

Voices

FRONTLINE VIEW Voices from communities in developing countries most affected by escalating climate change impacts

BIG BROTHER, LITTLE BROTHER

Once upon a time in a planet called Irk, two brothers lived side by side in a most un-brotherly manner. Big Brother had a great big farm planted with high-yielding cash crops. He owned state-of-the-art farm machinery, employed the best technicians, and lived a life of plenty. In contrast, Little Brother had a teeny-weeny farm that he and his family toiled on with their bare hands, and which produced barely enough to feed them. How did that happen?

"He used up all our inheritance to build his farm, leaving only this little patch to me," Little Brother grumbled.

"Ah...but you're not doing badly for yourself. Look at those melons now growing in your fields. Soon, your farm will be as big as mine, maybe even bigger," Big Brother said, smiling benignly.

"You very well know that's not possible unless you give me back my rightful share of the inheritance. You've used my money far too long to build your wealth; it's only right that you return it to me now with interest so that I, too, can build a good life for my family," countered Little Brother. But Big Brother wouldn't listen.

Soon a plague came to the land of Irk, and Little Brother's meager crops were quickly destroyed. He ran to Big Brother, pleading, "Look, my children are sick and starving. This plague is going to kill us all! I need you to pay me some of what you owe me so that we can survive..."

"I can't do that," Big Brother interrupted. "I have my own problems. You must stop bringing up the past and do something to stop the plague. But you're my brother and I care about you, so I'll send you some food to tide you over for a while, and some seeds you can plant to start over."

Many days passed before Big Brother remembered his promise. He sent a footman with a small sack of grain and a packet of seeds to his brother's farm. Alas,

the footman returned with the news that his brother's entire family had perished and handed him a note. In his brother's handwriting, the note read: The plague came from your farm. Everyone's death is on your conscience. But you're my brother and I care about you, so I hope you'll heed the warning that 'NO ONE is safe from the plague until EVERYONE is safe.'

Indeed, although it took a longer time for the big farm to be overcome by the plague, it happened eventually, and the land of Irk was never heard of again.

This is a good story to keep in mind as climate negotiators and world leaders move into the final stretch of the road to Copenhagen. Is it still possible to seal a just and effective agreement in Copenhagen despite the very slow progress of negotiations since Bonn 1? Yes, but only if the bullying stops and genuine caring begins; if clever rhetoric is backed by concrete and adequate figures in terms of emissions reduction and financial commitments for adaptation; if promoting justice and taking responsibility becomes the norm; only then can the Big Brothers and Little Brothers of the world work together in faith and trust to produce an agreement aimed at 'keeping everyone safe' from the fearsome impacts of climate change.



TUVALU: A CASUALTY OF INACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE?

"We don't want to leave this place. We don't want to leave, it's our land, our God given land, our culture and our identity, we can't leave. People won't leave until the very last minute." Taukiei Kitara from Tuvalu.

Why is a country like Tuvalu, comprised of nine small low-lying islands in the South Pacific, affected by climate change?

How can it protect itself from this intangible threat, especially when there is no precedent for such action?

Tuvalu has raised these questions. Immediate solutions will have to be implemented to avoid catastrophes. Consistent international action towards keeping global temperature rise as far below 1.5°C as possible as well as continued implementation of the Kyoto Protocol are essential. Despite the fact that Tuvalu is already experiencing adverse and irreversible changes, a political will on action by developed countries is still missing. One wonders, what else has to happen to convince governments to take meaningful and urgent action?

The sea is inextricably linked to Tuvalu's natural and social system and it has always maintained life on the islands. A change in sea level is therefore not an abstract risk but a challenging task to the every day life of Tuvaluans. Tuvalu has always had to fight with extreme weather events like storm surges and floods. But because of climate change and sea level rise, the frequency and magnitude of these weather events are intensified. Even a very minor rise in the sea level would have "severely negative effects on atolls and low islands" (IPCC 2001, p. 856) and would increasingly threaten areas with inundation.

"Tuvalu has a coastline which, encompasses extremely limited terrestrial, near shore,

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HIMALAYAN PARADISE IN DANGER: WILL NEPAL BE RESCUED?

Nepal is one of the world's poorest countries and has little capability to cope with the impacts of climate change. Although Nepal's contribution to the problem is tiny – Nepal's annual greenhouse gas emissions are only about 0.025 percent of the global total – the impacts of climate change are immense. Nepal already faces an erratic monsoon pattern that causes serious problems for agriculture. Winter rains in the last thirty years have also decreased, resulting in low productivity and poor harvests. Nepal has one of the world's highest rates of malnutrition, so climate impacts on food security are a huge problem for us.

Another daunting challenge Nepal faces is that glaciers are receding at a faster rate than ever. This poses the great threat of Glacier Lakes Outburst Floods (GLOF). According to United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) over 20 glacial lakes have the potential to outburst. When glacial lakes burst their bounds, they cause serious damage - taking lives, destroying livelihoods, property and infrastructure.

Nepal is already a poor country and has limited capacity to respond to these challenges. It now faces the threat unpredictable rainfall and unprecedented level of floods and droughts, which lead to increasing poverty and food insecurity.

Nepal is both a part of Least Developed Countries (LDC) and G77 plus China. It is vital that the Copenhagen Agreement be a real success to deliver effective support and address adverse climate change impacts in LDCs like Nepal.

For LDCs, a successful agreement in Copenhagen must at the very least deliver:

- Immediate support for the implementation of National Adaptation Programme of Actions (NAPA) which addresses immediate

and urgent needs of the LDCs

- Adequate, predictable and sustainable finance in addition to Official Development Assistance (ODA).

And, most importantly, it must deliver a deal that keeps global temperature rise as far below 1.5°C as possible. Without that, many communities in Nepal won't even be able to adapt to climate change impacts.

However, the political commitment demonstrated by the developed countries in the negotiations to meet this need is insignificant. Aggregate targets for deep emission cuts of greenhouse gases from the developed countries are still elusive. Developed countries must reduce their emission as demanded by science (-45% by 2020 and -95% by 2050, below 1990 levels).

Another important aspect is the ad-

equate and additional financial support to meet the cost of adaptation. They must commit at least 100 billion dollars yearly by 2020 for adaptation alone. Vulnerable countries like Nepal must also be supported with adequate capacity building and appropriate technology needed for adapting to the adverse impact of climate change.

Nepal is struggling to meet its basic needs like food, water, education, health and infrastructure facilities, and in addition to that, the country now has the daunting challenge of tackling climate change. This is not possible without the support of developed countries. After all they are the ones responsible for the cause of the problem and have the technological and financial capacity to tackle it.

Our sincere hope in the run-up to the Copenhagen is that developed countries show the urgently needed leadership in tackling climate change and that their engagement in the UN climate change negotiations is constructive and fosters a strong agreement towards avoiding climate catastrophe.



TUVALU: A CASUALTY OF INACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (CONT FROM PAGE 1)



"We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children"

and natural resources". The island state is thus endowed with a small buffer when it comes to the question of coastal erosion due to rising water levels. Tuvalu already is experiencing land loss in part due to anthropogenic factors.

Most of the previously mentioned adverse effects of climate change overstrain atoll countries like Tuvalu. They do not have the capacity to react and adapt in an adequate manner. This results from a combination of different factors including limited access to capital, human resources and technology, or simply relates to the size of the country.

Internal migration, coupled with the expected population increase of up to 26,000 by 2050 (UNFCCC 1999, p. 5) is anticipated to increase the demand for the already less available land and resources. It is expected to result in the overexploitation of both the land and the sea for resources, force an importation of food, and therefore increase solid waste pollution. The resulting changes or damage to the ecosystem would only intensify Tuvalu's vulnerability toward the effects of inundation, flooding, and erosion (UNFCCC 1999, pp. 22 and 29).

The frightening reality is that Climate Change is here to stay, no matter what we do, we can not stop this - the clock is ticking and we need to ALL work together to save our future generation.