

## Climate for change

**Every year of delay in our addressing the climate change situation results in a loss of close to \$ 500 billion.**

The drowning Sundarbans, receding Gangotri, excessive and untimely rain in Maharashtra and unprecedented droughts in Madhya Pradesh. Seen in isolation, these events may seem like random coincidences. Put it all together and the story that emerges is of an impending catastrophe. As mankind raced towards industrial and consumption driven development goals, the concept of sustainability got lost somewhere along the way.

While we, the common people, might think that climate change is something that only the people living in the coastal regions and politicians have to worry about, the truth is quite the opposite. Everything that we depend on for our day to day sustenance is directly affected by how the climate evolves over time. Be it the wheat and rice crops that get ruined due to untimely rains, thereby pushing up the prices, or the healthcare situation in the country, that gets worse due to the increasing cases of vector borne diseases.

The Copenhagen Accord has failed to recognise this. Led by the world's most powerful leaders, 192 nation leaders came together at Copenhagen Summit but left without making binding commitments. Ironically it is the poor and marginalised people, who have not contributed to climate change, that are and will be the most affected by climate change. The Kyoto Protocol was symbolically an important step, but it failed to deliver a major effort toward greenhouse gas reductions. In the absence of a new mindset, the Copenhagen Accord will mean more years of the same waiting game. Countries will continue free-riding. While global temperatures continue to rise, glaciers melt and ultimately people's livelihoods and lives are lost.

The world needed a fair, ambitious and 'operationally binding political deal' to have reached at Copenhagen. We have lesser time left for drastic global action to reduce Green House Gas emissions. The Himalayan glaciers may not be melting as fast as we were told, but for common people and for politicians who represent them, climate is changing and the impacts are there for us to see.

That we need to do something urgently to slow this, is a well known fact now. But 'what can be done' is a fact on which consensus has so far been elusive.

The Climate Summit in Copenhagen was the 15th attempt by the world leaders to come to a common ground to discuss and possibly resolve the situation. However, if the same blame game continues it will be near impossible to resolve and truly tackle this complex problem.

The developed world needs to understand and acknowledge the development needs and aspirations of the countries like India, China and Brazil. Especially in the light of the fact that with its current population India still accounts for only 5 per cent of the global emissions, whereas the U.S. is responsible for 20 per cent. The disparity was much higher in the past.

The U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) presents us not only with a global platform to voice our concerns but also a democratic platform where powerful and less powerful countries can talk on equitable terms. Any move forward from Copenhagen still needs to ensure that developed countries, like U.S., make binding commitments that are fair and ambitious at the same

time. Furthermore, developing countries are provided enough financial and technological support to ensure a smooth and viable transition to low carbon growth societies.

From India's domestic perspective, the current times present a phenomenal opportunity to start building a low carbon economy. By doing this, India will not only be able to sustain its economic and industrial growth but also ensure that its social development targets like rural electrification are met in a climate friendly way. The battle, however, will have to be fought on two fronts - 'Improving efficiencies in the existing infrastructure' and 'speeding up the implementation of new projects' like 'Sustainable Habitat Mission' and 'Solar Mission.'

It is only when India takes a leadership position in its global as well as domestic approach that the 'developed' will be shamed into correcting their own wrongdoings. It is critical that we, as a nation, take a stand in post Copenhagen and lead the global climate debate; strongly putting our point across, without getting intimidated or influenced by international pressure.

Needless to say that the benefits of these efforts would be phenomenal, both for the world economy and our own as well. Ultimately, every year of delay in our addressing the climate change situation results in a loss of close to \$ 500 billion.

[Source: The Hindu, 10 February 2010](#)