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CLIMATE CHANGE-INDIA

## Scientists Warn, Gov't Must Act

By Keya Acharya



**BANGALORE, India, Nov 29, 2010 (IPS) - India's first-ever major scientific assessment of its climate change scenario by the 2030s, released in November, has the report's scientists rooting for the government to take concrete action.**

Scientists involved in the work are now saying the job of taking action against the projections and warnings made so far is in government hands.

"It is the job of scientists to forewarn and inform," says Dr N H Ravindranath, one of the authors of this new report brought out by India's environment ministry and also a lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th assessment report in 2007. Ravindranath is from the premier Indian Institute of Science, based here in Bangalore.

The Indian report was issued in the run-up to the series of United Nations meetings around climate change to be held in Cancun, Mexico, from Nov. 29-Dec.10, 2010.

The report was prepared for the environment ministry by the Indian National Network for Climate Change Assessment (INCCA), which comprises 120 national research and scientific institutions and more than 220 scientists.

Using a Hadley Centre Regional Climate Model version 3 (HAD RM 3), it brought out scenarios in agriculture, water, natural ecosystems and biodiversity in the north, south, west and on India's coasts, bordering over three-quarters of this South Asian country's landmass.

The report, thus called a '4x4' assessment, forecasts an overall temperature warming of 1.7 degrees to 2 degrees Centigrade for India, sea-level rise at 1.33 millimetres per year and likely to rise further, with cyclonic intensity increasing even while their frequency declines.

Interestingly, fish yields of certain species such as sardines and mackerel are slated to rise in warming temperatures, it adds.

But fishermen on India's east coast say the forecast of increased yields of some fish, such as mackerel, sounds unlikely.

"The west coast might have more mackerel, the eastern coastline faces severe marine pollution," says Arjilli Dasu, executive secretary of the Vishakhapatnam-based District Fishermen's Youth Welfare Association. "The eastern coast has no ecological conservation measures, such as mangrove regeneration, in place. We expect, at the current conditions, that the sea will ingress at least 10 to 15 metres into the villages by 2020 itself."

Dasu's organisation works with fishing communities along a 100-km stretch of the coastline in Andhra Pradesh on India's eastern seafloor.

The warmer atmosphere will also be good for irrigated rice, as it tends to increase with carbon dioxide fertilisation, says the report.

However, rainfed agriculture, which provides livelihood for the majority of India's farmers, will suffer, and there will be more stress on livestock and on milk productivity.

Water yield is projected to increase in the Himalayan region, but will be variable in the Western Ghats and along the coastline, it adds.

The Keystone Foundation, which works with tribal communities, biodiversity and livelihood in the Western Ghats, notes the report's findings on rainfall and rainfed agriculture. "We apprehend an accentuated erraticity in the Western Ghats' plantation (tea) sector, in small agriculture and also high flooding", says foundation director Pratim Roy.

"For instance", says Roy, "this year there was very poor productivity in any seasonable

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crop, be it in agriculture, beekeeping or others, because flowering and the rains have both come together, instead of in its usual periodicity. So an entire food basket collapsed this year."

"As you now see, the report underlines a very high impact in highland areas," Roy told IPS on the telephone from Ootacamund, hill capital of the Western Ghats.

The Western Ghats, a beautiful hill-region running parallel to the west coast in peninsular India and traversing six states, will be impacted greatly by a rise in temperature by as much as 4.5 degrees Centigrade. It is recognised as a global biodiversity hotspot.

Having some of the finest examples of moist deciduous and tropical forests, 18 of the 54 forest grids in this area are projected to change by the 2030s, impacting the lives and livelihoods of a sizeable population in the area.

"A lot of effort has gone into the findings, " says Prof Ravindranath. "The ministry should initiate a plan of clear action for the forest sections under their control."

Dr Subodh Sharma from the environment ministry, chief coordinator of the INCCA report, says action for any assessment "lies in the policy-makers' see".

Sharma says the report will provide a solid base for future actions by various government departments. "I am thinking on how to take this report forward, but it will certainly provide an information base for all," adds Sharma.

"Assessments made at such short timelines are useful, as they can be used to develop adaptation strategies for a foreseeable future", Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh says in the report's preface.

India has not had any regional scientific climate- assessment in the next 20 years. All major policies have so far been driven by global assessments projected for the 2050s.

INCCA's first report, published in May 2010, was on greenhouse gas emissions. That was also the first report by a developing country on updated data. Its next report, due in May 2011, will be on India's carbon aerosol (black carbon) programme. (END)

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