

GET THE FACTS SO WE CAN ACT!

Dr. Mark Collins addressing the audience
Seated at head table from left to right are:
Christopher Corbin, Gina Sanguinetti Phillips,
Minister Ruddy Spenser and James Rawle



Civil Society turned out in large numbers to get the facts on Global Climate Change at the **National Forum for Climate Change** on November 8 and 9, 2007 at the Hilton Hotel in New Kingston, put on by the National Environmental Education Committee (NEEC) and the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica (EFJ) with funding from the Commonwealth Foundation. The time to adapt to Global Climate Change is now! That was the message brought out in every presentation.

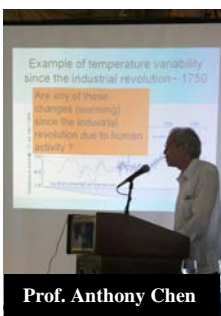
The Director of Commonwealth Foundation Dr. Mark Collins opened the event by urging that Jamaica and other Commonwealth countries, especially those that are small island developing states (SIDS) must lead in developing strategies for adaptation to Global Climate Change (GCC).

The forum was the first of its kind in Jamaica and, combined with the Public Lecture on Climate Change, the fora drew participation from over 200 persons including ministers of government, distinguished scholars, top level government technocrats, influential donor agency representatives, Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) and Community Based Organisations (CBO) representatives and members of the public; some of whom made significant presentations in providing the facts for action. Music in the song *I Don't Wanna Wash Away*, written and produced by Marolyn Lucy Gentles and performed by Temeisha Allen and Nicholas Shelton, with backing band members of "Gas Money Band", not only added a difference in the form of delivery of the event but provided a clear message that Climate Change is happening.



The main aim of the forum was to provide valuable information about GCC, facilitate dialogue and provide an opportunity for civil society to become apart of the national machinery that must develop strategies for mitigation and adaptation to Climate Change.

Various climate change models developed by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have assessed different possible scenarios and some of the following are evident;



- warming is taking place as a result of the increase of human induced carbon dioxide into the atmosphere;
- the results – sea level rise,
- vector born diseases will increase because temperature rise will facilitate parasitic development,
- corals reefs will dye from bleaching.
- Impacts will affect fresh water resources, biodiversity, human settlement and food security.
- These inevitable impacts will have effects on the economies of SIDS.

Many of these points were brought out by Professor Chen in his keynote address at the forum. Professor Chen is also a member of the IPCC who along with other members of the panel, shares the 2007 Nobel Prize with Al Gore. Professor Chen noted that while Jamaica's contributes very little to carbon emissions and global warming, GCC will affect the island in a great way. He cautioned us (Jamaica) to be aware of the 'delicate' threshold and 'tipping' points that can cause irreversible damage.

National Forum on Climate Change: Web Page Report

Mrs. Elizabeth Emanuel from PIOJ alluded to the findings by pointing out that climate change is a cross-sectoral planning issue and noted that issues and ideas brought out in the forum must be presented to the National 2030 Plan task force team. This is especially in light of the vulnerability of sectors like tourism, the fastest growing industry that operates predominantly along the coastal zone.



Mrs. Karen Ford-Warner

The issue of tourism and climate change is like a “double edged sword”. The factors that contribute to Global Climate Change are the factors that drive the tourism industry: Combustion engines used in air, land and sea transportation – an important element in people moving; Energy consumption in mega hotels; development along the coasts, to name a few. Karen Ford Warner, head of the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCO) said that there is a challenge to find the right balance between sustainable tourism as is described in the Tourism Master Plan such as seeking alternative markets, diversifying the tourism product to support more ecologically and greener tourism while providing for the ‘Mega’ sized tourist resorts that require large labour force and far more technological resources that ironically contribute to GCC.

One of the most interesting presentations was delivered by Sherine Huntley, Medical Entomologist at the Ministry of Health. The impacts CC is beginning to manifest itself in the health sector through increase in vector borne diseases like Malaria and Dengue fever. Some of the statistics were alarming. Her presentation also identified that cross-sectoral measures must be taken to reduce vulnerability through public policies to reduce vulnerability. The approach must include international promotion of social equity, within and between countries; rescheduling of foreign debts, alteration of trade rules.



Working Groups make recommendations for action!

One major concern emerging from the forum discussions was that the gaps that exist between ‘planning and policy’ and implementation were too wide. Human settlements and ‘tourism development’ continue to abound in flood prone areas and ecologically vulnerable areas such as wetlands. Participants voiced their opinions in the question and answer period and the issues surrounding planning, enforcement and compliance seemed to have dominated the working groups target areas for action. If planning is poor, compliance will be poor and enforcement will therefore be difficult. Eleanor Jones pointed out that natural occurrences turn into disaster primarily because of poor planning and compliance.

Dale Rankin of GEF/SGP announced that Jamaica is one of 10 countries to participate in one of the programmes new initiative to Climate Change mitigation: the Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change. The programme would offer opportunities to communities vulnerable to CC to implement projects on conservation and environmental management.

The forum has created a conduit for civil society to become energised into action and the media has caught on to the messages. Let us all pull together to ensure that the recommendation made will be acted upon. NEEC will give the full support to its members.

“Change does not happen just because we say it must. We must build the capacity for change.”

Marolyn ‘Lucy’ Gentles
Chair
NEEC