

Our final chance

By MOFFAT MAMU

FROM the melting glaciers of Nepal and Tibet to the low-lying atolls of the Pacific Islands, like in the Solomon Islands, the impact of the climate change is taking its toll on people's livelihood.

Climate change is a phenomenon that is getting a lot of attention and interest now.

The focus on major climate change activities now is on the road to Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December.

The conference will pull together some 15,000 officials from around 200 countries in the Danish capital with one goal in focus - to find solution to global warming.

The first round of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming ends on 2012 and new global deal must be struck.

The Kyoto Protocol aims to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

In Copenhagen there will be new agreements and treaties to address this global phenomenon.

This meeting is very important for the Pacific islands like us.

Solomon Islands was represented at the Bangkok meeting on Climate change to make a case for strong action on climate change to protect the people of Solomon Island from the devastating impacts of global warming.

The Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Meteorology, Rence Sore, the Director of the Climate Change Division, Douglas Yee and an Australian volunteer, Jenny Riesz, are representing the country these final negotiations before the critical United Nations Climate Change conference in Copenhagen in December this year.

Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Meteorology Rence Sore said, "Solomon Islands must have a strong voice at these conferences because the countries who are producing the most emissions are not the countries like ours who are already experiencing serious detrimental impacts.

"This is really one of our last chances before the final meeting in Copenhagen to lobby, negotiate and do everything in our power to keep our country safe," he said.

The Director of the Climate Change Division Douglas Yee says there must be substantial advancements made during the Bangkok negotiations.

"Without a strong, fair and comprehensive deal in Copenhagen, our people will continue to suffer," he said.

The Copenhagen conference is very important for global leaders to know the situation happening on the islands.

People are affected and their livelihood soon to wash away by rising sea level or dying crops due to intense heat, frequent disasters and droughts.

Presenting our case at the conference is important.

In the lead up to the Copenhagen the British High



Commission in Honiara is providing funds to the local media to document the challenges faced by islanders living on atolls as a result of the changes.

British High Commissioner Tim Smart said documenting their stories on video and paper is important for leaders to see and read how islanders are now being affected by this climate change," he said.

It's a reality

The rising atmospheric temperature and the sea level rise as a result of the impact of global warming and climate change is a reality.

Climate change is not a new concept but it became a global issue when scientists agreed that the adverse affects of 'global warming' is happening and started drawing future scenarios of such impacts.

Scientists said the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs), especially carbon dioxide, have exceeded their rate of the past 650,000 years and caused the rise of global temperature by 0.740°C over the past 100 years (1905-2006).

If this trend continues, it is obvious that climate will change its trajectories negatively in the 21st century.

Warming of 20C will cause risk of hunger, malaria, flooding and water shortage everywhere.

The most vulnerable are developing countries and that's countries like Solomon Islands.

Already recurrent extreme climate events such as floods, droughts and cyclones have seriously affected agriculture, food security, access to water and natural resources, tourism and economy

For years Solomon Islands like many other developing nations is faced with repeated floods, storms, cyclones and rising sea level which threaten the livelihoods of our people.

Climate had been a subject of discussion causing heated arguments among government scientist, environmentalist and researchers.

Climate change and biodiversity

The continuous rise in global temperature and sea level rise is becoming a concern for small countries where peoples' livelihood are based on terrestrial and marine resources.

Changes in temperature can cause sea level rise, making coastal ground water saltier, endangering wetlands and inundating valuable land and coastal communities.

Moreover, ranges and abundance of plant and animal biodiversity could change dramatically under changing climate conditions and some of them are likely to be unable to adapt or migrate to new locations.

As global temperature increase in atmosphere green house gases has resulted in global warming in recent times.

Impacts of particular concern to Solomon Islands are in sea temperature, changing weather patterns and rising sea level.

Such environmental changes are expected to bring about changes in the range of and abundance of some plant and animal species, with associated implications for bio-diversity.

Of particular concern for the reefs of the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) is the impact of a predicted increased frequency of cyclones, rising sea surface temperatures and acidification of the ocean.

The effects of climate change are real concern for small island countries like Solomon Islands where landmass is small and number of islands are low lying.

The Ministry of Environment and Conservation therefore outline a number of activities include to raise awareness on climate change.

This is done by developing awareness materials pertaining to the effect of climate change to bio-diversity, developing adaptation and mitigation strategies, and explore opportunities for carbon credit and trading as an option to logging.

Climate change impact

According to Oxfam International, communities must build their resilience by adopting appropriate technologies and diversifying their livelihoods to cope with the coming climate stress that lies outside the realm of human experience.

Ministries must learn to plan and budget around climate uncertainty.

New and old infrastructures such as hospitals, reservoirs and roads must be climate-proofed.

It estimates it would cost the developing

countries of adapting to climate change will be above the World Bank's widely cited estimate of \$10 billion to \$40 billion annually.

Approximately 10 percent of the world's population - 600 million people live in low-lying areas in danger of being flooded.

This means that if emissions of green house are not reduced as soon as possible it will hit hard on the low-lying islands.

Sea level rise had reached the doorsteps of people of Ontong Java and Sikaiana in the Malaita outer islands in Solomon Islands.

Seawater is eating their tiny islets away, contaminating their food gardens and poisoning their freshwater wells.

Last month about 500 people from Sikiana have been affected by the rising sea, which affected their food garden.

"We no longer can plant bananas and we have nothing on our fruit trees because of sea water rising. We are now feeding on coconuts and fish," said Steward Polycarp from Sikiana.

He said in 2005, the water started rising and flooded nearly portion of the island burying garden crops.

Water have risen from the three main big pools on the island and covered garden crops like taro and bananas.

Mr Polycarp said banana plants, which withstood the flood four years ago have now been washed away.

"Responsible authorities need to address this problem because the people were now complaining and further delay could lead to more disputes between them," he said.

The same is true for Ontong Java, next to Sikiana where people have been hit by king tides and cyclones.

Relocating these people is not easy for these people because they have been living on atolls next to the sea.

For all their lives, eating fish and coconuts is their normal way of lifestyle.

Other Pacific island states like Tuvalu and Kiribati are also facing similar situations.

With the change in weather pattern sea temperature rise which resulted in coral bleaching and fish loosing out on food.

An Australian Marine

biologist John Fairfax who visited Solomon Islands a number of time said coral bleaching is happening and will lead to declines in total tuna stocks and coral fish.

"In turn it would affect the livelihood of the peoples' diet due to lack of protein," he said.

Our emission contribution

According to the Ministry of Environment, Meteorology and Conservation the contribution of Solomon Islands to global green house gas emission and its role in causing climate change is insignificant.

But it warned that the country is a vulnerable island state.

"It must act responsibly to avert the worst global effects and consequences of climate change," this responsible ministry said.

Under its Strategic and Corporate Plan 2009-2011, government looks at converting Solomon Islands into becoming a 50% carbon neutral country in the medium term.

Although Solomon Islands may produce less, it is amongst the vulnerable countries in the world.

And the Minister responsible Gordon Darcy Lilo agreed that Pacific Island countries have contributed little to the cause of climate change, yet they are unfortunately the most vulnerable to its effects.

Lilo said this last week when welcoming the policy document 'Engaging the Pacific on Climate Change' which consolidates the Australian Governments approach to working with Pacific Island countries on climate change out to 2015.

He thanked the Australian government for making its commitment.

He said the policy document usefully outlines the potential impact of climate change on Pacific Island countries if the world fails to respond effectively.

"Significant stress will be placed on the livelihoods of these people by climate change impacts which will affect the security of water and food supplies and important Solomon Islands' industries such as fisheries, agriculture and tourism.

"Many of these impacts are already evident in low-lying parts of the country," Mr Lilo said.

The policy document will work to;

• Commit to effective

global solution to climate change including mitigation, adaptation and financing, and ensure that Pacific views are represented in international forums.

• Recognise and support national and regional priorities and work in partnership to achieve them.

• Support the Pacific Island countries' stated priority to contribute to global greenhouse gas reductions.

• Provide support for practical adaptation activities to increase resilience and reduce vulnerability.

• Assist Pacific Island governments to build their institutional arrangements and skills to respond to climate change.

• Help meet the needs of policy makers by improving the quality of and access to relevant data for effective decision-making.

• Contribute to better development coordination by supporting regional organisations that have a coordination role.

Our challenge

For the small island nations the challenge of climate change remains through sea-level rise, storm surge erosion, and coastal hazards, threatening infrastructure, settlements, and facilities like international airports.

The intensity of tropical cyclones had given rise to significant damage to food crops and infrastructure.

The recovery process is economically costly.

And there are health burden cost associated with climate sensitive diseases through morbidity/mortality from extreme weather events, vector borne diseases such as malaria, food and water borne diseases.

Islands of the Pacific through Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) attempts to address this through a convention it calls the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006-2015.

Under such a framework, SPREP members have implemented a series of measures that included:

● Planting mangroves to protect the coastline;

● Building seawalls only where necessary;

● Managing water resources;

● Protecting natural resources such as reefs and forests;

● Better urban management and planning; and

● Designing and placement of infrastructure.

Solomon Islands no doubt have also implemented some of the projects such as mangrove planting, building of walls and relocating infrastructures.

The other option is through use of renewable energy such as solar to avoid fuel generated power source.

Mr Sore said, "this mean we need to stop taking carbon out of the ground and putting it into the atmosphere.

"Above all, that means we need to stop unsustainable deforestation, stop uncontrolled usage of fuel and stop unnecessary wastage of energy - and start using solar and other sources of renewable energy".