

# Voices

**FRONTLINE VIEW**  
**Voices from communities**  
**in developing countries**  
**most affected by escalating**  
**climate change impacts**

## KENYA: A STORY OF GROWING DESPAIR ?

During the past two years my country has experienced a sustained drought. These prolonged dry spells have taken a heavy toll on our people and our natural resources.

The unprecedented high temperatures occurring in Kenya have resulted in thousands of heat-related deaths and illnesses. Malaria has long been endemic to Kenya's humid coast and swampy lowland regions. However, malaria is increasingly spreading to our highlands which used to be too cool for malaria to flourish. Many medical and environmental experts have attributed the increase in cases of malaria to climate change, in the form of warmer temperatures and variations in rainfall patterns.

Since September this year, we have experienced heavy rainfalls that have resulted in frequent flash floods. Rising temperatures and changing patterns of rain have exacerbated the problem of disappearing wetlands and have increased food insecurity as a result of reduced crop yield.

Kenyan wildlife safaris are world famous and our national parks contribute a significant amount to the country's foreign exchange earnings. However, the wildlife in these national parks is at risk: the wildebeest migration in the Mara River, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is being affected by changing rainfall patterns. The wildebeests are confused by the erratic rain patterns as they begin migration by following the smell of rain. The erratic climate has led to a loss in the numbers of wildlife, due to the rivers drying-up and insufficient vegetation for feeding.

Climate change impacts are already causing economic loss. Kenya's grain harvest is expected to be 28 percent lower. Food prices have jumped by as much as 130 percent – a cost that a poor country like ours can barely afford to pay. Declining crop yields, due to prolonged drought and high temperatures have put hundreds of thousands of people at risk of starvation in Kenya.

How long must we wait for adequate, equitable and effective action towards combating the real-time threat posed by climate change in countries like Kenya, where people already live and survive in constrained conditions?

Copenhagen must deliver immediate solutions. Failure is not an option on the table – neither for the poor and vulnerable, nor for the rich.



*A farmer gazes at the parched land*

## WHEN TREES MATTER: COUNTING UGANDA'S LOSSES

Uganda's forests cover almost a fifth of the country's land, about 3.5 million hectares. Of this, 70% is privately owned while 30% is held in trust by government for the people of Uganda as protected areas or reserves. The country loses over 2% of its forests every single year. The forests are cut down to make space for farming, make fuel for fire, and make room for a growing population.

What does this add up to? It means that in over 15 years, from 1990 to 2005, Uganda lost over a quarter of the country's forests. The rate of deforestation in the country grows as the demand for forest products grows. More than 90% of the country's energy demand is met by fuel from wood – enough firewood to outweigh

18 million elephants plus enough charcoal to outweigh 500,000 elephants.

Uncontrolled conversion of natural forests into other types of land use is a threat to sustainable forest management and therefore to a possibility of sustainable development. In Uganda, the majority of the people depend on forest resources for their livelihood. These forests contribute significant employment opportunities; approximately equivalent to nearly one million jobs.

The difficulty is the rising competing needs that put increasing stress on our forest by the day. There is growing concern that current levels of poverty, rising impacts from climate variability and unregulated user rights would also lead

to gross loss of biodiversity. A balance must be struck between the health of our forests and the ability of our people to properly manage and regulate our forests in the wake of the new challenges being posed by global warming.

Deforestation continues to be an alarming phenomenon and probably continue to be so in the future because a majority of the people in my country envisage forests as a source for short-term economic gains rather than a resource that has the potential to provide long-term benefits to present and future generations.

But this behaviour can only go on for much longer. Until we are re-growing our forests at a greater rate than we are using them,

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Climate Action Network under its Southern Capacity Programme is working towards supporting effective participation and input from developing country Civil Society in the UNFCCC Talks towards ensuring an equitable and fair agreement in Copenhagen. In this edition the contributors are CSO representatives from Argentina, Kenya, Mexico and Uganda.

# ARGENTINA: 'GRANARY OF THE WORLD' NO MORE

Rising evidence of climate change across the world leaves us very little time to act before it is too late. Increasingly unpredictable local weather patterns are hitting the most basic of economic activity – food production. On the continent of South America, ancient cultures and regional economies flourish based on determinate cropping seasons and availability of water. Now countries in the continent with economies based on agriculture are struggling with the debilitating impacts of increasing variability in natural weather patterns.

I have witnessed this confounding change in my country, Argentina, once called “the granary of the world.” In 2009 it faced one of the biggest droughts in its history. The precipitation was a mere third of what it would have been in a normal season. Many of the planted crops were lost and millions of animals died due to lack of water and fodder. Furthermore, the higher temperatures seen in various parts of the country made Dengue reach area where it never before existed.

Many provinces needed financial assistance from our national government. The farming sector lost almost \$5 billion this year, and the government could lose \$4.3 billion in tax revenue from the agricultural sector. These huge costs are already being borne by developing countries like mine and will only escalate in the future if the international community does not take decisive and early action towards combating climate change.

It is necessary for developed countries to take responsibility and do their fair-share by taking on deep emissions reduction targets. Any agreement in Copenhagen must deliver adequate financial and technological support for vulnerable developing countries like Argentina to be able to tackle these challenges both for adaptation and mitigation.

For the coming year the weather forecast apparently looks better, but who can ensure that will hold true? How many more events will we need undergo to establish the urgency of combating climate change?

these practices equate to nothing more than a future deprived of sustainability. Our forests do more to sustain the needs of the poor and marginalised, especially the women and children, than any other natural endowment in Uganda.

In an ideal world efforts to combat deforestation and forest degradation would be launched, both nationally and internationally at the earliest sustaining the multiple roles and functions of all types of forests; forest lands and woodlands. It is blatantly clear that there is no scope for loopholes in accounting for net emission reductions within forestry discussions at the United Nations' climate change talks, as it will only serve to lead Africa deeper into the cycle of false positives. Furthermore a top-down implementation of this mechanism must be avoided at all costs.

We must seek innovative and robust action plans based on meaningful consultations with local communities that build on our efforts to improve the understanding of the role and importance of forests both to the local and global community.

Our forests have done so much for us - The people of Uganda. I believe it is time we do something for them; and at the core of the issue - for the Planet.

## CHANGING CITY, CHANGING CLIMATE: THE MEXICAN DUEL

“Every year I have experienced climate change consequences in different cities of Mexico, especially Guadalajara and Mexico City; heat is more extreme and the raining season is more intense” - Ana Salcedo.

When I used to live in Guadalajara, I remember that the city was known nationwide for its great weather. Back then, the lake of “Chapala” and the surrounding “Spring” forest were used as the “thermometers” of the city.

Nowadays, the lake of “Chapala” loses more and more water every year, while at the same time is being polluted with heavy metals from companies that dump their waste into the water without any monitoring from the authorities. In the case of “Spring” forest, it has suffered from more fires than usual in the past years, and has now almost disappeared. We now know it as the “Sick” forest. Most of its fauna and flora is gone and instead new urban areas are appearing in its remaining surroundings.

The hurtful impacts on the lake and forest - two important natural resources of the city - have also changed the weather of the city. How can weather be changed by only one lake and one forest? For months now the city has been dealing with a plague of “dengue” mosquitoes. Dengue fever is not common to the city but it has ended up affecting a big part of the population.

According to some experts, this plague is caused by the changing climate of the region. They say that mosquitoes are now better able to survive here. However, there are others who argue that there are many variables to take into consideration in order to confirm this and that dengue is already spreading to newer areas around the world.

I currently live in Mexico City, the second most populated city in the world after Tokyo, where today between 18 and 20 million people live in severely constrained circumstances. The city is well known for its vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. The air quality has been a major problem for the city for several decades now. It is not unusual for city dwellers to complain of itchy eyes and headaches when air pollution levels are high – air pollution that also greenhouse gases, adding to climate change. Rising water scarcity poses concerns both on the quantity and quality of water available for sanitary and drinking purposes in this mega-polis. Widespread poverty, uncontrolled urbanization, and poor sanitation in large settlements in Mexico City – in addition to environmental problems – are all causes of adverse impacts on the health of the people of this city.

The ultimate challenge for Mexico as we emerge into the 21st century is to plan for the ways and means by which we will cope with the unprecedented environmental and developmental problems now being amplified by climate change. The result of the United Nations climate change meeting in December in Copenhagen (COP15) must lead us towards a sustainable future, both for us, our children, and generations to come.

