

November 25, 2011 12:00 am

## Delegates: Stronger voice from the developing countries

By Julius Recha Murgor and Mohamed Nasheed

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Climate change is one of the most serious and real challenges facing mankind, **writes Julius Recha Murgor**. For Kenya, there is the real threat that it will reverse economic and development gains made over the years if steps are not taken to avert global warming.

Some of the recent prolonged droughts have hit Kenya's hydro-power generation as the dam levels become too low to sustain production, affecting the economy through power rationing. The 1999-2000 La Niña-induced drought, for instance, caused extended power cuts across the country, reducing industrial productivity.

During such drought periods, the country switches to thermal generation. But such energy is not "clean" and is expensive, increasing the burden on communities already undergoing untold suffering associated with climate change.

To address this problem, Kenya is increasingly investing in geothermal power generation, which is clean and does not depend on seasonal factors. Other national efforts are directed towards wind, solar and bio-gas as alternative energy sources.

However, Kenya's agriculture – the country's economic backbone – has also been badly affected by climate change. Recent years have seen repeated crop failures in several parts of the country, including areas that were traditionally considered safe from drought. Lack of access to water for domestic use also results in families trekking long distances daily in search of water.

As a result of these challenges, the Kenyan government is spearheading efforts to develop a comprehensive action plan to help the implementation of the points laid out in the national climate change response strategy. An important aspect of the action plan is that it is highly interactive and consultative, involving stakeholder groups such as government, private sector and the civil society.

Yet the adverse effects of climate change have not been confined to Kenya, and any attempt to tackle climate change needs to cover the whole Horn of Africa region. Early warning systems and seasonal forecasts, whose accuracy and reliability have increased over the years, are important tools in climate change-related disaster preparedness. But the recurrence of drought emergencies may indicate something is wrong with the way drought

is being managed.

Perennial drought and other climate-induced crises have displaced large numbers of people throughout the Horn of Africa as they lose their traditional livelihoods, such as farming or fishing. This has led to “climate refugees” and conflicts between communities within and across borders.

Over the years, large numbers of refugees have crossed into Kenya from neighbouring countries, seeking to free themselves from the ravages of hunger and climate-driven conflicts. The influx of refugees has also greatly undermined the livelihoods of local residents, which lose pasture to refugees who often bring their own livestock.

A lasting solution to these climate-induced crises requires a cross-border approach. It must include short-term humanitarian assistance aimed at alleviating the suffering of refugees; security assistance to restore peace and stability in Somalia; development assistance to increase drought resilience; and climate change assistance to finance efforts to adapt to the changing environment.

Any meaningful assistance will also demand strong country-led institutional mechanisms and financing arrangements so as to enable effective, timely and well-coordinated planning and response to the new reality of climate vulnerability at both the international and national levels.

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As Europe and the US remain distracted by economic turmoil, an unlikely band of nations is taking up the climate cause: the small, the poor and the vulnerable, **writes Mohamed Nasheed.**

The Climate Vulnerable Forum is a group of the world’s poorer countries that are acutely sensitive to climate change, but are nonetheless doing the most to tackle the problem.

At the inaugural CVF meeting in the Maldives in 2009, all 11 countries agreed to ditch dirty development in favour of green growth. Some CVF countries have gone further: Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Samoa and the Maldives have announced plans to become carbon neutral.

There are many reasons why poorer countries adopt tough greenhouse gas mitigation targets. My country, the Maldives, announced its 2020 carbon neutral target in part to cajole industrial behemoths to clean up their act. If a small nation with modest means can enact a radical plan for carbon-free energy, what excuse do larger, wealthier nations have for dragging their feet?

Environmentalism, though, is only half the story. For many developing nations,

particularly far-flung, small-island states, the rush to renewables stems as much from energy security and economic considerations as from climate.

Many developing countries are among the world's most energy insecure. Their economies run on imported oil and they are held hostage to an oil price over which they have no control. Fossil fuel addiction puts a brake on economic development.

The Maldives spends 14 per cent of gross domestic product on diesel imports – more than on education and healthcare combined. If we continue “business-as-usual” growth, our oil dependency will double by 2020. The Marshall Islands declared a state of economic emergency in 2008, when oil prices soared and the government ran out of foreign exchange. Since then, the Pacific archipelago has moved aggressively into solar power.

As the oil price climbs, the cost of renewable energy such as solar is falling rapidly. Thanks in part to large increases in Chinese productive capacity, solar photovoltaic modules are about half the price they were in 2008. Daytime solar power in the Maldives is now a third cheaper than diesel-based electricity. For many countries without fossil fuel reserves, it makes simple economic sense to switch to clean power.

These sorts of actions might seem like a draught of fresh air in a sky rich in pollution.

But the emissions from poorer, developing countries are not insignificant. If all the world's small island states adopted 100 per cent renewable energy targets, for instance, it would prevent 0.5bn tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Moreover, if CVF countries can demonstrate that a green growth model is possible, other countries will follow.

The United Nations climate negotiations should help poorer countries shift to green growth. Developing countries that invest in clean energy should be able to submit their investment targets into any international agreement as their contribution to tackling climate change. Poorer countries with ambitious green targets should also be rewarded with technical and financial assistance.

At first glance, you might assume that a forum for climate vulnerable, poorer nations would be nothing more than a place to moan about climate injustice or rattle the begging bowl for aid. But the CVF merits a second look. By unilaterally embracing renewable energy and clean development, CVF countries may hold the key to unlocking global action on climate change.

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