

A GLOBAL DEAL FOR POSTPONING PRALAYA

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

An iceberg floats in a fjord near the town of Tasiilaq, Greenland | Photo Credit: [REUTERS](#)

The Earth and the atmosphere surrounding it receive radiation from the Sun, and get “heated”. Some of the gases in the atmosphere, notably carbon dioxide (CO₂) absorb this heat radiating from the earth’s surface and bounce it back. This is what keeps the earth- land and seas- at a temperature range “comfortable” for us humans and the other organisms inhabiting the earth today. We thus live in a large “green house”.

What happens when the level of these greenhouse gases increases? The temperature will rise. And this rise has been due to increases in the levels of CO₂ and other gases, produced upon burning carbon-rich fuels (coal, wood, petroleum products). Over the last 100 years alone, the global temperature has risen by close to 2 degree. And if we do not reduce or stop these fuels and use alternate sources of energy (solar, wind and others), the global temperature will rise further.

We already see it in the form of the melting of ice caps and glaciers, causing a rise in sea level. This can submerge small island countries such as Maldives and Mauritius. It has also led to a change in the global climate, causing errant monsoons, cyclones, tsunamis, El Nino and so on, affecting life on earth and in the oceans (fish, algae, coral reefs).

Temperature rise and climate change affect not just some countries but the entire globe, on which all species live- humans, animals, plants, fish, microbes. And if it is left uncontrolled, disaster looms for all life across the globe. Climate change, plus relentless industrial farming and fishing are leading to the extinction of 1 million species from Mother Earth within decades.

It is for acting against this catastrophe that the UNO brought countries across the world get together and in 2015 came up with what is called the Paris Agreement 2015 wherein they decided to make all efforts contain the temperature rise to no more than 1.5 degrees. While 195 countries across the globe signed the Paris Agreement and promised to take steps towards it, some oil producing/ importing) countries such as Turkey, Syria, Iran and USA have not. President Trump says climate change is “fake”!

We need to do two urgent things. One is to reduce, indeed replace carbon-based fuels, with other forms of energy generation that do not generate greenhouse gases; hence solar power, wind power and others. The second is to enhance all natural methods which absorb CO₂. Forests and plants do this best. Photosynthesis is done by all varieties of plants- algae in water, mangroves on the coast, crops and forests on land. They absorb atmospheric CO₂ and produce oxygen for us to breathe. Tropical forests do this best; hence, deforestation in the Amazon, tropical Africa and in India must end. These regions also house over 200 million species of plants, animals and fungi. They are thus termed as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs); likewise are Marine Protection Areas (MPAs). They restore and protect biodiversity, increase yields and enhance ecosystem protection and defense. They alone help us preserve over 17% of land realm and 10% of marine areas by 2020, and preserve millions of species from extinction. But we need to do more beyond next year.

It is with all this in mind that a diverse group of scientists and ecologists from across the world have come up with a companion pact to the Paris Agreement, called: “A Global Deal for Nature: Guiding Principles, Milestones and Targets”. This policy document is published on 19 April 2019

in the journal *Science Advances*, which should be read by every concerned citizen and government. Global Deal for Nature (or GDN) has five fundamental goals: (1) representation of all native ecosystem types and stages across their natural range of variation; (2) maintain viable populations of all native species in natural pattern of abundance and distribution – or “saving species”; (3) maintain ecological functions and ecosystem services; (4) maximize carbon sequestration by natural ecosystems and (5) address environmental change to maintain evolutionary processes and adapt to the impact of climate change.

These five goals of GDN have three Priority themes. Theme 1 is on protecting biodiversity. Towards this, they have listed a total of 846 ecoregions across the world and given milestones on how to protect as much as 30% of them by the year 2030. Theme 2 is on mitigating climate changes by conserving carbon storehouses or climate stabilization areas (CSAs) and Other Effective area- based Conservation Measures (OECMs). Theses involve saving about 18% of existing areas across the world (e.g., tundra, rainforest) as CSAs and about 37% of the areas as OECMs (indigenous peoples’ lands, such as in the Amazon Basin, Congo Basin, Northeast Asia, Continental India). Theme 3 is on reducing threats to ecosystems, and concerns reducing major threats (such as overfishing, wild life trade, laying new roads cutting across forest lands, and building major dams).

And in order to do all this, the gross cost is estimated to be \$ 100 billion per year. Considering that these are over 200 nations across the world (plus the private sector, which too should also be involved), this is a sum well worth achievable if we are to leave the world livable for our children, and all the flora and fauna that have enriched our earth since the last 550 million years. And if one wishes count the pennies gained for this investment, Barbiers et al. point out that biodiversity conservation can actually offer \$ 50 billion annual profit for the sea food industry and save the insurance industry \$52 billion annually through reducing flood damage losses!

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