

States need to roll out proper climate adaptation techniques

On Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that the rainfall in June, the first month of the monsoon, was below the mark, with the country recording a deficit of about 5% as of June 30. The shortfall, the IMD said, may get worse. While this year's erratic monsoon has not yet been linked to climate change, there are enough studies that show India's rainfall patterns are changing and monsoons are weakening in many parts of the country.

According to a recent fact sheet released by Climate Trends, a US Global Research programme, monsoon rain has been below average in five of the last six years. Rainfall so far in 2018 has also been below average, for the third consecutive year. These shifts, climate scientists feel, are part of long-term changes in where and when rain falls in India, driven by climate change.

To understand the calamity that India faces, this report must read with the latest World Bank study — "South Asia's Hotspots: The Impact of Temperature and Precipitation Changes on Living Standards — on how changing monsoon patterns and rising temperatures could cost India 2.8% of the gross domestic product.

In a country in which over 75% of the population is dependent on agriculture, the report said, falling yields from climate change would lead to a decline in living standards for agriculture-dependent households, while the effect on people's health would worsen the overall impact. It is expected that India's average annual temperatures could rise by 1-2°C by 2050, even if preventive measures are taken along the lines of those listed in the Paris Agreement, while the rise would be 1.5-3°C if no steps are taken.

The obvious question: Is India doing enough to tackle the climate-related challenges, especially because the country has to balance development needs with environmental concerns? In her address at an 'EU High Level Event on Climate Change' in Brussels last month, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said that all efforts put in by countries to tackle climate change would face a setback if developing nations did not get "adequate finances and technologies to translate their political commitments into tangible initiatives". This is true, but at a time when the world economy is not in the best of shapes, getting funds will not be easy.

There are some things that India is doing right. The thrust on renewable energy, especially solar, is a welcome move. But there are many areas that need more work: air pollution; water harvesting; groundwater recharge; climate-sensitive agriculture; building resilient cities; climate-efficient buildings; irrigation; and investment in health.

Much of the effort has been top-down even though states have their own action plans on climate change. A review of the action plans by the Centre for Science and Environment shows that there is lack of comprehensive climate impact vulnerability assessment at local, regional and state levels, lack of clarity on climate change, and no effective institutional framework for monitoring and evaluating climate-related projects.

This is definitely a cause of worry because unless the gravity of the situation percolates to the lowest administrative structure, the districts, and there is a proper roll out of adaptation techniques, people will pay a heavy price for these administrative failures.

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