

Small Island Developing States: Raise Your Voice, Not Sea Level

*A. Muthulakshmi**

ABSTRACT

India has witnessed remarkable progress in human and economic development since Independence, however, the path of economic development and growth has been challenging. The concept of sustainable development is buzz word now-a-days which has emerged due to increasing problems of environment and ecology. The inter-related issues emerged from economic growth; environment and ecology are affecting the human population. The anthropogenic activities are adversely affecting the environment and ecology while the global issues like ozone layer depletion, greenhouse gases emissions, global warming, climatic change, etc. cause concern. The environmental pollution is posing a serious challenge for the sustainability of the economic growth while the road to sustainable development is a tardy one. There is degradation of natural resources due to over exploitation, unsustainable economic and commercial activities as well as poor governance of environmental regulations, policies and enforcement of environmental legislations. Against this view point, present paper highlights the pertinent issues of environment in India.

World Environment Day is being celebrated on Thursday June 5th 2014. On this occasion millions of people across the planet gathered together at community, national, regional and local levels to promote positive action towards to protect the environment. So, on this day, we are always thinking about to plant trees and taking care of it, really we do? It is a day which stimulates awareness of the environment, enhances political attention and public action. The international theme for 2014 world environment day is Small Island Developing States: "Raise Your Voice, Not Sea Level." United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was announced recently, featuring Small Island Developing States as its main beneficiaries; the theme aims to help protect such islands from growing risks and vulnerabilities, particularly as a result of climate change. World environment day is an annual event assigned by the UNs General Assembly in 1972 which is meant to raise people's awareness concerning the event and persuade global communities to take positive action in preserving nature and environment.

* Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University, Aizawl-796 004

Origin of World Environment Day

World environment day was resultant effort of the UNs General Assembly in 1972, which took place from 5th - 6th June in Stockholm Conference on the issue of Human Environment. In the same platform, one more resolution was being taken place which gave birth to the UNEP. World environment day is the United Nations principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment. Over the years it has been grown to be broad, global platform for public outreach which is widely celebrated by stakeholders for more than 100 countries. And it also serves as the “**people’s day**” for doing something towards the betterment of the environment. The commemoration of world environment day happened every year with different theme and topic. United Nations Environment Programme decides the host country for world environment day. UNEP’s Executive Director Achim Steiner encourages every one, everywhere to join this year’s world environment day celebration 2014.

World Environment Day

This year’s global host for world environment day is Barbados, one of the many small island developing states which are facing multi-dimensional issues and challenges that require integrated global action. Barbados is the first small island developing state to host world environment day. It is considered to be highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change from agricultural impacts to the destruction of its coastal ecosystems. We need to help protect the islands in the face of growing risks and vulnerabilities, particularly as a result of climate change. We believe world environment day will be an excellent opportunity to raise a call for solidarity with the islands.

It is not observed as a public holiday, but many kinds of environmental activities are organized in many countries to celebrate under the theme of SIDS: Raise Your Voice, Not Sea Level with the goal of raising awareness of their unique development challenges and successes regarding a range of environmental problems including climate change, waste management, unsustainable consumption, degradation of natural resources, extreme natural disasters and rising sea levels in the midst of overpopulation and continuing industrialization.

What is the SIDS?

Small Island Developing States are low lying coastal countries and as a distinct group of developing countries facing specific social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. They were recognized as a special case both

for their environment and development in the United Nations conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (3rd - 14th June, 1992). The United Nations has been assisting and extending cooperation to Small Island Developing States in their sustainable development efforts through the programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of small island developing states finalized at the Global Conference held in Barbados in 1994, known also as the Barbados Programme of Action.

Currently, the United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs listed 52 small island developing states are spread over three geographical regions namely, the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Fifty two countries and territories are classified as small island developing states in which 38 countries are United Nations members and 14 are Non-Members or Associate Members of the Regional Commissions. They are facing many challenges which creates problem for the development as well as to the environment; small domestic markets and heavy dependence on a few external and remote markets, high costs for energy, infrastructure, transportation, communication and servicing; long distances from export markets and import resources; low and irregular international traffic volumes; little resilience to natural disasters; growing populations; high volatility of economic growth; limited opportunities for the private sector; and fragile natural environments. Therefore, they are highly disadvantaged in their development process and require special support from the international community.

According to the International Panel of Climate Change (IPCC), global sea levels are rising at an increased rate which is projected to be even greater this century. When global temperature warms, sea water expands and occupies more space. Sea levels rise when ice -melts as well. Coastal communities in every country are threatened with floods and storm surges, to which these small islands are the most exposed. India's 7,517 km coastline will be particularly hard-hit by storm surges and sea level rise leads to displacing millions of people from that place, flooding low lying areas, and damaging economic assets and infrastructure. The majority of those flooded will be in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh and India. A one meter rise in sea level is projected to displace approximately 7.1 million people in India and about 5.764 sq.km. of land area will be lost, along with 4,200 km of roads. The diverse impacts, expected as a result of sea level rise, include land loss and population displacement, increased flooding of low lying Coastal areas and loss of yield and employment resulting from inundation and salinization.

Highly coastal areas are concentrated on agricultural land and infrastructure development which increased the threats from any rise in sea

level. Because of that the very survival of certain low lying small island developing states will be threatened. Global climate change may damage coral reefs and other fragile island ecosystem and further which affects aquaculture and coastal tourism also. Increased frequency and intensity of storm events due to climate change will also have profound effects on both the economies and the environment of small island developing states. The biological diversity in small island developing states is among the most threatened in the world. Sustainable utilization of coastal and marine resources is the major challenges for them.

Small island developing states are particularly vulnerable to the pervasive impact of natural disasters like storm surges, landslides and droughts are occurring more frequently and intensively. Waste disposal is a common problem for all of them, particularly the wastes generated by urbanization. The freshwater resource is threatened by the contamination of human and livestock waste, industry-related pollution and agricultural chemicals. Inadequate action to safeguard watershed areas and groundwater resources are the major threats to the sustainable development for them.

We have some of the common activities can create healthier environment throughout the world which are follows:-

- Saving trees and planting more trees for making your city green.
- More clean up at our living place (Fresh home, city and country).
- Save water and recharge water table.
- World development without destruction.
- Caring the environment and sharing steps to care of it.
- Green city development.
- Forest care and protection.
- Increasing farming growth using natural fertilizers (organic farming).
- Recycling of products as much as you can.*The use of biogas and save electricity when not in use.
- Stop wasting food (40% of food are wasted).*Preservation and conservation of natural resources.
- Changing community attitudes to the disposal and use of sewage.
- Collect all plastics and recycle them if not give to waste collectors in your town.
- Switch off your TV, DVD, Stereo or Computer at the power point.
- Unplug your cell phone charger when not in use.
- Bring your own bag when you go for shopping.

- Keep reusable bags in your car or near your door so that they are easy to grab when you go.
- Save paper by paying bills online or setting up automatic payment from your bank account. Also, opt for e- mail bank and credit card statements.
- Use public transport whenever necessary.
- Uses a clothesline instead of a dryer whenever possible you can save more than 300 kilograms of CO₂ when you air dry your clothes for 6 months of the year.
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth or scrubbing utensils.
- All these small steps which will go a long way in helping you lead an environment friendly life as well.

Suggestions

- Necessary and adequate funding should be provided to SIDS which including through innovative sources of financing, to assist SIDS in their mitigation and adaptation measures and efforts.
- Commitment to reduce GHG emissions to internationally agreed levels within an agreed time frame.
- Develop and adopt more and more effective and efficient ways of using those natural resources
- Need to implement appropriate public education and create awareness programmes, including consumer incentives to promote energy conservation
- Establish a national disaster emergency fund with joint private and public sector support

Dotted all over the planet—from the Caribbean to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, these islands are a diverse group of small coastal countries or territories. Due to their small size and isolation, these small states are more vulnerable to natural and environmental disasters, climate change and sea level rise. However, these islands have also been successful in overcoming their environmental problems. From Palau to Puerto Rico, the stories of resiliency and innovation abound. For example, Tokelau recently began producing 100% of its energy from solar energies. In Fiji, lack of resources to make new drainage systems and sea walls, local residents are restoring mangroves and coral reefs to help the prevention of flooding and erosion. These stories and solutions can be applied to environmental concerns all over the world. Barbados transition to a green economy offer opportunities for managing natural capital, further diversify the economy, increasing

resource efficiency and supporting the goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development.

In Samoa and Fiji, coconut trees and their products account for 30% of GDP and the majority of small scale farmers are dependent on coconuts for their livelihood. In the Caribbean and Pacific islands, more than 50% of the population lives within 1.5 kilo meter of the coast. Climate change and sea level rise constitute pressing challenges for sustainable development.

“Planet earth is our shared island; let us join forces to protect it” told by Un Secretary –General Ban Ki Moon at the time of launch of 2014 International year of Small Island developing states. Therefore, world environment day facilitates as an opportunity for every one to realize not only the responsibility to care for the earth and to become agents of change. Because of our environment is the future of our world. If it is not healthy, then we cannot think of taking a breath of peace. So, every one needs to decide and work towards above mentioned activities in order to save the environment as well as save the earth.

References

<http://www.worldbank.org/organised> accessed on 27/5/2014.

<http://climate-i.iisd.org> accessed on 6/5/2014.

<https://www.flicker.com> accessed on 27/5/2014.

www.on.org/ohrlls accessed on 29/5/2014

<http://www.scpclearinghouse.org> accessed on 29/5/2014.

<http://www.unisdr.org> accessed on 29/5/2014.

<http://www.bb.unep.org> accessed on 29/5/2014.

<http://www.fao.org> accessed on 28/5/2014.

G. Poyyamoli, Potentials and Constraints for adopting climate resilient agricultural strategies in coastal regions of India, *World Focus*, Vol. XXXV, No. 2, Pp71.

Bharat H. Desai, Changing the ‘Climate’ for Climate Change, *World Focus*, September 2009. Pp 358-360.