

Doing climate justice

Climate Justice

On the 8th and 9th of February 2008, OneWorld South Asia (OWSA), organised their seventh annual regional meeting on “Climate Justice for Realisation of the MDGs: Southern Perspectives and Voices”. The main aim of the consortium was to bring forth pertinent climate justice issues including issues relating to energy independence and global warming. Industry experts, Government officials, professionals, non-government representatives, and community stakeholders participated in the meeting. The meeting was a collaborative attempt to reconcile differences, integrate views, encourage entrepreneurship, facilitate negotiations and ensure the realisation of the much-talked-about Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

OneWorld South Asia has prioritised the following to contribute towards achieving the MDGs in their programming focus:

- Using new media tools for voicing the voiceless
- Capacity building and strengthening civil society organisations through the use of ICTs
- Building ICT capacity among grassroots communities and people
- Advocating for people friendly ICT policies

This conference enabled the network of over 800 partners and members to deliberate on an issue that confronts all.

Inaugural session

Naimur Rahman, OWSA Director, welcomed the dignitaries and delegates. Rahman’s message focused not only on the theme of the meeting but also on the aims and objectives of OWSA. The Guests of Honour were Walter Fust, Director General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Chair, Global



Welcome note by Naimur Rahman, Director of OWSA

Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and Saroj Devkota, Vice Chairman HLCIT, Govt of Nepal. Fust, while reaffirming the role of discussion and dialogues in fostering the realisation of MDGs, stated that he is hopeful that the two-day conference would lead to a common vision on climate justice issues and will help in the inclusion and assimilation of southern voices on MDGs and the realisation of MDGs. In his welcome note Walter Fust said, “I firmly believe that climate change is the defining human development issue of the 21st century.” Natwar Thakkar, Founder, Nagaland Gandhi Ashram, was the honorary Chief Guest in the summit. He optimistically added, “There is still a possibility...the entire value system has to be revolutionised. The craze for consumerism and emphasis on materialism has to be replaced by a more rational, more sensible and spiritually oriented lifestyle.” Jocelyne Josiah, Advisor, Media and ICT for Asia – UNESCO and Dana D. Fisher, Secretary and Director, USAID India, were special invitees to the session.

Building a Southern Perspective on Climate Justice

The first session that focused on the linkages between inclusive economic

growth, poverty eradication and climate change was moderated by the session chair, Walter Fust. The speakers in the session not only attempted to underscore the major concerns of climate change but also tried to decipher the inherent fallacies in climate policies, migration policies and growth policies. Tara De Mel, Chairperson, Worldview, Sri Lanka, speaking first in the plenary, set the ball rolling. She stated that climate change is not only an environmental issue but a socio-economic issue circumscribing all aspects. According to Tara, the scientific reality of climate change and the recurrent emission of greenhouse gases have to be countered with a strong political response and there is a need for energy policy reforms. Wasim Zamam, Director, UNFPA, South & West Asia, was the second person to speak in the plenary. He primarily focused on the population, migration and urbanisation issues. He aptly said that in most of the South-East Asian countries, there is an explicit lack of favourable migration, relocation and resettlement policies. Zamam opined that population growth factor is mainly responsible for climate change because growth in population leads to a depletion in natural reserves and resources. Minar Pimple, Deputy Director, UN Millennium Campaign

Asia, spoke about the ways to energise MDGs. He spoke about an interdependent relation between MDGs and climate change forum. The first session of the conference was enlightened by the video message of R K Pachauri, Chairman IPCC & Director General, Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI). Pachauri stressed on the need to assess the impacts of climate change. He also added that in order to ensure energy sufficiency and lessen the burden of greenhouse gas emissions, correct policy measures need to be adapted and implemented. He stated that the impact of climate change mainly fall on the poor and the underprivileged and said that the global community as a whole has to show a sense of responsibility, sense of fairness, equity and exercise of ethics because the poorest of the poor have done nothing to bring this problem on themselves. In furtherance of his statement he said, "I am not saying that South Asia has to wait for the rest of the world to provide that help. We ourselves, among ourselves can do a lot and I think it is time for us to join hands across political divisions, across boundary lines and to see how we can articulate these problems in a proper perspective and then come up with solutions,".

Rakesh Khanna, Taraenviro, India, deliberated upon biodiversity and climate change with special reference to food production. He spoke about the declining conditions of the agricultural lands, coral reefs and other coastal zones. Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, CEO & National Programme Director, Lead, Pakistan, spoke on inclusive economic development, shared sovereignty and survival issues. Expressing concern, Sheikh confirmed that there is no definite protocol for adaptation strategies. S Padmanabhan, Dy Director and Senior Advisor, USAID, focused on regional cooperation to ensure higher and better forms of sharing of renewable and other forms of energy in local and regional markets.

The first plenary session was followed by six parallel sessions, three sessions on the 8 February 2008 and three on the 9 February 2008. The major issues of discussion in the parallel sessions were food security; natural resources management; mitigation and adaptation strategies; inter-sectoral relationships; sustainable development; role of ICTs; role of new media; new initiatives, collaborations and partnerships. The parallel sessions focused on research solutions to climate change, role of civil society organisations, public-private partnerships, community development, capacity-building, natural disaster management, etc. The parallel sessions debated over the impacts of climate change on micro and macro variables and other socio-economic and environmental indicators.

Three major highlights at the meeting were the launch of 'LifeLines for Education', launch of 'South Asian Feminist Portal' and the initiation of 'National e-Governance Stakeholder's Forum'. The project 'LifeLines for Education', outlined and initiated by OWSA in collaboration with USAID, British Telecom (BT), Cisco, Vikramshila Education Resource Society, International Youth Foundation and QUEST Alliance, was launched on the 8 February after the first three parallel sessions. The project, 'digital service' provides teachers in rural India with access to resources and pedagogical assistance. Both 'South Asian Feminist Portal' and 'National e-Governance Stakeholder's Forum' were launched on 9 February after the first three parallel sessions.

Recommendations

During the two-day conference, the participants deliberated on climate justice issues ranging from good practices, mitigation strategies to re-designing of technical and policy parameters. Intense debates happened over the creation of inter-sectoral linkages, impact on South Asia's food security, income opportunities and livelihood resources and the would-be role of ICTs in tackling climate change issues.

By the end of the meeting, the panelists could recommend some areas that are relevant to tackle the issues and problems that emanate from climate change. Summing all the recommendations, Rajakutty, Professor & Head, Ph.D.(Economics), National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), India has suggested some recommendations:

- to help in the development of knowledge and understanding of the impacts of climate change
- to identify local and regional indicators
- to identify research areas
- to enhance energy efficiency
- to foster the growth of capacity-building agencies
- to ensure that donor agencies mitigate climate change impacts
- to enhance the role of ICTs and media in knowledge sharing and knowledge dissemination
- to continue dialogue through cooperation and coordination among ministries
- to combine, train and sensitise traditional and new media

In his concluding speech, Naimur Rahman said, "We come forward to advocate for a global solution to the global challenge of meeting climate change demands, underpinned by global institutional and financial mechanisms. We also seek the inclusion of the voices from the South, of the poor, the marginalised, and the grassroots communities in the climate change dialogue, and in formulating appropriate and just strategies for mitigating and adapting to climate change."

Conclusion

The finale of the meeting was reached with the adoption of a 'Position Document' that considered climate change as a global phenomenon, the impacts and incidences of which would be faced by all nations, the developed and the developing. The conclusive statements of the document are:

- Developed nations are mainly responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions, which has led to global warming, melting of polar ice and other environmental hazards.
- India emits a lot of greenhouse gases.
- Mitigation and adaptation are important strategies that can control climate change.
- Because of certain pressing needs and consequential factors, developing nations (mainly from South-east Asia) will continue to emit greenhouse gases. ■