

Climate Change in Asia

FABC Climate Change Desk Strategic Action Plan

Preamble

Ecology and Environment in Asia

Natural disasters in various parts of Asia and especially the monumental disaster in Japan brought about by a destructive earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power breakdown on March 11, 2011 bring the ecological question unto the world stage. The old challenge to the integrity of creation had consisted of rapid, indiscriminate and irresponsible deforestation leading to floods, droughts, soil erosion, and loss of life-support systems. Today the ecological question has to do with a far more urgent and destructive issue – that of global warming and climate change. The whole world is experiencing the disastrous signs of climate change. Our world is warming up with the uncontrolled emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere particularly in the developed world through the use of fossil-fuel. This creates a greenhouse effect that raises sea temperatures and water levels, breaks up glaciers, melts polar ice, results in extraordinary rainfalls, floods, and extreme weather changes and even the loss of species of animals and plants.

Even now hundreds and thousands are ecological refugees as they search for safer places away from floods and rising sea levels. Climate change is wreaking havoc on agricultural production and sources of livelihood.

We in Asia are becoming increasingly aware and concerned regarding the ecological problem and its ethical implications. Local churches are collaborating with civil society to care for the integrity of creation. The local concern against polluting the atmosphere, irresponsible mining, and logging, destructive fishing, indiscriminate use of pesticides, dumping of e-waste, etc., now extends to the macro-issue of global warming and climate change as well as to the need for intergenerational justice. This awareness, concern and action on the ecological challenge are being brought down to the level of the grassroots.

Climate Change

Though the impact of Climate Change has been felt in various countries in Asia, the awareness seminars organized by FABC in October 2011 and October 2013 served as a great enlightenment and incentive to set up a Climate Change Desk and a Climate Change Committee to focus and follow-up this crucial issue at the Asian level.

Scientific Facts:

Climate Scientists already try to awaken the world to the consequences of Climate Change that are already taking place and continue to take place on our planet. The impending effects of Climate Change in Asia make it obvious to us our obligation to engage ourselves in effective action to prevent global warming also known as Climate Change from exceeding to 2 C. This is the most pressing challenge facing humanity today.

The global warming also known as Climate Change consists in the increase of several human induced Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions especially carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere.

This increase severely impacts the planetary ecosystems. The work of more than 2500 scientists comprising the inter-governmental panel on Climate Change (IPCC) demonstrates that the temperature on our planet is steadily increasing over pre-industrial levels which will have a lasting impact on present and future generations. According to the Panel's most recent findings issued as Report of the Working Group Climate Change is due overwhelmingly to human activities but can be mitigated by GHG emission reductions.

Our Experience in Asia

The sharing of experience of various Asian countries during the Seminar authenticated our conviction about the alarming threat facing Asia.

Asia during the past decade faced more devastating floods, typhoons, hurricanes, cyclones and landslides than in previous decades.

Further Asia also experiences water shortages due to reduced rainfall and high down pour of rain in a short period resulting in fast run off saline intrusion due to sea level rise affects the quality of water contained in coastal aquifers.

All these consequently contribute to the destruction of human lives, livelihoods, natural resources and livestock.

How it all happens

In this context we realize that rapid industrialization of the economy based on a materialistic model of capitalistic growth as well as the development of industrial agriculture have left their emissions - related mark on our climate. The growth model and the resulting lifestyle of the high and middle income sectors of our society in Asia have exacerbated this crisis. Asian societies for centuries were marked by family ties, simplicity and frugality of lifestyle as well as a basic communion with nature. Joining with every believer in God, we affirm that climate change is a moral, ethical and religious issue. Scientists also made us aware that any delay in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other practices such as deforestation can lead us to irreversible consequences. We also recognize that the issue of climate change is a matter of intergenerational justice. To hand over a planet that is unlivable to the next generation is an injustice. The cry of the next generation will, we believe, resound in the ears of our God who 'sees and hears' the cry of his people (Exodus 3:7-9). In seeking remedial measures needed to slow down the pace of climate change, the principle of equity among nations and within nations must be fully respected.

Underlying Causes

Rapid industrialization of the economy based on a materialistic model of Capitalistic growth as well as development of industrial agriculture has left their emission-related mark on our climate.

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The Church's Response

As Church we are challenged by this grave situation since climate change is an ethical, moral and religious issue. The Church in Asia, although representing a small percentage (3 per cent) of the total population, is not deterred from issuing a clarion call. We cannot but raise our voice on behalf of those people most impacted by climate change. Our voice must be matched by choices both at personal level as Christians as well as at ecclesial level as communities.

In order to respond as Church we need to identify certain priorities:

- ❖ A part of our prophetic task is to promote critical reflection among all Christian communities on the development policies and programmes of governments that adversely affect the poor. We must promote a new consciousness that the climate change issue is both a justice issue and a religious issue.
- ❖ We must help people recognize that the result of our actions is against God's commandment not to steal from future generations.
- ❖ We should promote models such as the Mekong Adaptation and Resilience to Climate Change project, to bring about co-operation between science and community-led action to respond to climate change. Another focus on potential climate change refugees and migrants may well present a pressing future need.
- ❖ The need of the hour is to live an eco-spirituality in tune with the Word of God, a spirituality marked by action on behalf of the exploited poor and the exploited nature.
- ❖ We must advocate and promote policies and programmes of renewable energy from solar power, water, biomass and wind.
- ❖ The Church should not only prophetically oppose and expose deforestation policies. It should undertake activities such as tree planting in as large a measure as possible.

- ❖ The outreach of the Church to civil society should aim at awakening public opinion to the disastrous consequences of climate change in order to encourage sustainable lifestyles and to promote a paradigm of focussing on ‘being’ rather than merely on ‘having’ coincident with long-established Asian cultural values and sensitivities.
- ❖ The FABC should prepare materials and practical guidance on environmental issues for use by national conferences and dioceses of Asia. We also urge conferences of Bishops to establish climate change desks to facilitate collaboration with the wider Asian communities.
- ❖ In advocating a change in national and local policies and programmes, the Church must focus on the concerns of the most vulnerable: the indigenous and the poor of Asia.
- ❖ Since climate change is an ethical and religious issue, the Church must work together with peoples of all faiths.
- ❖ We strongly urge that a special “season for the integrity of creation” starting on the 1st October and ending with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on 4th October be observed in our dioceses in Asia. This will not only awaken people to their responsibility for, and stewardship of, creation but also include prayers and initiatives at parish and diocesan levels for the same purpose.

FABC Strategy

We the members of Climate Change Desk of FABC met on Bangkok on December 9-10, 2014, to deliberate on how FABC would contribute to the important task of Climate Change. We realized that it would result in tragic consequences to the teaming millions of the poor and particularly the poor women in Asia. Hence there is urgency on the part of the Asian Churches to take pro-active steps to stop further deterioration.

- 1) Throughout the centuries, human beings in order to survive, had to produce their own methods of livelihood, as witnessed in the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to village settlements. However until the Industrial Revolution this production process depended upon human and animal energy. Industrial Revolution introduced other energy sources such as coal and fossil fuel, which produced carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other gases contributing the increase in the volume of greenhouse gases leading to Global Warming, which we call Climate Change. Mindless harmful production process destroyed the natural resources like forest and contributed to disastrous and tragic consequences. Nature on its part has been sending warnings and alarm signals by way of change in seasons and inflicted natural disasters like cyclones or typhoons, thereby taking heavy tolls on humanity particularly the poor both by frequency and violent recurrence of these events.
- 2) These human-made disasters forced UN to give a serious thought to these challenges. Scientists carefully studied and proved the link between natural disasters and global warming and clearly pointed out that humanity cannot escape serious consequences unless voluntary self-restriction is undertaken to avoid further deterioration. A series of international conferences have been organized. The latest one took place in Lima, Peru. These conferences provide a forum to advanced industrial countries which contribute to higher levels of harmful emission of gases to come together to the negotiating table for two

purposes: to impose self-restrictions on the emission of harmful gases in order to safeguard creation and the planet. The second aim is to develop a development fund so that developing countries are helped to alternative less harmful energy sources.

Against this backdrop, Climate Change Desk has decided the following strategic action plan:

- a) In view of the UN Climate meeting in Paris in 2015, effort will be made to reach out to policy makers in the respective countries. Since FABC cannot reach out to policy makers in China, it was decided to focus on India (the second highest carbon emission country in Asia). The head of the Climate Change Desk will investigate and make effort to organize some Forum of consultation so that it could involve some policy makers of the Government of India. It would be ideal to develop a network with politicians, well-known practical intellectuals and pressure groups to cooperate in introducing effective rules and regulations to control high emissions as well as investigate alternative energy sources. Another desired goal is to recommend the setting up of a global development fund to help developing countries to invest in alternative and non-polluting energy sources.
- b) FABC Climate Change Desk also realizes that without effective involvement of grass root groups, (both Church groups and secular groups) it is not possible to beef up widespread awareness which involves effective disposal of waste and point out conducive lifestyles. This will ensure bottom-up movement to support and echo government measures for effective climate change. Hence the following seminars are proposed on Asian level.
Tentative Schedules for Regional Workshops:
 - a. South Asia in India February /March 2015
 - b. South East Asia in the Philippines in June 2015
 - c. South East Asia in Bangkok in August 2015
 - d. East Asia in Korea September / October 2015
 - e. Central Asia in Kazakhstan to be decided

FABC Climate Change Desk will spell out the objectives to be achieved to these conferences and request them to discern on how they will contribute to Climate Change by influencing the policy makers and the public at large for changing lifestyles.

To obtain effective follow-up, the above seminars will involve the Bishops' Councils and secular groups in the respective countries with credible grass root links as the follow-up will require translation and dissemination of relevant material on Climate Change and to propose conducive lifestyles.