

“Low Carbon Development in India – Potential and Challenges for pro poor development”

from Dr. Nafisa Goga D’Souza, Associate Director of Laya Ressource Centre Andhra Pradesh, India

### **The Deficit in Addressing the Climate Crisis**

We are in the midst of a deep crisis that threatens the global community. This is because we have lived beyond the capacity of what the earth can sustain. *350 parts per million (ppm) is what climate experts, scientists and progressive national governments now say is the safe upper limit for CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in our atmosphere.* We are already above the safe zone at our current 390 ppm<sup>1</sup>. Unless we are able to rapidly return to below 350 ppm in this century, we risk reaching tipping points and irreversible impacts. Although international negotiations are in process since 1992, the moral imperative to act urgently, now, can hardly be disputed. And yet what we experience is a huge deficit in addressing the Climate Crisis. The gap between what is needed and what is committed on the table is enormous. And without urgent action greenhouse gas emissions are still projected to grow by over 50 percent by 2050, risking over two percent increase in global temperatures despite the inclusion of all countries within one framework in the recent Durban Agreement in the Seventeenth Conference of Parties on Climate Change.

### **Low Carbon path: Stakes for India**

India has a tremendous stake to engage actively in evolving solutions to the climate crisis for two major reasons:

- Impacts of Climate Change are enormous. The poor who are the majority will be impacted most by the climate crisis so there is an immediate need to develop climate resilient communities. India is considered to be a country under ‘extreme risk’ according to a recent global survey on a Climate Change vulnerability index.<sup>2</sup> This is because of various reasons. More so because India has a vast population which is poor. According to the World Bank statistics, about 42 percent of our population lives below 1.25 dollar a day. If we push this range to two dollars a day we could say about 60 percent is hardly able to make two ends meet. A very large section of our population thus who have not contributed at all to the problem of Climate Change are today unable to cope with the impacts of Climate Change.
- India’s emissions are rising rapidly and as much as 73 percent of energy consumption in India is from fossil fuels. According to the government of India the use of fossil based options is a no choice situation as the growth imperatives are non- negotiable. The energy sector is indeed central to the discourse on climate change. India is on a growth based economic pathway because it is perceived that a growth path will ultimately lead to the road to poverty alleviation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.350.org/en/about/science>

<sup>2</sup> <http://maplecroft.com/about/news/ccvi.html/2011>

## **Is a Low Carbon pathway possible with Pro Poor Development?**

### **New Paradigm of Development**

The development pathway seen from the perspective of a majority of people around the globe would mean in real terms year round food security, decent housing, accessible mass transport, good health services, access to quality education, and access to basic amenities for all to survive with dignity. To achieve this would imply that we review our approach to 'development' from the lens of the poor and that we relook at our development trajectory bottom-up. Basic survival for all is possible even while we pursue a low carbon pathway to development if we recognize that there are limits to growth. The vision of a low carbon society is an opportunity for us to make development choices that will take us along this path.

The challenge for India is to rethink its paradigm of development, make radical decisions in favour of renewable and decentralized energy systems charting out a course of action that safeguards economic sufficiency, environment soundness, equitable growth, good governance and inter-generational equity at the grassroots. This is the only pathway that will help India to leap-frog the conventional GDP growth model, attend to its basic industrial needs, and attain equitable development that leads to "Gross National Happiness" (GNH).

There are no easy answers especially in a global context where developed countries have indeed consumed more than their fair share of the global commons. The phenomenon of the Climate Crisis has arisen in the first place because of a skewed process of industrialization for exorbitant profit, which has led to colonization and neo-colonization in search of raw materials all over the globe thus making it unsustainable for living and putting its future in jeopardy. This model of destructive development has not only been environmentally unsound but also has exacerbated inequity and political and civil unrest and threatened the sovereignty of nation-states.

### **The Imperative of People's Voices**

This is where the voice of the common man is essential. The voice of the marginalized majority in India is unrepresented. The voice of the middle class is mute in a context where the race for career options often dehumanizing for most, leaves little time for engagement in critical issues that will one day engulf us all to a point of no return. In the ultimate analysis, the Climate Crisis will strike at the very root of the meaning of our existence. I say this, because to my mind the Climate Change phenomenon is a wakeup call for us all to question our own future priorities. The responsibility of bringing about a structural change where every individual on this earth has the right to survive with dignity lies squarely on the shoulders of the critical but knowledgeable few who will have to play a leadership role in steering and directing a new course of action that we all say must be inclusive growth. Radical initiatives will be required in order to bring about radical changes in society. And whether we like it or not the fate of the haves is intrinsically tied up with the fate of the have-nots. The more we strive towards an equitable social fabric the more we can hope for real prosperity. In fact many radical and bold choices are required today such that a paradigm shift towards inclusive growth becomes a reality rather than a fringe benefit. I do believe India is strategically placed to demonstrate a new model of development. It is the world's largest democracy and the voices of the people of India have now and again been demonstrated.

## **Huge potential for pro poor Low Carbon Development in India**

Since about half of India does not have access to energy, the climate crisis is an opportunity to look at new technology paradigms. Energy requirement for the poor is more than electricity for lighting. What is needed is delivery of a range of energy services: milling, pumping of water for irrigation, electricity for allied agricultural enterprises, pumping for piped drinking water and sanitation etc. Thus there is a huge potential for renewable technologies to be developed in the local context. The centralized grid system has failed. The argument that the centralized grid would ensure energy access is untenable because energy poverty still exists even 60 years after independence. This is the time to look for decentralized options. Moreover, India has underutilized 90 percent of its renewable resource potential. India has an opportunity and capacity to develop technologies relevant for the poor because answers will not come from developed countries.

On the other hand the challenges are many from within the country and from the global community as well. Examine the growth based development perspective within the country where the fruits of growth tend to keep pace with the demands of conspicuous consumption of the rich but benefits do not reach the poor. There has been a clear nexus between business community and government decision making: sops for the rich and taxes for the poor; subsidies for fossil fuels while no such equivalent benefits for renewable energy systems. And there has been not enough pressure from civil society on energy discourse since civil society itself is fragmented in its views.

So are the external challenges enormous. International climate is fraught with distrust. Every country wants another country to take responsibility for action; history of rationalizations not to act; there is a very little learning from our past mistakes particularly to revisit our model of development...what has gone wrong, why? There has to be a paradigm shift in technology and a paradigm shift in our lifestyles if all people on this Earth must live with dignity. Studies reveal that renewable energy will have to be accompanied by large reductions in overall energy use for environmental sustainability because there are no feasible options at least till 2050. Greed patterns of consumption have to be challenged both in developed and developing countries. And so also there is a global responsibility to ensure a development threshold which must allow every human being on Earth to live with dignity, within the construct of a low carbon path. In the age of globalization, poverty of one country cannot be delinked from the wealth of another. In essence Climate Change is a justice issue. The central question that we in India have to ask revolves around inequity in our country and the central question that Germany should ask must revolve around global inequity!