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A climatic...

Climate change consultant Tharuka Dissanaik, speaking to Ceylon Today, points out that this is due to several practical reasons. “For research and adaptation on climate change, it is difficult to give a budgetary percentage. This is because, unlike education and health where allocations can be reflected as a percentage of the total budget or government expenditure, climate change impacts are across sectors and ministries”. Impacts are felt in agriculture, fisheries, urban development, forestry, water management, irrigation, health, coastal and disaster management, making it difficult to quantify it as a percentage of the total budget. “In general, in the worst affected sectors such as agriculture, water management and coastal protection it would be good to see around 20% of the sectoral budget allocated for research and adaptation measures. Especially for drought and flood tolerant crops, land management, rehabilitating small irrigation tanks, strengthening coastal dunes and protecting mangrove areas. However there is no general agreement on this,” she states further.

Is Sri Lanka on the right track?

While politicians may wax eloquent about how ready we are to face food security issues, the reality of the situation is far more different. Sri Lanka, despite its middle income status, is an agricultural country. In days of yore, farmers relied on knowledge passed down through generations as the climate was more predictable but, the ground situation

today is markedly more complex. Sri Lanka does have a national strategy for climate change adaptation but it is yet to be put to the test at ground level. However, there are silver linings on the clouds – for the first time ever, the 2012 Annual Report of the Central Bank had an analysis of climate change and its impact on national development. “For Sri Lanka it is important to adapt, as we are not a great emitter of greenhouse gases. If we are to conform to international pressure on National Appropriate Mitigation measures, then it should be in those areas that also support our own development agenda- such as clean energy, efficient transportation and forestry” stresses Dissanaik.

Dire forecast

Climate scientists like John Nielsen-Gammon and Kerry Emanuel (npr.org) say that as the planet continues to heat up, so will the oceans; meaning that there will be more energy available for storms and likely more Class 4 and 5 typhoons just like Haiyan. The exact nature and manifestation of climate change impacts is still up for debate, even amongst the scientific community – the naysayers root for simply noting the changes in temperature and rainfall as an irregularity, whilst the positivists say that it indicates long term climatic change. At a recent meeting in Colombo, to discuss practical ‘no-regrets’ action to fight the increasing variability of climatic patterns, it was noted that the Government, as an overall strategy, hopes to create new job opportunities in the services sector; so that more people could be weaned away from agriculture. The declining contribution of agriculture in GDP will further reduce to 8% in 2020, according to the Finance Ministry. However, that does not mean that the state is going to turn a blind eye towards agriculture - to increase productivity and efficiency in agriculture, emphasis will be placed on improved technology and high-value production. Further, sectors such as fisheries and livestock are slated to improve through government-funded programmes. When a catastrophe such as Haiyan strikes the impacts of the climatic disaster is assessed. However, the longer term impacts on sensitive ecosystems and species is oft neglected. The impacts of climate change will invariably be felt in the climatic zones of a country altering their ecological features. Sri Lanka needs more funding to be allocated to studying changes in natural systems, forest composition and the fate of native and indigenous species within forests.

Adapting to the times

Dissanaik points out lessons (noted below) from successful climate change adaptation projects that could be easily incorporated into national development programmes, in order to make them more resilient. “The general rule of thumb is to advocate activities that will support ‘good’ development anyway, even if predicted climate impacts do not materialize,” she adds.

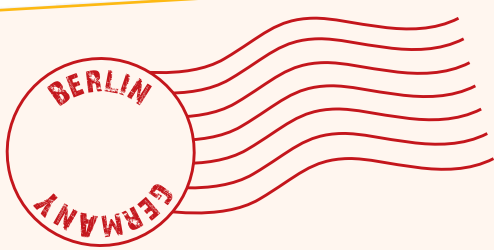


What could be done:

- There is great need for technological developments to reach the rural farmers and fishermen. This includes new varieties of climate and pest resistant crops; new techniques in water and land management; new breeds of livestock and early warning systems that could save lives, tools and implements of people.
- There is need for safety nets in rural areas in terms of accessing low-interest credit, compensation schemes and insurance to ensure that farmers and fishermen can return to their livelihood after the disaster.
- Highly vulnerable districts have now been identified, presenting an opportunity for Sri Lanka to design localized plans and strategies to overcome climate change, because the problems of Mulaitivu, Ratnapura and Hambantota are different and cannot be tackled by national level policy alone.
- Take a landscape level approach to development. Many rural development projects are narrowly planned and cause disruptive consequences on the natural and social environment. For example, if rehabilitating a village tank, ensure that catchment area is conserved and future siltation is reduced.
- At local level, interventions succeed if the two arms of local government (Divisional Secretariat and Pradeshiya Sabhas) cooperate for results. This is especially so in urban and semi-urban areas where the influence and responsibility is on the Pradeshiya Sabha to satisfy the basic requirements of the people.



(AFP)



Postcard from Rukshana

Winds of change

Hot sunny days are added to the past. Berlin is getting ready to welcome its comrade, the long, freezing winter season. Branches lose their leaves and change colour as they stand next to Berlin's signature graffiti infected structure, bearing the unwilling melancholy of what is to come. Till then, its beautiful colours read the story of tainted joy of autumn.