five locations on 2nd March 2019. The State of Uttar Pradesh made preparations for these Guinness World Records well in advance and Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 provided the wonderful opportunity to showcase and bag these records.

UNESCO in 2017 inscribed Kumbh on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (ich.unesco.org/en/RL/01158). Kumbh, the festival of the Sacred Pitcher as is known in Sanskrit language, is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, during which participants bathe or take a dip in a sacred river, the confluence of holy Ganges, the Yamuna and mystical invisible Saraswati. After the confluence the Ganges continues further, other two end there. Devotees believe that by bathing in the Ganges one is freed from sins liberating her/him from the cycle of birth and death. Millions of people reach the place without any invitation. The congregation includes ascetics, saints, sadhus, aspirants-kalpavasis and visitors.

Kumbh is held at Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik every four years by rotation and is attended by millions of people irrespective of caste, creed or gender. Its primary bearers, however, belong to akhadas and ashrams, religious organizations are individuals living on alms. Kumbh plays a central spiritual role in the country, exerting a mesmeric influence on ordinary Indians. The event encapsulates the science of astronomy, astrology, spirituality, ritualistic traditions, and social and cultural customs and practices, making it extremely rich in knowledge. As it is held in four different cities in India, it involves different social and cultural activities, making this a culturally diverse festival. Knowledge and skills related to the tradition are transmitted through ancient religious manuscripts, oral traditions, historical travelogues and texts produced by eminent historians. However, the teacher-student relationship of the sadhus in the ashrams and akhadas remains the most important method of imparting and safeguarding knowledge and skills relating to Kumbh Mela (www.kumbh.gov.in).

‘Prayag’ is confluence of rivers. There are five prayags on holy river Ganges, all located in Garhwal region of State of Uttarakhand, Central Himalaya. Prayagraj means the Emperor Prayag and it is the highest order Prayag, most revered and sacred. According to Hindu scriptures God worshipped and created universe at this place, there are several other beliefs adding to the glory of Prayagraj.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was uniquely organised on a mega scale making it divine and majestic ((‘Divya’ and ‘Bhavya’ in Sanskrit and Hindi languages). To manage the magnificent event Government of Uttar Pradesh formed Prayagraj Mela Authority (PMA) well in advance in 2018. The formation of PMA ensured providing the basic amenities to the devotees visiting the Mela. For the Kumbh 2019, modern technologies were deployed to enhance the ‘Divyata’ (Divinity) and ‘Bhavyata’ (magnificence) of the Kumbh. Gates based on various themes welcomed pilgrims and information boards guided them to the destinations. Huge pandals and tents facilitated the stay of pilgrims and visitors including the tent city having 5-star facilities for the foreigners on the Kumbh premise itself. Various lighting arrangements were made on the banks including façade lighting that engulfed the pilgrims in diverse colours. Different cuisines and gourmet food in the food courts satisfied the appetite of the pilgrims. Hygiene and sanitation in food court was quite up to the mark.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 became very different as compared to Kumbh at other places for, firstly, the tradition of long-term Kalpvas is practised only in Prayag; secondly, the Triveni Sangam is considered as the centre of the earth in few scriptures; thirdly, Lord Brahma performed the Yajna here for creating the universe; and fourthly, Prayagraj is called the shrine of pilgrimages, but the most important reason is that the significance of performing rituals and tapas at Prayagraj is of highest among all pilgrimages and provides one with the highest virtue ([www.kumbh.gov.in/en/prayagraj](http://www.kumbh.gov.in/en/prayagraj)).

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 landscape was organised over 3,200 hectares having 1,500 premium tents in a tent city especially created to cater to the high-end tourists. There were modest stay arrangements for over 20,000 people, 122,500 toilets regularly serviced by 15,000 cleanliness workers keeping the entire premise clean and open defecation free. Over 20,000 dustbins, one kept at every 50 meters, serviced by 140 tippers and 40 compacters operating 24X7 kept solid waste management very effective. Daily 92 million litres good quality safe drinking water was supplied. Parking facility for more than 500,000 vehicles was arranged. Over 40,700 energy efficient LED lights, 1000 CCTV cameras with GPS facility, over 524 shuttle buses and over 1,000 electric rickshaws to ferry people between railway and bus stations and other destinations to the Kumbh site. More than 20,000 security force were deployed. Fire and emergency services 40 vehicles, 40 watch towers for security watch and media coverage, drone cameras and helicopter keeping strict vigil over the entire premise, helicopter showering petals on the devotees and keeping a watch on the entire landscape, 218 media camps, digital signages displaying information and announcements, free highspeed Wi Fi the entire Kumbh premise was linked with Goggle map. There was Kumbh digital journey through virtual reality kiosks. Cleanliness, law and order, services and supplies were monitored using ICT facilities. Beside the displays at the Kumbh site, distant people were connected with the event through websites, mobile apps and social media showcasing a strong and effective communication strategy and paln.

Over 30 cultural programmes were conducted in large size pandals, especially created for the occasion, where more than 12,500 artists made performances cutting across messages on various themes serving to the fulfilment of various SDGs very effectively. Cultural events at various places were held daily, total number reaching to over 500. Many overseas groups did their performances. Cultural troops from 11 countries were invited to perform Ramlila (a performance based on Hindu epic Ramanaya) which attracted large number of people.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was well equipped and serviced with round the clock banking, telecommunication, food and civil supplies, milk supply, railway reservation, missing people, lost and found, ambulances, first aid and mobile health clinics.

Finding Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 a wonderful platform, RCE Srinagar took the opportunity to make observations on the demonstrations and communications pertaining to low carbon practices, SDGs, Aichi biodiversity targets, climate change commitments and sustainability by various stakeholders especially the Union and State governments. It was found that the Government of India and the Government of Uttar Pradesh have very good programmes and have been doing good towards achieving the SDGs and other commitments. Kumbh was a perfect demonstration site for open defecation free, safe drinking water, clean and green environment, energy efficient transport & lighting, becoming digital, using ICT, practicing sustainability, life styles reducing carbon and other footprints, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, disaster management and preparedness etc. People happily walked over 15-20 km to reach to the bathing ghats demonstrating their will and commitment towards low carbon lifestyles, being sustainable and environment friendly and living in harmony with nature. The rural people stood better in terms of using Earth’s resource more wisely and efficiently keeping their footprint low.

Through various programmes as well as personal interaction and observations during Kumbh huge sharing of knowledge, tradition and culture took place. RCE Srinagar took part in discussions, advised several NGOs, CBOs in organising various events and their displays and stalls and in making their communication effective towards promoting and achieving SDGs. RCE Srinagar has formed a group of organisations and people who participated in Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 to follow up the agenda taken up post Kumbh in their respective areas and helping each other. RCE Srinagar will take the lead role in making this group strong, guide them for planning and doing various activities towards promoting ESD and achieving SDGs. RCE Srinagar, after brilliantly and uniquely experiencing Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, will organise itself better and do lot more during the future Kumbhs and other such events.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was a perfect demonstration of environment friendly, low carbon lifestyles being practiced by the people of India. Kumbh has served the purpose of creating awareness and educating people showcasing demonstrations on SDGs, sustainability, biodiversity conservation and environment protection using both traditional wisdoms coupled with modern science and technology. It has certainly helped in promoting a low carbon society which is also environmentally sustainable, climate smart and disaster resilient. During the occasion of Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, RCE Srinagar made the presence of RCE Community felt and promoted ESD there in various ways.

Some feedback received on Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, 1. “The atmosphere is rustic, yet replete with spirituality and energy. It’s a great experience and can be felt only through physical experience”, 2. “Pictures and the words can not describe the energy flowing here. It’s wonderful to see spirituality rallying thousand of people towards a river”, 3. It’s the best planned, organised and coordinated Kumbh so far” (Source: The Times of India March 5, 2019).

**Future plan of RCE Srinagar**

Kumbh happens in a grand way. Full Kumbh takes place every 12 years, period that Jupiter takes to complete one circle. Ardh (half) Kumbh takes place every 6 years. Next Kumbh at Prayagraj will be in 2025.

At Prayagraj, besides Kumbh, both full and half, every year at the same time, with same significance, a fair is organised starting from Makar Sankranti (around 14 January) ending at Vasant Panchami and Maghi Purnima (around middle of February). The fair during non Kumbh years is called as ‘Magh Mela’(a religious and spiritual congregation of people during the holy month of Magh of the Hindu calendar). It spreads over 30 days and on an average over 50 million people visit it. RCE Srinagar will organise ESD programmes aimed at achieving the SDGs.

Haridwar in Uttarakhand is another Kumbh site. What happens in Prayagraj happens in Haridwar. Varanasi is another important place of religious congregation, round the year but more during the period of Magh Mela. RCE Srinagar has made ties with local organisations, Voluntary Institute for Community Applied Science (VICAS) in Prayagraj; Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development (IESD), Bararas Hindu University (BHU) in Varanasi; and Lok Paryavaran Shiksha Sansthan (LPSS), Divya Prem Sewa Mission (DPSM), GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and Sustainable Development (GBPNIHESD) and HN Bahuguna Garhwal (Central) University, Srinagar in Uttarakhand for programmes in Haridwar. A multi-media mobile exhibition including folk media will be developed and used to promote SDGs. RCE Srinagar has good experience in developing effective education and communication material and communication strategy. It will conduct regular programmes with the help of its partners for promoting SDGs. Approach identified is capacity building local youth and helping them take government programmes to the Gram Panchayats. Several other dimensions, as required, will be added to the programme as we move on.

This ESD initiative and the activities planned will promote almost all the 17 SDGs, however, the SDG 1: No poverty, SDG 2: Zero hunger, SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing, SDG 4: Quality education, SDG 5: Gender equality, SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation, SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities, SDG 14: Life below water, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, will be addressed specifically.

Title

ESD at religious and spiritual congregations for promoting action towards Sustainable Development Goals, Aichi Biodiversity Targets and Paris Climate Agreement

Rationale (why activities or policies described, or information shared through the educational practices/material are needed – within 100-200 words)

Humanity’s increasing footprint, existing world population already overshooting the Planet Earth’s biocapacity presently requiring over 1.6 Planets, human population and consumerism still increasing leading to breaking of the thread of sustainability poses biggest ever challenge for the survival of humanity, not only of the future generations but also of the present generation. SDGs along with the targets set for Aichi biodiversity and Paris climate agreement need to be achieved at the earliest to save the humanity. ESD has proved an important tool to educate and motivate people and trigger action. The religious and spiritual congregations on holy river Ganges attended by huge number of people, being in good faith and receptive mood, provide a fantastic opportunity for promoting action towards achieving SDGs, low carbon life styles and achieving environmental sustainability. India being world’s second largest populated country and quite soon going to become the first one needs special attention for achieving SDGs and making Planet sustainable for the entire world community.

Objectives (goals of activities or policies described, teaching or learning outcomes – within 50-100 words)

At religious and spiritual congregations people come as devotees and are in best receptive mood. The entire premise is considered holy, pious and sacred and messages told to people are received well, respected and put into practice. River Ganges is considered holiest by Indians, also by people from overseas, and the religious and spiritual congregations there as divine. Promoting environmental sustainability through achieving SDGs by educating people coupled with showcasing demonstrations can be best done here. The success stories, displays and demonstrations make people believe and put into practice the education imparted related to achieving SDGs and other such targets. The government authorities organizing the congregations besides doing themselves invite stakeholders to make displays and communication for promoting government programs, policies and plans including SDGs. RCE Srinagar with its partner organizations used Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 to communicate for SDG, Aichi biodiversity targets and India’s commitment to Paris climate agreement.

Activities and/or practices employed (within 50-150 words)

Through discussion amongst partners following themes were shortlisted for demonstration and communication, open defecation free environment, safe drinking water, clean and green environment, energy efficient transport & lighting, use of digital and ICT, reducing carbon and other footprints making life styles sustainable, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction. Needed IEC materials, in English and Hindi, were developed and designed. Exhibitions were set up manned by the expert communicators to help visitors understand the contents. Panel discussions, dialogues, meetings were organized. Multi media mobile exhibition was taken around across the Kumbh 2019 premise. Theme based folk media performances, puppetry and street plays, were organized. Participating organizations were helped in making their communication material and communication strategy effective. Future plans to continue the initiative started post Kumbh 2019 were discussed amongst all the partners.

Size of academic audience (approximately how many learners did the material from this project reach?)

Over 500,000 people;

Around 100,000 were addressed directly through meetings and discussions and over 400,000 visiting demonstrations, attending folk media performances.

The 500,000 people will discuss it further in their locations taking the total reach out to at least 50,00,000 (5 million)

Results (within 100-150 words)

1. People, over 500,000, liked the demonstrations and exhibitions, appreciated them. They also interacted with our communicators indicating their keen interest and they understood the messages cut across.
2. The activities have contributed significantly towards achieving open defecation free environment, safe drinking water, clean and green environment, energy efficient transport & lighting, use of digital and ICT, reducing carbon and other footprints making life styles sustainable, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction.
3. Many amongst the people addressed were educators and communicators and showed keen interest in replicating these efforts in their area, also adapting and translating the IEC material into their local languages.

Lessons learned (factors in success or failure, challenges and opportunities – within 50-100 words)

The crowed was very diverse coming from all over India. Most of the rural people didn’t know English and Hindi and therefore there were language constraints in communicating with outside people.

Besides the IEC material, the communicators of the Team RCE and its partners also knew only Hindi and English and not the other Indian regional languages. This inhibited in making our communication effective.

On the days of royal bath, there was too much crowed so though there were more people but for logistics and law and order problems they could not be reached out. Government’s priority was to manage the crowed, no untoward incident happens especially the stampede. So, we were restricted in making desired reach out.

Key messages (‘elevator speech’ about project - within 50 words)

Huge number of people in fine spirit and mood, coming voluntarily, feeling blessed and obliged being called upon by God on the divine and sacred land on the banks of Holy Ganges, provides perfect opportunity to create awareness on emerging environment and sustainable development challenges and promote measures helping achieve sustainability.

Through discussion amongst partners shortlist themes for making demonstration and communication; Develop needed IEC materials; Set up exhibitions manned by the expert communicators; Organize panel discussions, dialogues, meetings; Take around the multi-media mobile exhibition; Conduct theme based folk media performances, puppetry and street plays; Help partner organizations in making their communication material and communication strategy effective; Develop future plans to continue the initiative further making effective resource utilization