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International Day of Climate Action:

Nature calls for help

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The 18th Asia-Pacific Congress of Environmental Journalists on "Educate to end Climate Poverty" was an event, happening in the nick of time for the International Day of Climate Action being observed today.



Deforestation- destroying homes of the wild

In 2008, Centre for Environmental Justice conducted a survey in Hambantota, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Nuwara Eliya, Ratnapura, Mahiyangana and Galle to obtain public perceptions of climate change and adaptation.

The sample majority was fishermen, farmers and gem miners, depending on natural resources for livelihood. The rest was area leaders and professionals.

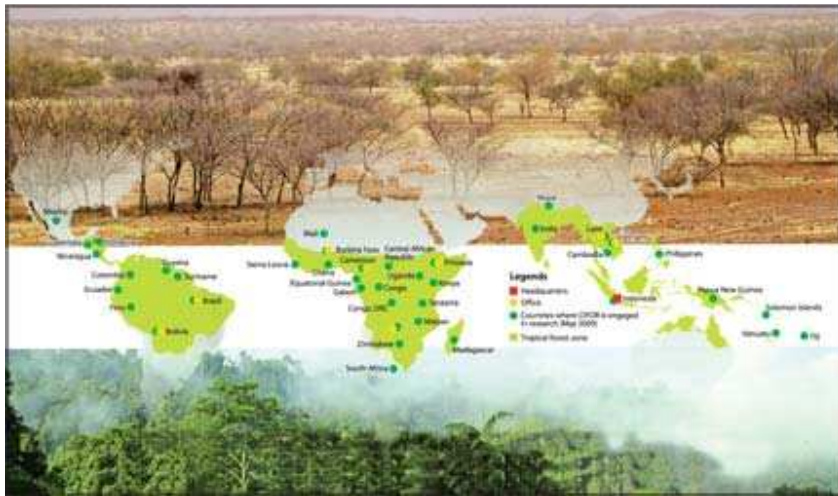
Many thought that the rainfall intensity had increased and the monsoon shifted backwards.

The dry and wet seasons for agriculture could not be predicted easily. Some farmers moved to alternative jobs. Some areas changed cultivation from paddy to vegetables.

Natural disasters

Frequency of natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and landslides was thought of as increased. Fish harvesting period reduced. High temperatures brought on skin irritations. Springs dried up. Certain invasive plants spread and certain other flora and fauna species decreased.

Some of the notable findings are both negative and positive. Flies and mosquitoes have increased.



Courtesy: Centre for International Forestry Research

In Nuwara Eliya, the mist and cold is reduced and even the nights feel hot. Avocado, Anoda and Jack trees grow well there now and bear fruit. Some species of ferns and orchids are heavily reduced. The flower sizes of the Hakgala Gardens are reduced and the colours have changed.

The congress participants were shown a harrowing movie clip of the impacts of climate change by Yani

Saloh, Media Manager, Centre for International Forestry Research, Indonesia.

As dark shadows moved across cities and diseases spread across the globe, she was overcome with emotion and had to stop until she recovered herself. Indonesia had been particularly prone to tsunami and earthquakes in the recent times.

The next presenter, Thushan Kapurusinghe, Project Leader, Turtle Conservation Project, did it differently.

He showed how the project changed poachers of sea turtles in Rekawa into conservationists. All the seven species of sea turtles in the world are endangered and five of them are in Sri Lanka. Kapurusinghe offered a solution to the poachers.

He gave them a livelihood as carers of turtles and changed their mentality. They are now employed and the turtles protected.

"If you make people sad, frustrated and angry, it will not work," commented Terry Clayton, Psychologist and Writer, Information and Knowledge Group, International Water Management Institute. "You must give them a solution." He emphasised his view of the difference between alarm, and alarmism which led people into fright and flight. But, if the sea temperature rises, the turtles are again in the danger of being extinct. "Temperature affects their sex-ratio," said Kapurusinghe. "If the temperature rises, all will be females.

If it reduces, all will be males." If the beaches vanish, where will they go? "Sri Lanka's dry zone is going to increase and the wet zone decrease and become very wet," said Prof. Sarath Kotagama, President, Field Ornithology Group.

Food and life

"If the base climate changes, agriculture, food and life patterns change." Strengthen science education, he admonished. "Impacts will be less felt in a more diverse eco-system," said Dr. Jini Dela, World Conservation Union.

The disasters are going to strike the poor most, said Uchita de Zoysa, Chairman, Global Sustainability Solutions, stressing the right to development in a climate-constrained world. "Sustainable consumption cannot be achieved on climatic negotiation but on equity and equitable consumption. It is about how each one of us should live sustainably."

A proposed global tax on aviation can raise \$26M for adaptation and mitigation, said Libby Southwell, Director, adlib consulting. Mass tourism harms. Authentic experiential tourism benefits the local community. But tourism is consumer driven. "Eco tourism is very niche and not all tourists want wild life and nature."

Replace eco tourism with responsible tourism with the consumer changing his behaviour for a responsible holiday." Using the expression "bastardisation of culture to make it a commodity", she spoke of the need to be socially and economically responsible in tourism. Tertiary education on hotel and hospitality industry could aid this. Palitha Gurusinghe, Eco Tourism Foundation, mentioned that Sri Lanka needed to be positioned as a green tourist destination where benefits are trickled to the community, and not as a green washing destination where hotels with thatched kabanas become "green hotels" overnight.

Transport and power generation are the two sectors important to cut emissions in Sri Lanka, pointed out Prof. Hemanthi Ranasinghe, Chairperson, Media Resource Service of SLAAS.

Naturally aerated

"Architects can design naturally aerated building which use a lot of natural light, with trees around. We need to reduce energy and water by 10 per cent and waste by 20 per cent." Bimalika Perera of Clean Air Sri Lanka said that the vehicle emission testing program in the Western Province had begun only last year.

The vehicle owner perceptions about the emission regulations need to change, she noted.

"Carbon trading is only a market mechanism," commented Hemantha Withanage, Executive Director, Centre for Environmental Justice. "Community is the centre of all solutions. Adapt to wind and water!" According to Dr. Thusitha Sugathapala, Vice President, Clean Air Sri Lanka, we have used 50 per cent of our known fossil fuel. "By 2050, a temperature increase of 1.5-4.5 Celsius degrees can occur," he said. Global dimming, in which soot, ash and sulphur block sun rays, decreases temperature. "You can act on common sense and reduce emissions to air, soil and water. No solution except to change life style."

As Svetlana Y. Dylevskaya, Editor, Green Women Ecological News Agency, Kazakhstan, quoted from Mike Shanahan, the climate story is a political story, a financial story and ultimately

about justice and equity. Will there be equity for developing countries on the negotiating table? Must we wait for politics to give us a solution? Can we not do our little to avert climate disasters? As Yani said, whatever we must do, we should do now, without depending too much on Copenhagen.

Are we educated to end climate poverty? The idea is clearly there. If you can grasp it.

[Climate Change]

When the climate changes in temperature, rain fall and wind speed, its negative outcomes could be melting of ice caps and glaciers, sea level rise, spread of vector-borne diseases, loss of crop yield and bio-diversity, acidifying oceans and increased intensity of cyclones and floods. Some people could become climate refugees.

The climate can change by the heat-trapping green house effect, brought on by industrial carbon emissions and deforestation that releases carbon stored in trees and peat land. Gases such as carbon dioxide do not allow the sun's heat energy to escape from the earth's atmosphere. The result is global warming, the increase of the earth's average temperature from year to year. It leads to climate change.

Solutions

Mitigation tries to reduce causes for climate change. Adaptation adjusts natural and human systems to reduce climate change damage. Forests and people will have to cope with changes in average temperatures, precipitation rates and intense weather events of droughts and floods. This helps people to manage climate change and protect their livelihoods. One way is changing the way we use water.

A greenhouse gas sink is a process which removes a greenhouse gas, an aerosol, or a precursor of a greenhouse gas from the atmosphere. A carbon sink absorbs carbon dioxide and retains stocks of carbon in organic matter such as forests, oceans and soil.