

How to Combat Climate Change

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Various categories of nations (undeveloped, developing at various paces, and fully developed) from all continents are coming closer to jointly tackle the imminent danger of global climate change—the ultimate manifestation of human misdeeds which have irreversibly degraded the entire natural life support system. It is, therefore, the most paradoxical case where the current development and growth paradigm, the root cause for such a crisis, is now catalysing international understanding for sustainability and human existence!

The Industrial Revolution signaled an ever increasing human assault on the rightful domain of nature. This has caused structural alteration of its framework, over-exploitation of non-renewable natural resources (economic deposits, oil & natural gas), and irreversible degradation of its renewable & biotic resources. Corruption of the food chain, disruption of the natural cycles and biodiversity, extinction of innumerable life forms. Even human existence is now imperiled.

International efforts to face the challenge of mal-development began with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, "... having met at Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972, considered the need for a common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment." Twenty-six principles were enunciated to initiate greater transnational efforts for sustainable development.

Several efforts, under the UN umbrella, were made towards global action for this goal. The desperation was highlighted by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board commissioned by Secretary General, Kofi Annan in 2000; involving 23 international agencies; 192 nations and 1360 experts worldwide. In 2005 this Board succinctly summarised the State of the Ecosystem in seven basic key messages and also formulated three 'desirable and doable' Commandments to change the current paradigm of 'Living Beyond Our Means'.

Despite the first disaster-warning nearly forty years ago, unmitigated aggressions on the natural domain have reached the climactic threat of global warming and climate change, affecting global atmospheric and oceanic circulation systems. Its consequences include erratic global weather, sinking of coastal areas, melting of glaciers and icebergs, disruption of water systems and food shortages. After all, nature does not obey political boundaries!

An Inter-Governmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) was constituted just twenty-one years ago by the UN to gather its flock from this marauding enemy. A prolific volume of research data generated by hundreds of scientists from all over the world authenticated its anthropocentric source. Nevertheless, the pitch has been queered, since its present Chairman is a mere science administrator. This fact has emboldened the corporate global polluters and the market forces to attribute 'cyclic natural—not human', factors for climate change. This has triggered a bitter debate between climate change sceptics (led by East Anglia University) and conservationists—facilitating them to perpetuate, with impunity, eco-destructive activities!

The Chairman fell into their 'mouse-trap' by quoting projected figures for recession of Himalayan glaciers. Natural events cannot be 'astrologically' quantified. Stephen Schneider, one of the first climate-scientists to indicate rise in man-made greenhouse gases has thus commented on such quantifications: "Nothing scientifically has changed because of any of this. The only changes are political and perceptual". Scientific calculations aside, the Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigme Thinley, a Himalayan dweller, told Copenhagen delegates that rapid climate change is clearly evident in the Himalayas which have turned brown because of a lack of snowfall.

Julia Sligo, Chief Scientist at the UK Met-Office, said : "With all the furore over the past few weeks it's very easy for the public to lose sight of these basic facts. CO₂ levels are 30 percent higher than at any time over at least the last 600,000 years and the rate of rise is unprecedented. Yes, there is uncertainty in the observations. We accept that and we quantify that, but it does not alter the message. I believe ...the case for anthro-pogenic global warming is very compelling and I think it's good for us to remind ourselves of that in the face of all these attempts to suggest otherwise."

A series of climate change conferences and confabulations held in all the continents for greater involvement of national governments has climaxed with the recent—and most representative—conference at Copenhagen (COP 15) last December. It was attended by 120 nations and many heads of states, including USA, UK, India, China, Brazil and South Africa. Predictably, the conference was sharply divided into different groups of countries at various stages of economic development, particularly on (a) funds for Clean Development Mechanism; (b) technology; and (c) emission reduction commitments at National levels. Predictably, no binding consensus was reached with several country groups voicing their own attitudes on such issues. It was, generally agreed that polluting countries shall voluntarily make their emission reduction commitments by January-end 2010. In fact, even India, against any legally binding agreements, conveyed its commitment to 20-25% cuts on 30th January to the UN. Therefore, by facing a crisis of very existence due to obsession with affluence and economic growth may compel human societies, especially in urban areas of affluent countries, may weave a mosaic of human unity transgressing continents and countries, since natural systems know no boundaries. The crucial involvement of local communities, however, cannot be overemphasized. The odds are that this shall pave the way for more equitable sustainable development. □□□