

# Data sharing is important in tackling the spread of zoonotic diseases, says Dr Soumya Swaminathan



Kochi: Technological breakthroughs, along with new policies and political support, can solve the problems in the areas of environment and fisheries, and collaboration and data sharing is important in tackling the spread of zoonotic diseases, according to Dr Soumya Swaminathan, former Chief Scientist of the World Health Organisation. She was speaking after

inaugurating various initiatives undertaken as part of a major research project on water quality assessment of Vembanad Lake and waterborne diseases at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute in Kochi. Dr Soumya said that focus should be given to health and environmental and climatic changes to curtail the spread of diseases. "We need the scientific community to come up with technological breakthroughs that can solve the problem, and at the same time, we need policies that can promote science-based solutions in the areas of the environment and fisheries, where we need policies to help the communities in the coastal areas to have a livelihood. What is needed along with this is political support," she said.

Commenting on the environmental and climate changes causing damages, she said that we live in a troubled geopolitical environment. It is very uncertain today. "On the one hand, it is geopolitics; on the other hand, it is climate change, which is rapidly moving and unpredictable and is causing not just economic damage but also loss of lives and livelihoods. We see now in different parts of the world, fires in Los Angeles, Pakistan, landslides in Wayanad, and flooding in coastal areas are examples," she said, adding that in coastal areas, the heat translates into something much more dangerous. Another issue is socio-economic vulnerabilities. In a city, if there is a flood, it is the low-income people who are the most affected. We need to focus more attention on those people. Policies should focus on cities. Cities are more vulnerable towards climate change and pandemics," added Dr Soumya.

Regarding the one health initiative and pandemic preparedness, she said that more collaboration, networking, and sharing of data are needed to respond to the occurrences of zoonotic diseases. "I have been advocating the need to link the data and create an environmental health regulatory agency. Because we see most of the health threats today are environmental health threats. A big risk factor is diet. We still have a problem of undernutrition, anaemia, and the risk of growing obesity, overnutrition, and non-communicable diseases. Kerala and Tamil Nadu are states with a very high burden of non-communicable diseases. The main risk factor is diet. Pollution is another risk factor," she pointed out. Dr Soumya also appreciated the state for dealing with the Nipah outbreak in the past two years without deaths.

At the event held on Friday, she inaugurated Water Clinics, an integrative database for water-associated diseases in coastal communities, the Cleanse App, and the Aquadip App. CMFRI Director Dr. Grinson George presided over the event.