Keyword: climate-change

Headline: Water at the heart of climate action

Byline: Kim Jensen

Published Date: 04:10 AM March 22, 2020

Section: opinion

Word Count: 618

Content:

The threat of climate change continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. Research warns that many of the Philippines' coastal areas could be submerged in about three decades as a result of rising sea levels and heavy rainfall. On the other extreme, the Manila water crisis last year, aggravated by the El Niño dry spell, reminded us that the country is not immune to water scarcity either. Climate change often manifests itself through changes in the water cycle. On one hand, we are seeing floods, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and intense storms, affecting entire nations and the livelihood of millions. On the other, climate change is also responsible for driving the world's water scarcity issue, depleting a resource critical not only for survival but also for the smooth functioning of nearly all industries and sectors.

The inextricable link between the climate and water crisis means that we cannot look at these two issues in silos. Beyond working toward reducing our overall carbon footprint to mitigate climate change, we must adopt a holistic approach that considers how the two entities of water and climate play into each other — be it building our resilience to water-related disasters or tackling water scarcity aggravated by climate change.

Reducing the carbon footprint of water to mitigate climate change. Climate mitigation strategies are driven by the global movement to reduce carbon emissions, with the aim of reducing the rate of climate change. One way to reduce carbon emissions is by driving greater energy efficiency across sectors.

A key area is in water itself. Water processes consume large amounts of energy, from supplying drinking water, to irrigation, to industrial processes such as wastewater and chemical treatment, to heating, cooling, and air-conditioning in buildings. Pumps — which underpin water movement and treatment throughout these processes — contribute as much as 10 percent of the global electricity consumption. With fossil fuels being the source of most of the energy produced today, water processes are indirectly responsible for producing large amounts of greenhouse gases.

Technology has been a key enabler of energy efficiency, and with the advent of the digital era, we are now equipped with capabilities to achieve considerable efficiencies in water processes. For instance, digital technology can enable pumps to be more intuitive and responsive to fluctuating demand, adjusting water flow through real-time monitoring. This, in turn, keeps energy use efficient and will go a long way in reducing our carbon footprint.

Managing water smartly to adapt to climate change. Alongside climate mitigation, it is also crucial that we have effective climate adaptation strategies in place. One way is by using our scarce water resources more efficiently, which calls for all stakeholders — from governments to businesses to communities — to incorporate water stewardship in their activities.

While conscientiousness is key to water stewardship, there is often an intention-action gap arising from a lack of either awareness or ability to manage water resources. We can address these issues by leveraging technological advancements.

Today, which is World Water Day, reminds us of the interconnected nature of the climate and water crisis. While this presents a complex challenge, it also serves as an opportunity for us to address the two biggest threats we face today by adopting a holistic approach. While nations' efforts are increasingly reflecting an understanding of the interdependencies of water and climate, it is important to remember that collective action will be key to managing these global issues.

* * *

Kim Jensen is group senior vice president and regional managing director of Grundfos Asia Pacific Region.