

## **Random Thoughts**

### **Crafting a State Action Plan on Climate Change**

**R. S. Tolia\***

The Copenhagen Conference of Parties ( CoP ) held last December had hoped that it would be possible to arrive at some binding agreement to ensure that all countries of the world would take effective action (i) in agreeing to reduce global emissions of GHGs with a sense of urgency, and (ii) the developed countries would provide significant financial resources and facilitate access to technology to some of the poorest regions of the world, enabling them to adapt to the impacts of climate change and simultaneously undertake mitigation measures. The jury is still out figuring out the real outcomes of this Conference and the claims made so far include ; firstly, acceptance of a 2<sup>0</sup> C limit on temperature increase at the so-called Copenhagen Accord, as target, and secondly, the BASIC ( Brazil, South Africa, India and China ) have announced voluntary targets for reduction in intensity of GDP growth. Unity amongst the developing countries and the ‘shift of emphasis from national emission reductions to equitable access to atmospheric space’, as one resultant outcome, is being already perceived as an achievement. Notwithstanding the initiative taken by the U.N. Secretary – General, Ban Ki-

moon, in organizing a high level meeting in September, 2009, the initial promise of action of a much larger congregation of world leaders at Copenhagen and a strong ground-swell of grassroots support for action, the results globally have been termed as “ far less than satisfactory ”.

### ***Post-Copenhagen Challenge***

R.K. Pachauri, the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in his first post-Copenhagen appraisal has raised a couple of issues which do deserve attention of all those who wish to reflect on the main issue paraphrased by Pachauri himself, namely, “ *whether the world and human society in general are ready and willing to take action, on critical issues that require a major change in the manner in which we produce and consume goods and services ?*”( *Challenge of Climate Change, post-Copenhagen, The Hindu, Feb 1, 2010* ). His article targets those ‘who remain skeptics and resistant to change in conventional ways and customs’ and he goes on to illustrate how ‘the power of skeptics has become extremely high because economic interests which resist change support them on a substantial scale’. Citing a report that 770 companies had hired an estimated 2304 lobbyists to influence USA’s federal policy on climate change, a rise of 300 percent in numbers in just five years, and the trend, according to him, ‘of this enormous economic power and manifestation of vested interest’ has engulfed countries right ‘from Australia to Britain to North America’.

## ***Resistance to Change***

While the outcome of the Copenhagen CoP may have, ‘emboldened those who resist change to try every tactic by which they can stall action both at the international as well as the national level in many countries,’ and might result in effectively blocking the legislation moved by Senators John Kerry and Barbara Boxer, rendering any global accord ineffective, the issue which we in India ought really be debating is, what exactly is our own response, as a major developing country, in general and its various constituents States, in particular ?

The challenge and opportunity, to quote Pachauri again, “ *is to launch urgent grassroots action by civil society, business and local governments towards a pattern of sustainable development. National governments and multilateral initiatives would follow inevitably.*”

## ***National Action Plan on Climate Change***

In a previous piece in the Garhwal Post this columnist at the time of unveiling of the National Action Plan on Climate Change ( *Random Thoughts, Mountains and the Climate Change*), it might be recalled, had suggested that it was much more important that immediate action was mounted at the States’ level, as is now being belatedly realized. Of the eight Missions, contemplated under the NAPCC, the National Mission on Sustaining Himalayan Eco-systems has been drafted and it is believed that soon this is going to be operationalized. As it is the only Mission

which is specific to a geographical region viz. Himalayas, it is but natural for all of us in Uttarakhand to know about its content, operational mechanism and intended objectives. It acquires added importance in the light of the Glaciergate for which CoP 15 is going to be remembered more than anything else.

The Final Draft of the Mission Document of the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Eco-system ( NMSHE) has been on the internet since August, 2009, put up the department of Science and Technology, Government of India. The Himalayan ecosystem encompasses a population over 51 million people, it says, who practice hill agriculture and whose vulnerability is expected to increase on account of climate change. The Himalayan ecosystem is vital to the ecological security of the Indian landmass, through providing forest cover, feeding perennial rivers that are the source of drinking water, irrigation, and hydropower, conserving biodiversity, providing a rich base for high value agriculture and a spectacular landscapes for sustainable tourism. There are several aspects related to NMSHE which deserved to be discussed by the scientists, policy-planners and the informed citizens for example, whether its anchoring in the Department of Science & Technology is appropriate, or will such an anchoring witness over-powering the human-side of the sustainability debate by the purely technical-side, or will such a broad-basing of the Climate Change portfolio lead to dissipation in efforts, or is the wood going to be missed for the trees ?

This Mission is expected to seek to understand the coupling between the Himalayan ecosystem and climate factors and address the issue of glacier melt. Obviously it would require the joint effort of climatologists, glaciologists and other experts, on the one hand, and exchanging information with the South Asian countries and countries sharing the Himalayan ecology, on the other. A real long haul appears quite certain both for our scientists and science managers. As it is yet the early days for the rolling out of the component National Missions we better await view of the experts before we adjudge and prognosticate likely outcomes.

### ***A Design of a State Action Plan on Climate Change***

Very insightful literature has in the meanwhile been shared by several international and national organizations who have been involved with the various streams of the Climate Change debate. It is about time that a state like Uttarakhand put up its acts together and started working on a design for a State Action Plan on Climate Change; re-visiting its various strategies, programmes, projects on the one hand and took a decision to consider only those new demands for grants which pass the 'acid-test' of Climate Change, on the other. This would be the best way to sensitize its bureaucracy about the inexorable task which has been thrust by the current on-going debate. Adjoining state of Himachal Pradesh seems to have activated its related departments and organizations to address it and it would not be bad idea even to work together on crafting a model State Action Plan on Climate Change for the Himalayan

region. It would be a lead which is certainly expected of Uttarakhand, given a large number of Central and State R&D institutions to which it plays host.

What should be the broad contours or outline of a model State Action Plan on Climate Change for the Indian Himalayan region, would be the first question which suggests itself ? To this columnist the insights offered by a publication brought out by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, otherwise also known as the SDC, appears an apt one. In any case one has to make a start somewhere. Even at the cost of running a risk of quoting from a publication of one of the richest European countries, it deserves to be pointed out that Switzerland, is often seen as a mountain country 'par excellence'. It is not for nothing that Mahatma Gandhi had called Kausani as the Switzerland of India and wondered why we took no notice of this potential of our mountain regions !

Drawing from a document brought out by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation ( *Mountains and Climate Change, From Understanding to Action, CDE, University of Bern, Switzerland © 2009* ) one could that any such State Action Plan must take into account the following sectors and the Key Issues raised therein :

***The Key Issues :***

1. ***Mountain Waters*** ; which must factor in our Swajal experience, issues related to consumptive and non-consumptive uses of water, water ownership issues

related to Ganga and Yamuna, 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and reform in the parastatals like Jal Nigam/Jal Sansthan, revised watershed guidelines going beyond the environment fixation and resulting in addressing livelihood issues, irrigation issues of uplands, water policies e.g. funding of rainwater-harvesting, community irrigation, catchment treatment of water-sources etc., no sector could be more crucial, requiring large scale consultations,

2. ***Mountain Glaciers***; although its scientific and technical aspects would now be covered by the recently launched National Mission on Sustaining Himalayan Eco-systems, there are several aspects, like involvement of local communities in recording scientific data, GLOF issues, to be addressed at the sub-national level,
3. ***Mountain Hazards***; earthquakes, preparedness, review of policies related to rehabilitation with reference to mountain hazards, reviving hill-side safety committee measures, activating search and rescue trainings, activation of the Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre, Environment Protection and Pollution Control Board revamping, improvement in the Appellate mechanisms of the Environment Act, 206, advance warning mechanisms, adopting an integrative approach covering the whole risk cycle from ‘prevention to recovery’, mainstreaming concepts like ‘green roads’, training in technical skills and retro-fitting etc, enforcement of building norms;

4. ***Mountain Bio-diversity***; taking a stock of threats, reconciling conservation with development, re-activation of what had been termed as ‘Conservation, Development and Harvesting Plan’ ( CDH Plan ), special focus on Mountain forestry, re-visiting and upscaling the economic potential of plants like Seabuckthorn, medicinal and aromatic plants, improved management of Protected Areas and their Plans, mainstreaming concepts like ‘ Conservation Corridors’ like the one in Sikkim etc ;
  
5. ***Food Security in Mountains*** ; wholesale revisiting of our all past efforts on hill-agriculture, vigorous promotion of organic farming, in all developmental sectors like horticulture, animal husbandry, core valley seed programme, promotion of concepts like ‘bara-naza’, indigenous crops and their introduction in the public distribution system, upscaling of examples like Rawain Women’s Co-operative Federation (HARC) or INHERE SHGs, revamping of the entire rural credit structure, pushing micro-finance into mountain regions, revisiting policies related to hill agriculture, marketing, storage and risk management, strengthening of rural poverty alleviation programmes, integration of rural employment programmes with agricultural revamping, in crop-science, credit, co-operative credit structure, revival of horticultural crops following the Himachal model of support through a Marketing outfit HP Fruit Marketing Federation ; and

6. ***Out - Migration Issues*** ; hitherto only discussed in popular debates, serious attention to be paid to the ‘pull and push factors’ of involuntary migration, addressing the ‘unemployability’ of the ever increasing unemployed educated youth, commencing interventions like ‘B-ABLE’ initiative of ‘skilling’ youth for sustainable livelihood opportunities, revamping the entire ‘technical education’ sector through ‘adoption by the industries’, examination of hydro-power sector’s potential of creating livelihood opportunities, bringing in innovative models of micro-finance cum skill enterprise and other ‘out of the box’ solutions to address this major issue of unemployment leading to permanent migration.

Major concerns addressing both i.e. the climate change and montane issues, would get encompassed by these six components of the proposed State Climate Change Plan and within this framework details of sectors, programmes , schemes and projects could be fleshed out by the experts, technocrats, social-scientists and planners.

### ***Anchoring of Climate Change and Way Ahead***

In which sector or department should Climate Change be anchored is a question which deserves a very serious consideration. A SWOT exercise would suggest that an autonomous Climate Change Division in the Department of Science & Technology be anchored in the Council of Science & Technology, headed by an eminent Emeritus

Scientist of eminence, supported by retired experience scientists/managers drawn from water, hazard management, poverty - alleviation sectors. All related departments / organizations related to the abovementioned six Key Issue sectors be constituted as the Core Support Group, which should report preparation of State Plan progress both to the Planning Department and the Cabinet. Newly established Doon University could also be a suitable candidate for anchoring a full-fledged Centre for Climate Change as a back-stopping mechanism, as an additionality, to assist this C.C. Division in the Department of Science & Technology, as the rolling out of the eight National Missions on Climate Change would require a very close tracking and follow-up action. Uttarakhand Science Education and Research Centre (USERC), yet to be catapulted into its designated mission, could also be activated in the UCOST, alternately and / or additionally.

At the national level we now have a National Action Plan on Climate Change, which in turn is going to give rise to as many as eight National Missions, so it is about time that the States commenced their own exercise of preparing the State Action Plan on Climate Change, depending upon their own specificity, development history and capacity to mobilize resources required to meet their individual development goals. The mountain states, like Uttarakhand, find themselves very strategically poised, now that the Climate Change agenda has brought forth in its wake the golden opportunity of seeking what has come to be known as *Payments for Environmental Services ( PES )*. It is the early

bird, as the saying goes, which gathers the worm. House Sparrows are nearly gone, are there any birds left ?

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